

CLIMATE CHANGE
POPULATION GROWTH
AND FAMINE

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Introduction

The threat of a large-scale global famine by the middle of the 21st century

Unless efforts are made to stabilize and ultimately reduce global population, there is a serious threat that climate change, population growth, and the end of the fossil fuel era could combine to produce a large-scale famine by the middle of the 21st century.

As glaciers melt in the Himalayas and the Andes, depriving India, China and South America of summer water supplies; as sea levels rise, drowning fertile rice-growing regions of Southeast Asia; as droughts reduce the food production of North America and Southern Europe; as groundwater levels fall in China, India, the Middle East and the United States; and as high-yield modern agriculture becomes less possible because fossil fuel inputs are lacking, the 800 million people who are currently undernourished may not survive at all.

This book is a collection of articles and book chapters that I have written, warning of the threat of a catastrophic global famine. Some new material has also been added. The first four chapters appeared in my book, **Civilization's Crisis: A Set of Linked Challenges**, published by World Scientific in 2017. Chapters 5, 6, and 8 are from the preliminary version of a book entitled **The Climate Emergency: Two Time Scales**, which I am currently writing under a contract with World Scientific.

Energy inputs of agriculture

Modern agriculture has become highly dependent on fossil fuels, especially on petroleum and natural gas. This is especially true of production of the high-yield grain varieties introduced in the Green Revolution, since these require especially large inputs of fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation. Today, fertilizers are produced using oil and natural gas, while pesticides are synthesized from petroleum feedstocks, and irrigation is driven by fossil fuel energy. Thus agriculture in the developed countries has become a process where inputs of fossil fuel energy are converted into food calories.

Predictions of drought in the Stern Review

According to a report presented to the Oxford Institute of Economic Policy by Sir Nicholas Stern on 31 January, 2006, areas likely to lose up to 30% of their rainfall by the 2050's because of climate change include much of the United States, Brazil, the Mediterranean region, Eastern Russia and Belarus, the Middle East, Southern Africa and Southern Australia. Meanwhile rainfall is predicted to increase up to 30% in Central Africa, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Siberia, and much of China.

Stern and his team point out that “We can... expect to see changes in the Indian monsoon, which could have a huge impact on the lives of hundreds of millions of people in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Most climate models suggest that the monsoon will change, although there is still uncertainty about exactly how. Nevertheless, small changes in the monsoon could have a huge impact. Today, a fluctuation of just 10% in either direction from average monsoon rainfall is known to cause either severe flooding or drought. A weak summer monsoon, for example, can lead to poor harvests and food shortages among the rural population - two-thirds of India's almost 1.1 billion people. Heavier-than-usual monsoon downpours can also have devastating consequences...”

In some regions, melting of glaciers can be serious from the standpoint of dry-season water supplies. For example, melts from glaciers in the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas now supply much of Asia, including China and India, with a dry-season water supply. Complete melting of these glacial systems would cause an exaggerated runoff for a few decades, after which there would be a drying out of some of the most densely populated regions of the world.

Ocean current changes and failure of monsoons

It is expected that climate change will affect ocean currents, and hence also affect monsoon rainfall. We are already experiencing a diversion of the Gulf Stream due to southward currents of cold water from melting ice in the Arctic. This has caused what is known as the *North Atlantic Anomaly*. While most regions of the world are experiencing rising temperatures, the North Atlantic and several northern European countries are exceptions to this rule, and have cooled. Complete failure of the Gulf Stream would lead to much colder temperatures in Europe.

Changes in ocean currents have already lead to the failure of the West African Monsoon, and this has already produced severe food insecurity in West Africa.

In the future, climate-changed ocean currents may lead to failures of monsoons in South-east Asia, and thus damage the food supply of almost two billion people.

Falling water tables around the world

Under many desert areas of the world are deeply buried water tables formed during glacial periods when the climate of these regions was wetter. These regions include the Middle East and large parts of Africa. Water can be withdrawn from such ancient reservoirs by deep wells and pumping, but only for a limited amount of time.

In oil-rich Saudi Arabia, petroenergy is used to drill wells for ancient water and to bring it to the surface. Much of this water is used to irrigate wheat fields, and this is done to such an extent that Saudi Arabia exports wheat. The country is, in effect, exporting its ancient heritage of water, a policy that it may, in time, regret. A similarly short-sighted project is Muammar Qaddafi's enormous pipeline, which will bring water from ancient sub-desert reservoirs to coastal cities.

In the United States, the great Ogallala aquifer is being overdrawn. This aquifer is an enormous stratum of water-saturated sand and gravel underlying parts of northern Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming and South Dakota. The average thickness of the aquifer is about 70 meters. The rate of water withdrawal from the aquifer exceeds the rate of recharge by a factor of eight.

Thus we can see that in many regions, the earth's present population is living on its inheritance of water, rather than its income. This fact, coupled with rapidly increasing populations and climate change, may contribute to a very serious food crisis partway through the 21st century.

Populations displaced by drought and famine

Climate change could produce a refugee crisis that is "unprecedented in human history", Barack Obama has warned as he stressed global warming was the most pressing issue of the age.

Speaking at an international food conference in Milan, the former US President said rising temperatures were already making it more difficult to grow crops and rising food prices were “leading to political instability”.

If world leaders put aside “parochial interests” and took action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by enough to restrict the rise to one or two degrees Celsius, then humanity would probably be able to cope.

Failing to do this, Mr Obama warned, increased the risk of “catastrophic” effects in the future, “not only real threats to food security, but also increases in conflict as a consequence of scarcity and greater refugee and migration patterns”.

“If you think about monsoon patterns in the Indian subcontinent, maybe half a billion people rely on traditional rain patterns in those areas,”

Populations displaced by rising temperatures

A new study published in *Nature: Climate Change* has warned that up to 75% of the world’s population could face deadly heat waves by 2100 unless greenhouse gas emissions are rapidly controlled.¹ The following is an excerpt from the article:

“Here we conducted a global analysis of documented lethal heat events to identify the climatic conditions associated with human death and then quantified the current and projected occurrence of such deadly climatic conditions worldwide. We reviewed papers published between 1980 and 2014, and found 783 cases of excess human mortality associated with heat from 164 cities in 36 countries.

“Based on the climatic conditions of those lethal heat events, we identified a global threshold beyond which daily mean surface air temperature and relative humidity become deadly. Around 30% of the world’s population is currently exposed to climatic conditions exceeding this deadly threshold for at least 20 days a year.

“By 2100, this percentage is projected to increase to 48% under a scenario with drastic reductions of greenhouse gas emissions and 74% under a scenario of growing emissions. An increasing threat to human life from excess heat now seems almost inevitable, but will be greatly aggravated if greenhouse gases are not considerably reduced.”²

¹Mora, C. et al., *Global risk of deadly heat*, *Nature: Climate Change*, 19 June 2017

²See also <https://phys.org/news/2017-08-deadly-south-asia-century.html> and

Conclusions

The subject of population stabilization is a highly sensitive and controversial one. Nevertheless it is an issue that must be confronted if a catastrophic global famine is to be avoided. The three terrible Malthusian forces, famine, disease and war. in the end will cut down any population that exceeds its means of support.

In the first edition of his book on population, Malthus wrote: “That population cannot increase without the means of subsistence is a proposition so evident that it needs no illustration. That population does invariably increase, where there are means of subsistence, the history of every people who have ever existed will abundantly prove. And that the superior power cannot be checked without producing misery and vice, the ample portion of these two bitter ingredients in the cup of human life, and the continuance of the physical causes that seem to have produced them, bear too convincing a testimony.”

In later editions, he modified this opinion and made it less pessimistic by allowing for the effect of preventive checks such as late marriage. Malthus considered birth control to be a form of vice, but today it is accepted as the most humane method of avoiding the grim Malthusian forces, famine, disease and war.

If we examine them in the light of current history, we can see that famine, disease and war are interlinked. War produces famine, and indeed famine has been used as an instrument of war, as we see in the conflicts now taking place in Somalia. Another link is the almost unbelievable economic cost of war. An estimated 1.7 trillion U.S. dollars were spent on armaments in 2017. Part of this colossal sum could instead have been used to provide primary health care to all the peoples of the world, and with it, access to the information and materials needed for family planning.

Let us work together to avoid the enormous suffering that would be involved if climate change and population growth combine to produce a catastrophic global famine.

<https://cleantechnica.com/2017/09/28/extreme-heatwaves-like-recent-lucifer-heatwave-become-normal-europe-2050s/>

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Chapter 1

ECONOMICS, ETHICS AND ECOLOGY

“Like him who perverts the revenues of some pious foundation to profane purposes, he pays the wages of idleness with those funds which the frugality of his forefathers had, as it were, consecrated to the maintenance of industry.”

Adam Smith (describing an industrialist who fails to reinvest his profits)

“That population cannot increase without the means of subsistence is a proposition so evident that it needs no illustration. That population does invariably increase, where there are means of subsistence, the history of every people who have ever existed will abundantly prove. And that the superior power cannot be checked without producing misery and vice, the ample portion of these two bitter ingredients in the cup of human life, and the continuation of the physical causes that seem to have produced them, bear all too convincing a testimony”

Thomas Robert Malthus

1.1 Introduction

The history of the epoch that immediately preceded the modern era can cast much light on the challenges facing us today, so we will begin by reviewing it. Until the start of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries, human society maintained a more or less sustainable relationship with nature. However, with the beginning of the industrial era, traditional ways of life, containing both ethical and environmental elements, were replaced by the money-centered, growth-oriented life of today, from which these vital elements are missing.

1.2 Economics without ethics

According to the great classical economist Adam Smith (1723-1790), self-interest (even greed) is a sufficient guide to human economic actions. The passage of time has shown that Smith was right in many respects. The free market, which he advocated, has turned out to be the optimum prescription for economic growth. However, history has also shown that there is something horribly wrong or incomplete about the idea that individual self-interest alone, uninfluenced by ethical and ecological considerations, and totally free from governmental intervention, can be the main motivating force of a happy and just society. There has also proved to be something terribly wrong with the concept of unlimited economic growth. Here is what actually happened:

1.3 Industrialism in 18th and 19th centuries

Highland Clearances and Enclosure Acts

In pre-industrial Europe, peasant farmers held a low but nevertheless secure position, protected by a web of traditional rights and duties. Their low dirt-floored and thatched cottages were humble but safe refuges. If a peasant owned a cow, it could be pastured on common land.

With the invention of the steam engine and the introduction of spinning and weaving machines towards the end of the 18th Century, the pattern changed, at first in England, and afterwards in other European countries. Land-owners in Scotland and Northern England realized that sheep were more profitable to have on the land than “crofters” (i.e., small tenant farmers), and families that had farmed land for generations were violently driven from their homes with almost no warning. The cottages were afterwards burned to prevent the return of their owners.

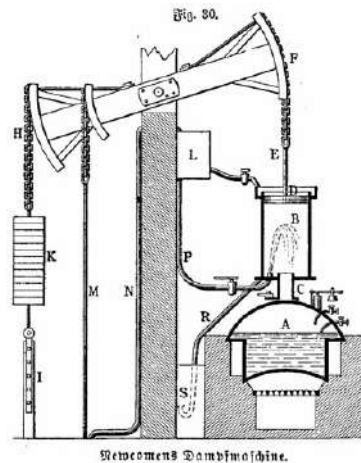


Figure 1.1: *Newcomen's steam engine* , (from Hmlopedia)

The following account of the Highland Clearances has been left by Donald McLeod, a crofter in the district of Sutherland: “The consternation and confusion were extreme. Little or no time was given for the removal of persons or property; the people striving to remove the sick or helpless before the fire should reach them; next struggling to save the most valuable of their effects. The cries of the women and children; the roaring of the affrighted cattle, hunted at the same time by the yelling dogs of the shepherds amid the smoke and fire, altogether presented a scene that completely baffles description - it required to be seen to be believed... The conflagration lasted for six days, until the whole of the dwellings were reduced to ashes and smoking ruins.”

Between 1750 and 1860, the English Parliament passed a large number of “Enclosure Acts”, abolishing the rights of small farmers to pasture their animals on common land that was not under cultivation. The fabric of traditional rights and duties that once had protected the lives of small tenant farmers was torn to pieces. Driven from the land, poor families flocked to the towns and cities, hoping for employment in the textile mills that seemed to be springing up everywhere.

Working conditions in 19th century England

According to the new rules by which industrial society began to be governed, traditions were forgotten and replaced by purely economic laws. Labor was viewed as a commodity, like coal or grain, and wages were paid according to the laws of supply and demand, without regard for the needs of the workers. Wages fell to starvation levels, hours of work increased, and working conditions deteriorated.



Figure 1.2: *A watercolor painting by Vincent van Gogh showing wives of Belgian miners carrying bags of coal. Public domain)*

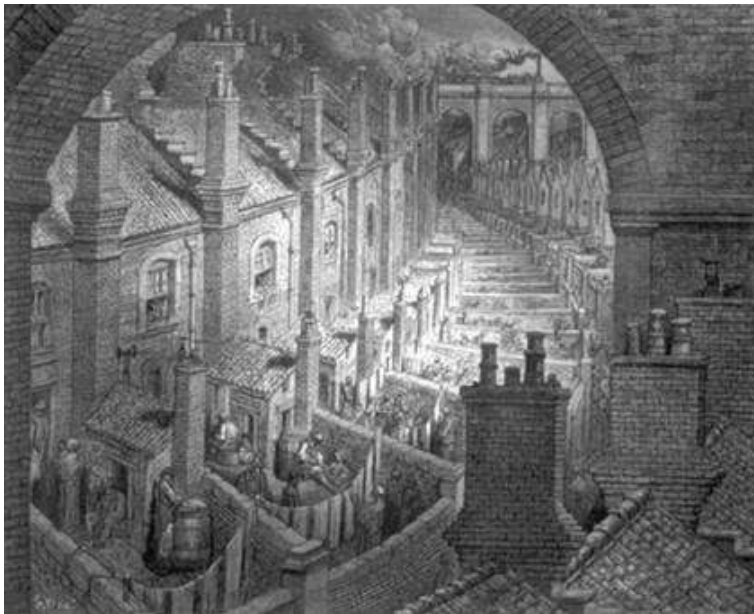


Figure 1.3: *London during the industrial revolution (Public domain)*

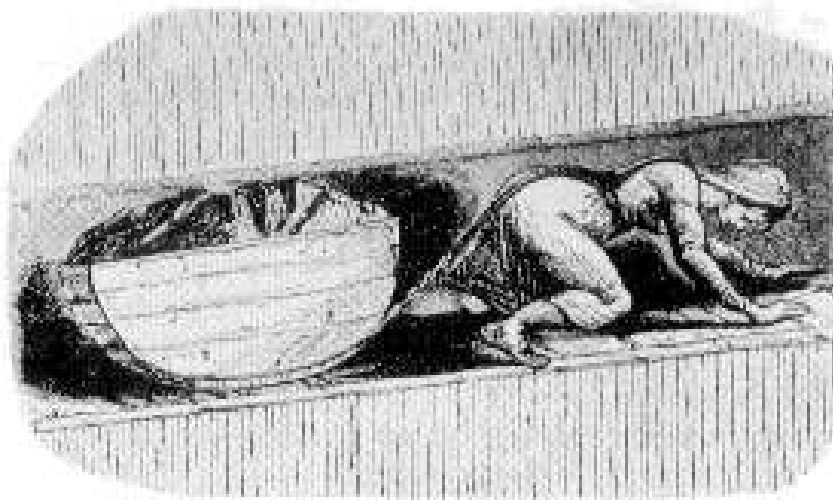


Figure 1.4: *A girl pulling a coaltub through the narrow space left by removal of coal from a seam.* (Public domain)

John Fielden's book, "The Curse of the Factory System" was written in 1836, and it describes the condition of young children working in the cotton mills. "The small nimble fingers of children being by far the most in request, the custom instantly sprang up of procuring 'apprentices' from the different parish workhouses of London, Birmingham and elsewhere... Overseers were appointed to see to the works, whose interest it was to work the children to the utmost, because their pay was in proportion to the quantity of pay that they could exact."

"Cruelty was, of course, the consequence; and there is abundant evidence on record to show that in many of the manufacturing districts, the most heart-rending cruelties were practiced on the unoffending and friendless creatures... that they were flogged, fettered and tortured in the most exquisite refinements of cruelty, that they were in many cases starved to the bone while flogged to their work, and that they were even in some instances driven to commit suicide... The profits of manufacture were enormous, but this only whetted the appetite that it should have satisfied."

Dr. Peter Gaskell, writing in 1833, described the condition of the English mill workers as follows:

"The vast deterioration in personal form which has been brought about in the manufacturing population during the last thirty years... is singularly impressive, and fills the mind with contemplations of a very painful character... Their complexion is sallow and pallid, with a peculiar flatness of feature caused by the want of a proper quantity of adipose substance to cushion out the cheeks.

Their stature is low - the average height of men being five feet, six inches... Great numbers of the girls and women walk lamely or awkwardly... Many of the men have but little beard, and that in patches of a few hairs... (They have) a spiritless and dejected air, a sprawling and wide action of the legs..."

"Rising at or before daybreak, between four and five o'clock the year round, they swallow a hasty meal or hurry to the mill without taking any food whatever... At twelve o'clock the engine stops, and an hour is given for dinner... Again they are closely immured from one o'clock till eight or nine, with the exception of twenty minutes, this being allowed for tea. During the whole of this long period, they are actively and unremittingly engaged in a crowded room at an elevated temperature."

Dr. Gaskell described the housing of the workers as follows:

"One of the circumstances in which they are especially defective is that of drainage and water-closets. Whole ranges of these houses are either totally undrained, or very partially... The whole of the washings and filth from these consequently are thrown into the front or back street, which, often being unpaved and cut into deep ruts, allows them to collect into stinking and stagnant pools; while fifty, or even more than that number, having only a single convenience common to them all, it is in a very short time choked with excrementous matter. No alternative is left to the inhabitants but adding this to the already defiled street."

"It frequently happens that one tenement is held by several families... The demoralizing effects of this utter absence of domestic privacy must be seen before they can be thoroughly appreciated. By laying bare all the wants and actions of the sexes, it strips them of outward regard for decency - modesty is annihilated - the father and the mother, the brother and the sister, the male and female lodger, do not scruple to commit acts in front of each other which even the savage keeps hid from his fellows."

1.4 Adam Smith

The invisible hand

As everyone knows, Adam Smith invented the theory that individual self-interest is, and ought to be, the main motivating force of human economic activity, and that this, in effect, serves the wider social interest. He put forward a detailed description of this concept in an immense book, “The Wealth of Nations” (1776).

Adam Smith (1723-1790) had been Professor of Logic at the University of Glasgow, but in 1764 he withdrew from his position at the university to become the tutor of the young Duke of Buccleuch. In those days a Grand Tour of Europe was considered to be an important part of the education of a young nobleman, and Smith accompanied Buccleuch to the Continent. To while away the occasional dull intervals of the tour, Adam Smith began to write an enormous book on economics which he finally completed twelve years later. He began his “Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations” by praising division of labor. As an example of its benefits, he cited a pin factory, where ten men, each a specialist in his own set of operations, could produce 48,000 pins in a day. In the most complex civilizations, Smith stated, division of labor has the greatest utility.

The second factor in prosperity, Adam Smith maintained, is a competitive market, free from monopolies and entirely free from governmental interference. In such a system, he tells us, the natural forces of competition are able to organize even the most complex economic operations, and are able also to maximize productivity. He expressed this idea in the following words:

“As every individual, therefore, endeavors as much as he can, both to employ his capital in support of domestic industry, and so to direct that industry that its produce may be of greatest value, each individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the Society as great as he can.”

“He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of greatest value, he intends only his own gain; and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end that was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for Society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest, he frequently promotes that of Society more effectively than when he really intends to promote it.”

For example, a baker does not bake bread out of an unselfish desire to help his fellow humans; he does so in order to earn money; but if he were not

performing a useful service, he would not be paid. Thus the “invisible hand” guides him to do something useful. Free competition also regulates prices: If the baker charges too much, he will be undersold. Finally, if there are too many bakers, the trade will become so unprofitable that some bakers will be forced into other trades. Thus highly complex operations are automatically regulated by the mechanisms of the free market. “Observe the accommodation of the most common artificer or day labourer in a civilized and thriving country”, Smith continues, “and you will perceive that the number of people of whose industry a part, though but a small part, has been employed in securing him this accommodation, exceeds all computation. The woolen coat, which covers the day-labourer, as coarse and rough as it may seem, is the joint labour of a great multitude of workmen. The shepherd, the sorter of wool, the wool-comber, the carder, the dyer, the scribbler, the spinner, the weaver, the fuller, the dresser, with many others, must all join their different arts to complete even the most homely production. How many merchants and carriers, besides, must have been employed... how much commerce and navigation... how many ship-builders, sailors, sail-makers, rope-makers...”

Reinvestment and growth

An important feature of Adam Smith’s economic model is that it is by no means static. The virtuous manufacturer does not purchase pearl necklaces for his wife; he reinvests his profits, buying more machinery or building new factories. An industrialist who ignores the commandment to reinvest is “...like him who perverts the revenues of some pious foundation to profane purposes; he pays the wages of idleness with those funds which the fragility of his forefathers had, as it were, consecrated to the maintenance of industry.”

The expansion of the system will not be slowed, Smith maintained, by shortages of labor, because “...the demand for men, like that for any other commodity, necessarily regulates the production of men.” Smith did not mean that more births would occur if the demand for workers became greater. He meant that if wages began to rise above the lowest level needed to maintain life, more children of the workers would survive. In those days, the rates of infant and child mortality were horrendous, particularly among the half-starved poor. “It is not uncommon”, Smith wrote, “in the Highlands of Scotland, for a mother who has borne twenty children not to have two alive.”

Adam Smith’s ideas were enthusiastically adopted by the rising class of manufacturers and by their representatives in government. The reverence shown to him can be illustrated by an event that occurred when he visited England’s Prime Minister, William Pitt, and his Cabinet. The whole gathering stood up when Smith entered. “Pray be seated, gentlemen”, Smith said.



Figure 1.5: *Adam Smith (1723-1790)* (Public domain)

“Not until you first are seated Sir”, Pitt replied, “for we are all your scholars.”

History has shown that Adam Smith was right in many respects. The free market is indeed a dynamo that produces economic growth, and it is capable of organizing even the most complex economic endeavors. Through Adam Smith’s “invisible hand”, self interest is capable of guiding the economy so that it will maximize the production of wealth. However, history has also shown the shortcomings of a market that is totally free of governmental regulation.

The landowners of Scotland were unquestionably following self-interest as they burned the cottages of their crofters; and self-interest motivated overseers as they whipped half-starved child workers in England’s mills. Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” no doubt guided their actions in such a way as to maximize production. But whether a happy and just society was created in this way is questionable. Certainly it was a society with large areas of unhappiness and injustice. Self-interest alone was not enough. A society following purely economic laws - a society where selfishness is exalted as the mainspring for action - lacks both the ethical and ecological dimensions needed for social justice, widespread happiness, and sustainability¹.

1.5 Malthus

A debate between father and son

T.R. Malthus’ *Essay on The Principle of Population*, the first edition of which was published in 1798, was one of the the first systematic studies of the problem of population in relation to resources. Earlier discussions of the problem had been published by Botterro in Italy, Robert Wallace in England, and Benjamin Franklin in America. However Malthus’ *Essay* was the first to stress the fact that, in general, powerful checks operate continuously to keep human populations from increasing beyond their available food supply. In a later edition, published in 1803, he buttressed this assertion with carefully collected demographic and sociological data from many societies at various periods of their histories.

The publication of Malthus’ *Essay* coincided with a wave of disillusionment which followed the optimism of the Enlightenment. The utopian societies predicted by the philosophers of the Enlightenment were compared with reign of terror in Robespierre’s France and with the miseries of industrial workers in

¹In fact, Adam Smith himself would have accepted this criticism of his enthronement of self-interest as the central principle of society. He believed that his “invisible hand” would not work for the betterment of society except within the context of a certain amount of governmental regulation. His modern Neoliberal admirers, however, forget this aspect of Smith’s philosophy, and maintain that market forces alone can achieve a desirable result.



Figure 1.6: *The Rookery near Dorking in Surrey* (Public domain)

England; and the discrepancy required an explanation. The optimism which preceded the French Revolution, and the disappointment which followed a few years later, closely paralleled the optimistic expectations of our own century, in the period after the Second World War, when it was thought that the transfer of technology to the less developed parts of the world would eliminate poverty, and the subsequent disappointment when poverty persisted. Science and technology developed rapidly in the second half of the twentieth century, but the benefits which they conferred were just as rapidly consumed by a global population which today is increasing at the rate of one billion people every fourteen years. Because of the close parallel between the optimism and disappointments of Malthus' time and those of our own, much light can be thrown on our present situation by rereading the debate between Malthus and his contemporaries.

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834) came from an intellectual family: His father, Daniel Malthus, was a moderately well-to-do English country gentleman, an enthusiastic believer in the optimistic ideas of the Enlightenment, and a friend of the philosophers Henry Rousseau, David Hume and William Godwin. The famous book on population by the younger Malthus grew out of conversations with his father.

Daniel Malthus attended Oxford, but left without obtaining a degree. He later built a country home near Dorking, which he called "The Rookery". The house had Gothic battlements, and the land belonging to it contained a beech forest, an ice house, a corn mill, a large lake, and serpentine walks leading to "several romantic buildings with appropriate dedications".

Daniel Malthus was an ardent admirer of Rousseau; and when the French philosopher visited England with his mistress, Thérèse le Vasseur, Daniel Malthus entertained him at the Rookery. Rousseau and Thérèse undoubtedly saw Daniel's baby son (who was always called Robert or Bob) and they must have noticed with pity that he had been born with a hare lip. This was later sutured, and apart from a slight scar which marked the operation, he became very handsome.

Robert Malthus was at first tutored at home; but in 1782, when he was 16 years old, he was sent to study at the famous Dissenting Academy at Warrington in Lancashire. Joseph Priestly had taught at Warrington, and he had completed his famous *History of Electricity* there, as well as his *Essay on Government*, which contains the phrase "the greatest good for the greatest number".

Robert's tutor at Warrington Academy was Gilbert Wakefield (who was later imprisoned for his radical ideas). When Robert was 18, Wakefield arranged for him to be admitted to Jesus College, Cambridge University, as a student of mathematics. Robert Malthus graduated from Cambridge in 1788 with a first-class degree in mathematics. He was Ninth Wrangler, which meant that he was the ninth-best mathematician in his graduating class. He also won prizes in declamation, both in English and in Latin, which is surprising in view of the speech defect from which he suffered all his life.

In 1793, Robert Malthus was elected a fellow of Jesus College, and he also took orders in the Anglican Church. He was assigned as Curate to Okewood Chapel in Surrey. This small chapel stood in a woodland region, and Malthus' illiterate parishioners were so poor that the women and children went without shoes. They lived in low thatched huts made of woven branches plastered with mud. The floors of these huts were of dirt, and the only light came from tiny window openings. Malthus' parishioners diet consisted almost entirely of bread. The children of these cottagers developed late, and were stunted in growth. Nevertheless, in spite of the harsh conditions of his parishioners' lives, Malthus noticed that the number of births which he recorded in the parish register greatly exceeded the number of deaths. It was probably this fact which first turned his attention to the problem of population.

By this time, Daniel Malthus had sold the Rookery; and after a period of travel, he had settled with his family at Albury, about nine miles from Okewood Chapel. Robert Malthus lived with his parents at Albury, and it was here that the famous debates between father and son took place.

1793, the year when Robert Malthus took up his position at Okewood, was also the year in which Daniel Malthus friend, William Godwin, published his enormously optimistic book, *Political Justice* [6,14,21]. In this book, Godwin predicted a future society where scientific progress would liberate humans from

material want. Godwin predicted that in the future, with the institution of war abolished, with a more equal distribution of property, and with the help of scientific improvements in agriculture and industry, much less labour would be needed to support life. Luxuries are at present used to maintain artificial distinctions between the classes of society, Godwin wrote, but in the future values will change; humans will live more simply, and their efforts will be devoted to self-fulfillment and to intellectual and moral improvement, rather than to material possessions. With the help of automated agriculture, the citizens of a future society will need only a few hours a day to earn their bread.

Godwin went on to say, “The spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility and the spirit of fraud - these are the immediate growth of the established administration of property. They are alike hostile to intellectual improvement. The other vices of envy, malice, and revenge are their inseparable companions. In a state of society where men lived in the midst of plenty, and where all shared alike the bounties of nature, these sentiments would inevitably expire. The narrow principle of selfishness would vanish. No man being obliged to guard his little store, or provide with anxiety and pain for his restless wants, each would lose his own individual existence in the thought of the general good. No man would be the enemy of his neighbor, for they would have nothing to contend; and of consequence philanthropy would resume the empire which reason assigns her. Mind would be delivered from her perpetual anxiety about corporal support, and free to expatiate in the field of thought which is congenial to her. Each man would assist the inquiries of all.”

Godwin insisted that there is an indissoluble link between politics, ethics and knowledge. *Political Justice* is an enthusiastic vision of what humans could be like at some future period when the trend towards moral and intellectual improvement has lifted men and women above their their present state of ignorance and vice. Much of the savage structure of the penal system would then be unnecessary, Godwin believed. (At the time when he was writing, there were more than a hundred capital offenses in England, and this number had soon increased to almost two hundred. The theft of any object of greater value than ten shillings was punishable by hanging.)

In its present state, Godwin wrote, society decrees that the majority of its citizens “should be kept in abject penury, rendered stupid with ignorance and disgustful with vice, perpetuated in nakedness and hunger, goaded to the commission of crimes, and made victims to the merciless laws which the rich have instituted to oppress them”. But human behavior is produced by environment and education, Godwin pointed out. If the conditions of upbringing were improved, behavior would also improve. In fact, Godwin believed that men and women are subject to natural laws no less than the planets of Newton’s



Figure 1.7: *Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834)*. (Public domain)

solar system. “In the life of every human”, Godwin wrote, “there is a chain of causes, generated in that eternity which preceded his birth, and going on in regular procession through the whole period of his existence, in consequence of which it was impossible for him to act in any instance otherwise than he has acted.”

The chain of causality in human affairs implies that vice and crime should be regarded with the same attitude with which we regard disease. The causes of poverty, ignorance, vice and crime should be removed. Human failings should be cured rather than punished. With this in mind, Godwin wrote, “our disapprobation of vice will be of the same nature as our disapprobation of an infectious distemper.”

In France the Marquis de Condorcet had written an equally optimistic book, *Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain*. Condorcet's optimism was unaffected even by the fact that at the time when he was writing he was in hiding, under sentence of death by Robespierre's government. Besides enthusiastically extolling Godwin's ideas to his son, Daniel Malthus also told him of the views of Condorcet.

Condorcet's *Esquisse*, is an enthusiastic endorsement of the idea of infinite human perfectibility which was current among the philosophers of the 18th century, and in this book, Condorcet anticipated many of the evolutionary ideas of Charles Darwin. He compared humans with animals, and found many common traits. Condorcet believed that animals are able to think, and even to think rationally, although their thoughts are extremely simple compared with those of humans. He also asserted that humans historically began their existence on the same level as animals and gradually developed to their present state. Since this evolution took place historically, he reasoned, it is probable, or even inevitable, that a similar evolution in the future will bring mankind to a level of physical, mental and moral development which will be as superior to our own present state as we are now superior to animals.

In his *Esquisse*, Condorcet called attention to the unusually long period of dependency which characterizes the growth and education of human offspring. This prolonged childhood is unique among living beings. It is needed for the high level of mental development of the human species; but it requires a stable family structure to protect the young during their long upbringing. Thus, according to Condorcet, biological evolution brought into existence a moral precept, the sanctity of the family.

Similarly, Condorcet maintained, larger associations of humans would have been impossible without some degree of altruism and sensitivity to the suffering of others incorporated into human behavior, either as instincts or as moral precepts or both; and thus the evolution of organized society entailed the development of sensibility and morality.

Condorcet believed that ignorance and error are responsible for vice; and he listed what he regarded as the main mistakes of civilization: hereditary transmission of power, inequality between men and women, religious bigotry, disease, war, slavery, economic inequality, and the division of humanity into mutually exclusive linguistic groups.

Condorcet believed the hereditary transmission of power to be the source of much of the tyranny under which humans suffer; and he looked forward to an era when republican governments would be established throughout the world. Turning to the inequality between men and women, Condorcet wrote that he could see no moral, physical or intellectual basis for it. He called for complete social, legal, and educational equality between the sexes.

Condorcet predicted that the progress of medical science would free humans from the worst ravages of disease. Furthermore, he maintained that since perfectibility (i.e. evolution) operates throughout the biological world, there is no reason why mankind's physical structure might not gradually improve, with the result that human life in the remote future could be greatly prolonged. Condorcet believed that the intellectual and moral facilities of man are capable

of continuous and steady improvement; and he thought that one of the most important results of this improvement will be the abolition of war.

As Daniel Malthus talked warmly about Godwin, Condorcet, and the idea of human progress, the mind of his son, Robert, turned to the unbalance between births and deaths which he had noticed among his parishioners at Okewood Chapel. He pointed out to his father that no matter what benefits science might be able to confer, they would soon be eaten up by population growth. Regardless of technical progress, the condition of the lowest social class would remain exactly the same: The poor would continue to live, as they always had, on the exact borderline between survival and famine, clinging desperately to the lower edge of existence. For them, change for the worse was impossible since it would loosen their precarious hold on life; their children would die and their numbers would diminish until they balanced the supply of food. But any change for the better was equally impossible, because if more nourishment should become available, more of the children of the poor would survive, and the share of food for each of them would again be reduced to the precise minimum required for life.

Observation of his parishioners at Okewood had convinced Robert Malthus that this sombre picture was a realistic description of the condition of the poor in England at the end of the 18th century. Techniques of agriculture and industry were indeed improving rapidly; but among the very poor, population was increasing equally fast, and the misery of society's lowest class remained unaltered.

Publication of the first essay in 1798

Daniel Malthus was so impressed with his son's arguments that he urged him to develop them into a small book. Robert Malthus' first essay on population, written in response to his father's urging, was only 50,000 words in length. It was published anonymously in 1798, and its full title was *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it affects the future improvement of society, with remarks on the speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and other writers*. Robert Malthus' *Essay* explored the consequences of his basic thesis: that "the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man".

"That population cannot increase without the means of subsistence", Robert Malthus wrote, "is a proposition so evident that it needs no illustration. That population does invariably increase, where there are means of subsistence, the history of every people who have ever existed will abundantly prove. And that the superior power cannot be checked without producing misery and vice, the ample portion of these two bitter ingredients in the cup of human life, and the

continuance of the physical causes that seem to have produced them, bear too convincing a testimony.”

In order to illustrate the power of human populations to grow quickly to enormous numbers if left completely unchecked, Malthus turned to statistics from the United States, where the population had doubled every 25 years for a century and a half. Malthus called this type of growth “geometrical” (today we would call it “exponential”); and, drawing on his mathematical education, he illustrated it by the progression 1,2,4,8,16,32,64,128,256,...etc. In order to show that, in the long run, no improvement in agriculture could possibly keep pace with unchecked population growth, Malthus allowed that, in England, agricultural output might with great effort be doubled during the next quarter century; but during a subsequent 25-year period it could not again be doubled. The growth of agricultural output could at the very most follow an arithmetic (linear) progression, 1,2,3,4,5,6,...etc.

Because of the overpoweringly greater numbers which can potentially be generated by exponential population growth, as contrasted to the slow linear progression of sustenance, Malthus was convinced that at almost all stages of human history, population has not expanded freely, but has instead pressed painfully against the limits of its food supply. He maintained that human numbers are normally held in check either by “vice or misery”. (Malthus classified both war and birth control as forms of vice.) Occasionally the food supply increases through some improvement in agriculture, or through the opening of new lands; but population then grows very rapidly, and soon a new equilibrium is established, with misery and vice once more holding the population in check.

Like Godwin’s *Political Justice*, Malthus’ *Essay on the Principle of Population* was published at exactly the right moment to capture the prevailing mood of England. In 1793, the mood had been optimistic; but by 1798, hopes for reform had been replaced by reaction and pessimism. Public opinion had been changed by Robespierre’s Reign of Terror and by the threat of a French invasion. Malthus’ clear and powerfully written essay caught the attention of readers not only because it appeared at the right moment, but also because his two contrasting mathematical laws of growth were so striking.

One of Malthus’ readers was William Godwin, who recognized the essay as the strongest challenge to his utopian ideas that had yet been published. Godwin several times invited Malthus to breakfast at his home to discuss social and economic problems. (After some years, however, the friendship between Godwin and Malthus cooled, the debate between them having become more acrimonious.)

In 1801, Godwin published a reply to his critics, among them his former friends James Mackintosh and Samuel Parr, by whom he recently had been

attacked. His *Reply to Parr* also contained a reply to Malthus: Godwin granted that the problem of overpopulation raised by Malthus was an extremely serious one. However, Godwin wrote, all that is needed to solve the problem is a change of the attitudes of society. For example we need to abandon the belief “that it is the first duty of princes to watch for (i.e. encourage) the multiplication of their subjects, and that a man or woman who passes the term of life in a condition of celibacy is to be considered as having failed to discharge the principal obligations owed to the community”.

“On the contrary”, Godwin continued, “it now appears to be rather the man who rears a numerous family that has to some degree transgressed the consideration he owes to the public welfare”. Godwin suggested that each marriage should be allowed only two or three children or whatever number might be needed to balance the current rates of mortality and celibacy. This duty to society, Godwin wrote, would surely not be too great a hardship to be endured, once the reasons for it were thoroughly understood.

The second essay, published in 1803

Malthus’ small essay had captured public attention in England, and he was anxious to expand it with empirical data which would show his principle of population to be valid not only in England in his own day, but in all societies and all periods. He therefore traveled widely, collecting data. He also made use of the books of explorers, such as Cook and Vancouver.

Malthus second edition - more than three times the length of his original essay on population - was ready in 1803. Book I and Book II of the 1803 edition of Malthus’ *Essay* are devoted to a study of the checks to population growth which have operated throughout history in all the countries of the world for which he possessed facts.

In his first chapter, Malthus stressed the potentially enormous power of population growth contrasted the slow growth of the food supply. He concluded that strong checks to the increase of population must almost always be operating to keep human numbers within the bounds of sustenance. He classified the checks as either preventive or positive, the preventive checks being those which reduce fertility, while the positive checks are those which increase mortality. Among the positive checks, Malthus listed “unwholesome occupations, severe labour and exposure to the seasons, extreme poverty, bad nursing of children, great towns, excesses of all kinds, the whole train of common diseases and epidemics, wars, plague, and famine”.

In the following chapters of Books I, Malthus showed in detail the mechanisms by which population is held at the level of sustenance in various cultures. He first discussed primitive hunter-gatherer societies, such as the inhabitants

of Tierra del Fuego, Van Diemens Land and New Holland, and those tribes of North American Indians living predominantly by hunting. In hunting societies, he pointed out, the population is inevitably very sparse: “The great extent of territory required for the support of the hunter has been repeatedly stated and acknowledged”, Malthus wrote, “...The tribes of hunters, like beasts of prey, whom they resemble in their mode of subsistence, will consequently be thinly scattered over the surface of the earth. Like beasts of prey, they must either drive away or fly from every rival, and be engaged in perpetual contests with each other...The neighboring nations live in a perpetual state of hostility with each other. The very act of increasing in one tribe must be an act of aggression against its neighbors, as a larger range of territory will be necessary to support its increased numbers. The contest will in this case continue, either till the equilibrium is restored by mutual losses, or till the weaker party is exterminated or driven from its country... Their object in battle is not conquest but destruction. The life of the victor depends on the death of the enemy”. Malthus concluded that among the American Indians of his time, war was the predominant check to population growth, although famine, disease and infanticide each played a part.

In the next chapter, Malthus quoted Captain Cook’s description of the natives of the region near Queen Charlotte’s Sound in New Zealand, whose way of life involved perpetual war. “If I had followed the advice of all our pretended friends”, Cook wrote, “I might have extirpated the whole race; for the people of each hamlet or village, by turns, applied to me to destroy the other”. According to Cook, the New Zealanders practiced both ceaseless war and cannibalism; and population pressure provided a motive for both practices.

In later chapters on nomadic societies of the Near East and Asia, war again appears, not only as a consequence of the growth of human numbers, but also as one of the major mechanisms by which these numbers are reduced to the level of their food supply. The studies quoted by Malthus make it seem likely that the nomadic Tartar tribes of central Asia made no use of the preventive checks to population growth. In fact the Tartar tribes may have regarded growth of their own populations as useful in their wars with neighboring tribes.

Malthus also described the Germanic tribes of Northern Europe, whose population growth led them to the attacks which destroyed the Roman Empire. He quoted the following passage from Machiavelli’s *History of Florence*: “The people who inhabit the northern parts that lie between the Rhine and the Danube, living in a healthful and prolific climate, often increase to such a degree that vast numbers of them are forced to leave their native country and go in search of new habitations. When any of those provinces begins to grow too populous and wants to disburden itself, the following method is observed. In the first place, it is divided into three parts, in each of which

there is an equal portion of the nobility and commonality, the rich and the poor. After this they cast lots; and that division on which the lot falls quits the country and goes to seek its fortune, leaving the other two more room and liberty to enjoy their possessions at home. These emigrations proved the destruction of the Roman Empire". Regarding the Scandinavians in the early middle ages, Malthus wrote: "Mallet relates, what is probably true, that it was their common custom to hold an assembly every spring for the purpose of considering in what quarter they should make war".

In Book II, Malthus turned to the nations of Europe, as they appeared at the end of the 18th century, and here he presents us with a different picture. Although in these societies poverty, unsanitary housing, child labour, malnutrition and disease all took a heavy toll, war produced far less mortality than in hunting and pastoral societies, and the preventive checks, which lower fertility, played a much larger roll.

Malthus had visited Scandinavia during the summer of 1799, and he had made particularly detailed notes on Norway. He was thus able to present a description of Norwegian economics and demography based on his own studies. Norway was remarkable for having the lowest reliably-recorded death rate of any nation at that time: Only 1 person in 48 died each year in Norway. (By comparison, 1 person in 20 died each year in London.) The rate of marriage was also remarkably low, with only 1 marriage each year for every 130 inhabitants; and thus in spite of the low death rate, Norway's population had increased only slightly from the 723,141 inhabitants recorded in 1769.

There were two reasons for late marriage in Norway: Firstly, every man born of a farmer or a labourer was compelled by law to be a soldier in the reserve army for a period of ten years; and during his military service, he could not marry without the permission of both his commanding officer and the parish priest. These permissions were granted only to those who were clearly in an economic position to support a family. Men could be inducted into the army at any age between 20 and 30, and since commanding officers preferred older recruits, Norwegian men were often in their 40's before they were free to marry. At the time when Malthus was writing, these rules had just been made less restrictive; but priests still refused to unite couples whose economic foundations they judged to be insufficient.

The second reason for late marriages was the structure of the farming community. In general, Norwegian farms were large; and the owner's household employed many young unmarried men and women as servants. These young people had no chance to marry unless a smaller house on the property became vacant, with its attached small parcel of land for the use of the "houseman"; but because of the low death rate, such vacancies were infrequent. Thus Norway's remarkably low death rate was balanced by a low birth rate. Other

chapters in Book II are devoted to the checks to population growth in Sweden, Russia, Central Europe, Switzerland, France, England, Scotland and Ireland.

Malthus painted a very dark panorama of population pressure and its consequences in human societies throughout the world and throughout history: At the lowest stage of cultural development are the hunter-gatherer societies, where the density of population is extremely low. Nevertheless, the area required to support the hunters is so enormous that even their sparse and thinly scattered numbers press hard against the limits of sustenance. The resulting competition for territory produces merciless intertribal wars.

The domestication of animals makes higher population densities possible; and wherever this new mode of food production is adopted, human numbers rapidly increase; but very soon a new equilibrium is established, with the population of pastoral societies once more pressing painfully against the limits of the food supply, growing a little in good years, and being cut back in bad years by famine, disease and war.

Finally, agricultural societies can maintain extremely high densities of population; but the time required to achieve a new equilibrium is very short. After a brief period of unrestricted growth, human numbers are once more crushed against the barrier of limited resources; and if excess lives are produced by overbreeding, they are soon extinguished by deaths among the children of the poor.

Malthus was conscious that he had drawn an extremely dark picture of the human condition. He excused himself by saying that he has not done it gratuitously, but because he was convinced that the dark shades really are there, and that they form an important part of the picture. He did allow one ray of light, however: By 1803, his own studies of Norway, together with personal conversations with Godwin and the arguments in Godwin's *Reply to Parr*, had convinced Malthus that "moral restraint" should be included among the possible checks to population growth. Thus he concluded Book II of his 1803 edition by saying that the checks which keep population down to the level of the means of subsistence can all be classified under the headings of "moral restraint, vice and misery". (In his first edition he had maintained that vice and misery are the only possibilities).

Systems of Equality

In the 1803 edition of Malthus' *Essay*, Books III and IV form a second volume. The ideas which he put forward in this second volume are much more open to dispute than are the solidly empirical demographic studies of Books I and II. Malthus excused himself at the beginning of the second volume, saying that he realized that the ideas which he was about to put forward were less solidly

based than those in his first volume. However, he said that he wished to explore all the consequences of his principle of population: “..Even the errors into which I may have fallen”, he wrote, “by affording a handle to argument, and an additional excitement to examination, may be subservient to the important end of bringing a subject so nearly connected with the happiness of society into more general notice”.

Malthus began Book III by discussing the systems of equality proposed by Condorcet and Godwin; and he tried to show that such utopian societies would prove impossible in practice, because they would rapidly drown in a flood of excess population. Condorcet himself had recognized this difficulty. He realized that improved living conditions for the poor would lead to a rapid growth of population. “Must not a period then arrive”, Condorcet had written, “... when the increase of the number of men surpassing their means of subsistence, the necessary result must be either a continual diminution of happiness and population... or at least a kind of oscillation between good and evil?”

Condorcet believed the serious consequences of population pressure to be far in the future, but Malthus disagreed with him on exactly that point: “M. Condorcet’s picture of what may be expected to happen when the number of men shall surpass subsistence is justly drawn... The only point in which I differ from M. Condorcet in this description is with regard to the period when it may be applied to the human race... This constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery has existed in most countries ever since we have had any histories of mankind, and continues to exist at the present moment.”

“M. Condorcet, however, goes on to say”, Malthus continued, “that should the period, which he conceives to be so distant, ever arrive, the human race, and the advocates of the perfectibility of man, need not be alarmed at it. He then proceeds to remove the difficulty in a manner which I profess not to understand. Having observed that the ridiculous prejudices of superstition would by that time have ceased to throw over morals a corrupt and degrading austerity, he alludes either to a promiscuous concubinage, which would prevent breeding, or to something else as unnatural. To remove the difficulty in this way will surely, in the opinion of most men, be to destroy that virtue and purity of manners which the advocates of equality and of the perfectibility of man profess to be the end and object of their views.” When Malthus referred to “something else as unnatural”, he of course meant birth control, some forms of which existed at the time when he was writing; and in this passage we see that he was opposed to the practice. He preferred late marriage or “moral restraint” as a means of limiting excessive population growth.

After his arguments against Condorcet, Malthus discussed William Godwin’s egalitarian utopia, which, he said, would be extremely attractive if only it could be achieved: “The system of equality which Mr. Godwin proposes”,

Malthus wrote, “is, on the first view of it, the most beautiful and engaging which has yet appeared. A melioration of society to be produced merely by reason and conviction gives more promise of permanence than any change effected and maintained by force. The unlimited exercise of private judgement is a doctrine grand and captivating, and has a vast superiority over those systems where every individual is in a manner the slave of the public. The substitution of benevolence, as a master-spring and moving principle of society, instead of self-love, appears at first sight to be a consummation devoutly to be wished. In short, it is impossible to contemplate the whole of this fair picture without emotions of delight and admiration, accompanied with an ardent longing for the period of its accomplishment.”

“But alas!” Malthus continued, “That moment can never arrive.... The great error under which Mr. Godwin labours throughout his whole work is the attributing of almost all the vices and misery that prevail in civil society to human institutions. Political regulations and the established administration of property are, with him, the fruitful sources of all evil, the hotbeds of all the crimes that degrade mankind. Were this really a true state of the case, it would not seem a completely hopeless task to remove evil completely from the world; and reason seems to be the proper and adequate instrument for effecting so great a purpose. But the truth is, that though human institutions appear to be, and indeed often are, the obvious and obtrusive causes of much misery in society, they are, in reality, light and superficial in comparison with those deeper-seated causes of evil which result from the laws of nature and the passions of mankind.”

The passions of mankind drive humans to reproduce, while the laws of nature set limits to the carrying capacity of the environment. Godwin’s utopia, if established, would be very favorable to the growth of population; and very soon the shortage of food would lead to its downfall: Because of the overpowering force of population growth, “Man cannot live in the midst of plenty. All cannot share alike the bounties of nature. Were there no established administration of property, every man would be obliged to guard with his force his little store. Selfishness would be triumphant. The subjects of contention would be perpetual. Every individual would be under constant anxiety about corporal support, and not a single intellect would be left free to expatiate in the field of thought.”

Malthus believed that all systems of equality are doomed to failure, not only because of the powerful pressure of population growth, but also because differences between the upper, middle, and lower classes serve the useful purpose of providing humans with an incentive for hard work. He thought that fear of falling to a lower social status, and hope of rising to a higher one, provide a strong incentive for constructive activity. However, he believed that

happiness is most often found in the middle ranks of society, and that therefore the highest and lowest classes ought not to be large. Malthus advocated universal education and security of property as means by which the lowest classes of society could be induced to adopt more virtuous and prudent patterns of behavior.

The Poor Laws

Among the most controversial chapters of Malthus' second volume are those dealing with the Poor Laws. During the reign of Queen Elisabeth I, a law had been enacted according to which justices were authorized to collect taxes in order to set to work "...the children of all such, whose parents shall not by the said persons be thought able to keep and maintain their children; and also such persons, married or unmarried, as, having no means to maintain them, use no ordinary or daily trade to get their living by..". Malthus commented: "What is this but saying that the funds for the maintenance of labour in this country may be increased without limit by a *fiat* of government...? Strictly speaking, this clause is as arrogant and absurd as if it had enacted that two ears of wheat should in the future grow where one had grown before. Canute, when he commanded the waves not to wet his princely foot, did not assume a greater power over the laws of nature." Malthus pointed out that if we believe that every person has a right to have as many children as he or she wishes, and if we enact a law, according to which every person born has a right to sustenance, then we implicitly assume that the supply of food can be increased without limit, which of course is impossible.

During the first few years of the nineteenth century there was a severe shortage of food in England, partly because of war with France, and partly because of harvest failures. As a result, the price of wheat tripled, causing great distress among the poor. By 1803, 3,000,000 pounds sterling were being distributed to make up the difference between the wages of poor workers and the amount which they needed to pay for food. Malthus regarded the supply of grain as constant, i.e. independent of the price; and he therefore believed that distribution of money under the Poor Laws merely raised the price of grain still further in relation to wages, forcing a larger number of independent workers to seek help. He thought that the distributed money helped to relieve suffering in some cases, but that it spread the suffering over a wider area.

In some parishes, the amount of money distributed under the Poor Laws was proportional to the number of children in a family, and Malthus believed that this encouraged the growth of population, further aggravating the shortage of food. "A poor man may marry with little or no prospect of being able to support a family in independence", he wrote, "...and the Poor Laws may be

said therefore in some measure to create the poor which they maintain; and as the provisions of the country must, in consequence of the increased population, be distributed to every man in smaller proportions, it is evident that the labour of those who are not supported by parish assistance, will purchase a smaller quantity of provisions than before, and consequently more of them must be driven to ask for support.” Malthus advocated a very gradual abolition of the Poor Laws, and he believed that while this change was being brought about, the laws ought to be administered in such a way that the position of least well-off independent workers should not be worse than the position of those supported by parish assistance.

Replies to Malthus

The second edition of Malthus’ *Essay* was published in 1803. It provoked a storm of controversy, and a flood of rebuttals. In 1803 England’s political situation was sensitive. Revolutions had recently occurred both in America and in France; and in England there was much agitation for radical change, against which Malthus provided counter-arguments. Pitt and his government had taken Malthus’ first edition seriously, and had abandoned their plans for extending the Poor Laws. Also, as a consequence of Malthus’ ideas, England’s first census was taken in 1801. This census, and subsequent ones, taken in 1811, 1821 and 1831, showed that England’s population was indeed increasing rapidly, just as Malthus had feared. (The population of England and Wales more than doubled in 80 years, from an estimated 6.6 million in 1750 to almost 14 million in 1831.) In 1803, the issues of poverty and population were at the center of the political arena, and articles refuting Malthus began to stream from the pens of England’s authors.

William Coleridge planned to write an article against Malthus, and he made extensive notes in the margins of his copy of the *Essay*. In one place he wrote: “Are Lust and Hunger both alike Passions of physical Necessity, and the one equally with the other independent of the Reason and the Will? Shame upon our race that there lives an individual who dares to ask the Question.” In another place Coleridge wrote: “Vice and Virtue subsist in the agreement of the habits of a man with his Reason and Conscience, and these can have but one moral guide, Utility, or the virtue and Happiness of Rational Beings”. Although Coleridge never wrote his planned article, his close friend Robert Southey did so, using Coleridge’s notes almost verbatim. Some years later Coleridge remarked: “Is it not lamentable - is it not even marvelous - that the monstrous practical sophism of Malthus should now have gained complete possession of the leading men of the kingdom! Such an essential lie in morals - such a practical lie in fact it is too! I solemnly declare that I do not believe that

all the heresies and sects and factions which ignorance and the weakness and wickedness of man have ever given birth to, were altogether so disgraceful to man as a Christian, a philosopher, a statesman or citizen, as this abominable tenet."

In 1812, Percy Bysshe Shelley, who was later to become William Godwin's son-in-law, wrote: "Many well-meaning persons... would tell me not to make people happy for fear of over-stocking the world... War, vice and misery are undoubtedly bad; they embrace all that we can conceive of temporal and eternal evil. Are we to be told that these are remedyless, because the earth would in case of their remedy, be overstocked?" A year later, Shelley called Malthus a "priest, eunuch, and tyrant", and accused him, in a pamphlet, of proposing that "... after the poor have been stript naked by the tax-gatherer and reduced to bread and tea and fourteen hours of hard labour by their masters.. the last tie by which Nature holds them to benignant earth (whose plenty is garnered up in the strongholds of their tyrants) is to be divided... They are required to abstain from marrying under penalty of starvation... whilst the rich are permitted to add as many mouths to consume the products of the poor as they please"

Godwin himself wrote a long book (which was published in 1820) entitled *Of Population, An Enquiry Concerning the Power and Increase in the Number of Mankind, being an answer to Mr. Malthus*. One can also view many of the books of Charles Dickens as protests against Malthus' point of view. For example, *Oliver Twist* gives us a picture of a workhouse "administered in such a way that the position of least well-off independent workers should not be worse than the position of those supported by parish assistance."

Among the 19th century authors defending Malthus was Harriet Martineau, who wrote: "The desire of his heart and the aim of his work were that domestic virtue and happiness should be placed within the reach of all... He found that a portion of the people were underfed, and that one consequence of this was a fearful mortality among infants; and another consequence the growth of a recklessness among the destitute which caused infanticide, corruption of morals, and at best, marriage between pauper boys and girls; while multitudes of respectable men and women, who paid rates instead of consuming them, were unmarried at forty or never married at all. Prudence as to time of marriage and for making due provision for it was, one would think, a harmless recommendation enough, under the circumstances."

At the end of the 19th century, the founders of neoclassical economic theory looked back on the problems raised by Malthus and concluded that they had been overcome because of improvements in agriculture and transportation, and the opening up of new "unclaimed" lands in other parts of the world. However Alfred Marshall pointed out that in the very long run, the problems

that Malthus raised would return. In his “Principles of Economics” (1890), Chapter IV, he wrote: “... it was not Malthus’ fault that he could not foresee the great developments of steam transport by land and by sea, which have enabled Englishmen of the present generation to obtain the products of the richest lands of the earth at comparatively small cost... But... [i]t remains true that unless the checks on the growth of population in force at the end of the nineteenth century are on the whole increased... it will be impossible for the habits of comfort prevailing in Western Europe to spread themselves over the whole world and maintain themselves for many hundred years”. Then there follows a footnote in which Malthus first extrapolates the then population size to find that before 2120 it will be 6 billion; he then assumes further innovation, but eventually says that: “... the pressure of population on the means of subsistence may be held in check for about two hundred years, but not longer.”

The Irish Potato Famine of 1845

Meanwhile, in Ireland, a dramatic series of events had occurred, confirming the ideas of Malthus. Anti-Catholic laws prevented the Irish cottagers from improving their social position; and instead they produced large families, fed almost exclusively on a diet of milk and potatoes. The potato and milk diet allowed a higher density of population to be supported in Ireland than would have been the case if the Irish diet had consisted primarily of wheat. As a result, the population of Ireland grew rapidly: In 1695 it had been approximately one million, but by 1821 it had reached 6,801,827. By 1845, the population of Ireland was more than eight million; and in that year the potato harvest failed because of blight. All who were able to do so fled from the country, many emigrating to the United States; but two million people died of starvation. As the result of this shock, Irish marriage habits changed, and late marriage became the norm, just as Malthus would have wished. After the Potato Famine of 1845, Ireland maintained a stable population of roughly four million.

Malthus continued a life of quiet scholarship, unperturbed by the heated public debate which he had caused. At the age of 38, he married a second cousin. The marriage produced only three children, which at that time was considered to be a very small number. Thus he practiced the pattern of late marriage which he advocated. Although he was appointed rector of a church in Lincolnshire, he never preached there, hiring a curate to do this in his place. Instead of preaching, Malthus accepted an appointment as Professor of History and Political Economy at the East India Company’s College at Haileybury. This appointment made him the first professor of economics in England, and probably also the first in the world. Among the important books which he

wrote while he held this post was *Principles of Political Economy, Considered with a View to their Practical Application*. Malthus also published numerous revised and expanded editions of his *Essay on the Principle of Population*. The third edition was published in 1806, the fourth in 1807, the fifth in 1817, and the sixth in 1826.

In the societies that Malthus describes, we can see a clear link not only between population pressure and poverty, but also between population pressure and war. Undoubtedly this is why the suffering produced by poverty and war saturates so much of human history. Stabilization of population through birth control offers a key to eliminating this suffering.

We will return to the ideas of Malthus in Chapter 2, since they are extremely relevant to the problems of the 21st century.

Ricardo's theory of rent

. Among Malthus' closest friends was the financier David Ricardo (1772-1823). Ricardo had been born into a Jewish family that had moved to London from Portugal. However, at the age of 21 he had broken relations with his family and rejected his orthodox Jewish faith in order to marry a Quaker girl. Ricardo, who had worked with his father on the London Sock Exchange since the age of 14, then proceeded to become a financier in his own right, amassing a fortune worth over a million pounds, in those days an immense sum.

Having read a copy of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Ricardo became interested in theoretical economics, and at the age of 37 he began to write about this subject. His articles and books were admired by Malthus, and the two became close friends, although they disagreed on many issues.

Malthus had been brought up as a member of the British landowning class. He valued the beauty of the countryside, and was disturbed by the growth of industrialism. By contrast, Ricardo's sympathies lay with the rising and vigorous class of industrialists. The theory of rent, developed by Ricardo, showed that there is an inevitable conflict between these two classes.

Ricardo's theory of rent dealt with the effect of economic growth on prices, wages and profits. He and Malthus both agreed with Adam Smith's picture of growth: The virtuous industrialist does not spend his profits on luxuries, but instead reinvests them. New factories are built, the demand for workers increases, wages rise, and more workers are "produced" in response to the demand, i.e., more of the worker's children survive, and their numbers grow.

With each turn of the spiral of economic growth, there is an increased demand for food, since the population of workers increases. The most fertile land is already in use, but to meet the larger demand for food, marginal land is tilled, for example land on steep hillside slopes. It costs more to grow grain on

marginal land, and therefore grain prices rise. According to Ricardo, the only people who benefit from economic growth are the owners of especially fertile land. The factory owners do not benefit, because they must pay higher wages to meet the increased price of food for their workers, and their profits remain the same. The workers do not benefit, because regardless of the price of grain, each of them is given only enough food to survive. The true beneficiaries of economic growth, according to Ricardo, are the owners of the most fertile land, i.e., the landowning aristocracy.

Ricardo defines “rent” to be the difference, per acre, between the cost of growing grain on good land, and the cost on marginal land. This difference is pocketed by the owners of good land. They do not really deserve it because ownership of fertile land is something that they inherited, rather than something that they produced by their own efforts.

The Corn Laws

At the time when Ricardo was writing, imports of cheap foreign grain were effectively blocked by the Corn Laws, a series of acts of Parliament which were in force between 1815 and 1846. These laws imposed prohibitively high tariffs on the import of foreign grain. Ricardo’s theory of rents showed that the Corn Laws benefited the landowning aristocracy at the expense of the industrialists. His sympathies were with the industrialists, because he felt that the Corn Laws were forcing England back into feudalism and economic stagnation. By contrast, Malthus favored the Corn laws because he felt that it was dangerous for England to become dependent on imports of foreign grain. What would the country do in case of war?, Malthus asked. What would England do if it lost its industrial edge and became unable to export its manufactured products? How would the country then support its overgrown population?

In the end, the aristocracy lost its control of Parliament, the Corn Laws were repealed, and the population of England continued to grow. It has grown from 8.3 million in 1801, the year of the first census, to 50.7 million in 2006. Today, England could not possibly support its population on home-grown food. Like the Netherlands and Japan, Britain is dependent on exports of manufactured goods and imports of grain.

The Iron Law of Wages

Ricardo believed that the “natural price” of any commodity is the lowest possible cost of its production, and that in the long run, prices of any commodity would approach this natural value. When he applied this idea to labor, the result was his “Iron Law of Wages”. Since the lowest cost of “producing” work-

ers is the cost of keeping them alive at the subsistence level, he reasoned, the natural price of labor is determined by the lowest possible cost of sustenance. If workers are paid less than this, they will die, their numbers will decrease, the demand for workers will increase, and the price of labor will rise. If they are paid more, a greater number of their children will survive, the number of workers will increase above demand, and wages will fall. According to this argument, starvation wages are inevitable.

Ricardo's reasoning assumes industrialists to be completely without social conscience or governmental regulation; it fails to anticipate the development of trade unionism; and it assumes that the working population will multiply without restraint as soon as their wages rise above the starvation level. This was an accurate description of what was happening in England during Ricardo's lifetime, but it obviously does not hold for all times and all places.

1.6 The Reform Movement

The slow acceptance of birth control in England

With the gradual acceptance of birth control in England, the growth of trade unions, the passage of laws against child labor and finally minimum wage laws, conditions of workers gradually improved, and the benefits of industrialization began to spread to the whole of society.

One of the arguments which was used to justify the abuse of labor was that the alternative was starvation. The population of Europe had begun to grow rapidly for a variety of reasons: - because of the application of scientific knowledge to the prevention of disease; because the potato had been introduced into the diet of the poor; and because bubonic plague had become less frequent after the black rat had been replaced by the brown rat, accidentally imported from Asia.

It was argued that the excess population could not be supported unless workers were employed in the mills and factories to produce manufactured goods, which could be exchanged for imported food. In order for the manufactured goods to be competitive, the labor which produced them had to be cheap: hence the abuses. (At least, this is what was argued).

Industrialization benefited England, but in a very uneven way, producing great wealth for some parts of society, but also extreme misery in other social classes. For many, technical progress by no means led to an increase of happiness. The persistence of terrible poverty in 19th-century England, and the combined pessimism of Ricardo and Malthus, caused Thomas Carlyle to call economics "the Dismal Science".

Among the changes which were needed to insure that the effects of technical progress became beneficial rather than harmful, the most important were the abolition of child labor, the development of unions, the minimum wage law, and the introduction of birth control.

Francis Place (1771-1854), a close friend of William Godwin and James Mill, was one of the earliest and most courageous pioneers of these needed changes. Place had known extreme poverty as a child, but he had risen to become a successful businessman and a leader of the trade union movement.

Place and Mill were Utilitarians, and like other members of this movement they accepted the demographic studies of Malthus while disagreeing with Malthus' rejection of birth control. They reasoned that since abortion and infanticide were already widely used by the poor to limit the size of their families, it was an indication that reliable and humane methods of birth control would be welcome. If marriage could be freed from the miseries which resulted from excessive numbers of children, the Utilitarians believed, prostitution would become less common, and the health and happiness of women would be improved.

Francis Place and James Mill decided that educational efforts would be needed to make the available methods of birth control more widely known and accepted. In 1818, Mill cautiously wrote "The great problem of a real check to population growth has been miserably evaded by all those who have meddled with the subject... And yet, if the superstitions of the nursery were discarded, and the principle of utility kept steadily in view, a solution might not be very difficult to be found."

A few years later, Mill dared to be slightly more explicit: "The result to be aimed at", he wrote in his *Elements of Political Economy* (1821), "is to secure to the great body of the people all the happiness which is capable of being derived from the matrimonial union, (while) preventing the evils which the too rapid increase of their numbers would entail. The progress of legislation, the improvement of the education of the people, and the decay of superstition will, in time, it may be hoped, accomplish the difficult task of reconciling these important objects."

In 1822, Francis Place took the considerable risk of publishing a four-page pamphlet entitled *To the Married of Both Sexes of the Working People*, which contained the following passages:

"It is a great truth, often told and never denied, that when there are too many working people in any trade or manufacture, they are worse paid than they ought to be paid, and are compelled to work more hours than they ought to work. When the number of working people in any trade or manufacture has for some years been too great, wages are reduced very low, and the working people become little better than slaves."



Figure 1.8: *The Utilitarian philosopher and economist James Mill (1773-1836) was an early advocate of birth control. (He was the father of John Stuart Mill.)* (Public domain)

“When wages have thus been reduced to a very small sum, working people can no longer maintain their children as all good and respectable people wish to maintain their children, but are compelled to neglect them; - to send them to different employments; - to Mills and Manufactories, at a very early age. The miseries of these poor children cannot be described, and need not be described to you, who witness them and deplore them every day of your lives.”

“The sickness of yourselves and your children, the privation and pain and premature death of those you love but cannot cherish as you wish, need only be alluded to. You know all these evils too well.”

“And what, you will ask, is the remedy? How are we to avoid these miseries? The answer is short and plain: the means are easy. Do as other people do, to avoid having more children than they wish to have, and can easily maintain.”

“What is to be done is this. A piece of soft sponge is tied by a bobbin or penny ribbon, and inserted just before the sexual intercourse takes place, and is withdrawn again as soon as it has taken place. Many tie a sponge to each end of the ribbon, and they take care not to use the same sponge again until it has been washed. If the sponge be large enough, that is, as large as a green walnut, or a small apple, it will prevent conception... without diminishing the pleasures of married life...”

“You cannot fail to see that this address is intended solely for your good.

It is quite impossible that those who address you can receive any benefit from it, beyond the satisfaction which every benevolent person and true Christian, must feel, at seeing you comfortable, healthy and happy.”

The publication of Place’s pamphlet in 1822 was a landmark in the battle for the acceptance of birth control in England. Another important step was taken in 1832, when a small book entitled *The Fruits of Philosophy or, the Private Companion of Young Married People* was published by a Boston physician named Dr. Charles Knowlton. The book contained simple contraceptive advice. It reviewed the various methods of birth control available at the time. In order for the sponge method to be reliable, Knowlton’s book pointed out, use of a saline douching solution was necessary.

The battle for these social reforms was not easily won. For example, in 1876, “The Fruits of Philosophy” was ruled by an English court to be obscene, and a bookseller was sentenced to two years imprisonment for distributing it. The liberal politician Charles Bradlaugh and his friend, the feminist author Annie Besant then decided to provoke a new trial by selling the book themselves. They wrote polite letters to the Chief Clerk of the Magistrates, the Detective Department, and the City Solicitor announcing the time and the place at which they intended to sell the book, and they asked to be arrested. The result was a famous trial in which the two reformers were acquitted, but the jury again ruled “The Fruits of Philosophy” to be obscene.

As the nineteenth century progressed, birth control gradually came to be accepted in England, and the average number of children per marriage fell from 6.16 in 1860 to 4.13 in 1890. By 1915 this figure had fallen to 2.43. Because of lowered population pressure, combined with the growth of trade unions and better social legislation, the condition of England’s industrial workers improved; and under the new conditions, Ricardo’s Iron Law of Wages fortunately no longer seemed to hold.

Trade unions and child labor laws

Nor was the battle to establish trade unions easily won. At the start of the 19th century, many countries had laws prohibiting organizing unions, and these invoked penalties up to and including death. In England, the Reform Act of 1832 made unions legal, but nevertheless in 1834, six men from Dorset who had formed the “Friendly Society of Agricultural Workers” were arrested and sentenced to a seven years’ transportation to Australia. An obscure law from 1797 was invoked, which prohibited swearing secret oaths. This they had in fact done, but their main crime seems to have been refusing to work for less than 10 shillings a week. Despite bitter opposition, trade unions gradually developed both in England and in other industrial countries.



Figure 1.9: *Beatrice Webb (1858-1943). Together with her husband Sidney Webb, Graham Wallace and George Bernard Shaw, she founded the London School of Economics using money left to the Fabian Society by Henry Hutchinson. The Fabians also founded the British Labour Party, and they lobbied for a minimum wage law and National Health Service.* (Public domain)

One of the important influences for reform was the Fabian Society, founded in London in 1884. The group advocated gradual rather than revolutionary reform (and took its name from Quintus Fabius Maximus, the Roman general who defeated Hannibal's Carthaginian army by using harassment and attrition rather than head-on battles). The Fabian Society came to include a number of famous people, including Sydney and Beatrice Webb, George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, Annie Besant, Leonard Woolf, Emaline Pankhurst, Bertrand Russell, John Maynard Keynes, Harold Laski, Ramsay MacDonald, Clement Attlee, Tony Benn and Harold Wilson. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, was greatly influenced by Fabian economic ideas.

The group was instrumental in founding the British Labour Party (1900), the London School of Economics and the New Statesman. In 1906, Fabians lobbied for a minimum wage law, and in 1911 they lobbied for the establishment of a National Health Service.

Adam Smith had praised division of labor as one of the main elements in industrial efficiency, but precisely this aspect of industrialism was criticized by Thomas Carlyle (1795-1891), John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris (1834-1896). They considered the numbingly repetitive work of factory laborers to be degrading, and they rightly pointed out that important traditions of design were being lost and replaced by ugly mass produced artifacts. The Arts and Crafts movement founded by Ruskin and Morris advocated cooperative

workshops, where creative freedom and warm human relationships would make work rewarding and pleasant. In several Scandinavian countries, whose industrialization came later than England's, efforts were made to preserve traditions of design. Hence the present artistic excellence of Scandinavian furniture and household articles.

Through the influence of reformers, the more brutal aspects of Adam Smith's economic model began to be moderated. Society was learning that free market mechanisms alone do not lead to a happy and just society. In addition, ethical and ecological considerations and some degree of governmental regulation are also needed.

The Reform Movement aimed at social goals, but left ecological problems untreated. Thus our economic system still does not reflect the true price to society of environmentally damaging activities. For example, the price of coal does not reflect the cost of the environmental damage done by burning it. This being so, our growth-worshiping economic system of today thunders ahead towards an environmental mega-catastrophe, as we will see in the next chapter.

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Chapter 2

THREATS TO THE ENVIRONMENT

“Some of the potential risks could be irreversible and could accelerate the process of global warming. Melting of permafrost in the Arctic could lead to the release of huge quantities of methane. Dieback of the Amazon forest could mean that the region starts to emit rather than to absorb greenhouse gases. These feedbacks could lead to warming that is at least twice as fast as current high-emission projections, leading to temperatures higher than seen in the last 50 million years. There are still uncertainties about how much warming would be needed to trigger these abrupt changes. Nevertheless, the consequences would be catastrophic if they do occur.”

Stern Report Discussion Paper, January 31, 2006.

2.1 Introduction

The worst dangers from a disastrous increase in global temperatures lie in the distant future; but to avoid them, action must be taken immediately. The huge subsidies currently given to fossil fuel companies must be abolished, or, better yet, shifted to the support of renewable energy.

In the long-term future (in several hundred years) climate change threatens to produce ocean level rises which will drown most of the world's coastal cities, and which will wipe out countries such as Bangladesh and Holland. At the same time, increases in temperature will make large parts of the Middle East, India and Africa uninhabitable.

Hope that catastrophic climate change can be avoided comes from the exponentially growing world-wide use of renewable energy and from the fact prominent public figures, such as Pope Francis, Leonardo DiCaprio, Elon Musk, Bill McKibben, Naomi Klein and Al Gore, are making the public increasingly aware of the long-term dangers. Short-term disasters due to climate change may also be sufficiently severe to wake us up.

We must work with dedication to save the future for our grandchildren and their grandchildren, a future, which we share with all other living creatures on earth. We must accept our responsibility for the long-term future of human civilization and the biosphere.

2.2 Malthus revisited

Avoiding the grim Malthusian forces

Malthus died in Bath in 1834, but debate on his ideas continued to rage, both in his own century and our own. Each year he is refuted, and each year revived. Despite impressive scientific progress since his time, the frightful Malthusian forces - poverty, famine, disease, and war - cast as dark a shadow in our own times as they did in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the enormous power of modern weapons has greatly intensified the dangers posed by war; and the rapid growth of global population has given new dimensions to the problems of poverty and famine.

Looking at the world today, we can see regions where Malthus seems to be a truer prophet than Condorcet and Godwin. In most developing countries, poverty and disease are still major problems. In other parts of the world, the optimistic prophecies of Condorcet and Godwin have been at least partially fulfilled. In the industrialized nations, Godwin's prophecy of automated agriculture has certainly come true. In the nations of the North, only a small

percentage of the population is engaged in agriculture, while most of the citizens are free to pursue other goals than food production.

Scandinavia is an example of an area where poverty and war have both been eliminated locally, and where death from infectious disease is a rarity. These achievements would have been impossible without the low birth rates which also characterize the region. In Scandinavia, and in other similar regions, low birth rates and death rates, a stable population, high educational levels, control of infectious disease, equal status for women, democratic governments, and elimination of poverty and war are linked together in a mutually re-enforcing circle of cause and effect. By contrast, in many large third-world cities, overcrowding, contaminated water, polluted air, dense population without adequate sanitation, low status of women, high birth rates, rapidly increasing population, high unemployment levels, poverty, crime, ethnic conflicts, and resurgence of infectious disease are also linked in a self-perpetuating causal loop - in this case a vicious circle.

Population stabilization and sustainability

Does the contrast between the regions of our contemporary world mean that Malthus has been “proved wrong” in some regions and “proved right” in others? To answer this question, let us re-examine the basic assertion which Malthus puts forward in Books I and II of the 1803 version of his *Essay*. His basic thesis is that the maximum natural fertility of human populations is greatly in excess of replacement fertility. This being so, Malthus points out, human populations would always increase exponentially if they were not prevented from doing so by powerful and obvious checks.

In general, Malthus tells us, populations cannot increase exponentially because the food supply increases slowly, or is constant. Therefore, he concludes, in most societies and almost all periods of history, checks to population growth are operating. These checks may be positive, or they may be preventive, the positive checks being those which raise the death rate, while the preventive checks lower the birth rate. There are, however, Malthus says, exceptional periods of history when the populations of certain societies do actually increase exponentially because of the opening of new lands or because of the introduction of new methods of food production. As an example, he cites the growth of the population of the United States, which doubled every 25 years over a period of 150 years.

We can see, from this review of Malthus’ basic thesis, that his demographic model is flexible enough to describe all of the regions of our contemporary world: If Malthus were living today, he would say that in countries with low birth and death rates and stable populations, the checks to population growth

are primarily preventive, while in countries with high death rates, the positive checks are important. Finally, Malthus would describe our rapidly-growing global population as the natural result of the introduction of improved methods of food production in the developing countries. We should notice, however, that the flexibility of Malthus' demographic model first appears in the 1803 version of his *Essay*. In the 1798 version, he maintained “..that population does invariably increase, where there are means of subsistence..” and “that the superior power (of population) cannot be checked without producing misery and vice..” This narrower model of population did not agree with Malthus' own observations in Norway in 1799, and therefore in his 1803 *Essay* he allowed more scope for preventive checks, which included late marriage and moral restraint as well as birth control (which he classified under the heading of “vice”).

Today we are able to estimate the population of the world at various periods in history, and we can also make estimates of global population in prehistoric times. Looking at the data, we can see that the global population of humans has not followed an exponential curve as a function of time, but has instead followed a hyperbolic trajectory. At the time of Christ, the population of the world is believed to have been approximately 220 million. By 1500, the earth contained 450 million people, and by 1750, the global population exceeded 700 million. As the industrial and scientific revolution has accelerated, global population has responded by increasing at a break-neck speed: In 1930, the population of the world reached two billion; in 1958 three billion; in 1974 four billion; in 1988 five billion, and in 1999, six billion. Today, roughly a billion people are being added to the world's population every fourteen years.

As the physicist Murry Gell-Mann has pointed out, a simple mathematical curve which closely approximates the global population of humans over a period of several thousand years is an hyperbola of the form

$$P = \frac{190,000,000,000}{2025 - t}$$

Here P is the population and t is the year. How are we to explain the fact that the population curve is not an exponential? We can turn to Malthus for an answer: According to his model, population does not increase exponentially, except under special circumstances, when the food supply is so ample that the increase of population is entirely unchecked. Malthus gives us a model of culturally-driven population growth. He tells us that population increase tends to press against the limits of the food supply, and since these limits are culturally determined, population density is also culturally-determined. Hunter-gatherer societies need large tracts of land for their support; and in such societies, the population density is necessarily low. Pastoral methods of food

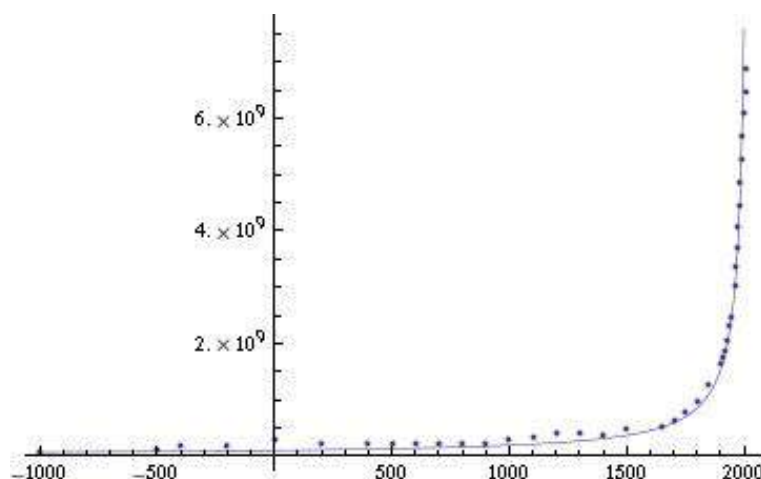


Figure 2.1: *The hyperbola $C/(2025-t)$ compared with global population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau. Here we choose $C = 190,000,000,000$. (Author's own graph)*

production can support populations of a higher density. Finally, extremely high densities of population can be supported by modern agriculture. Thus, the hyperbolic curve, $P=C/(2025-t)$, where C is a constant, should be seen as describing the rapidly-accelerating growth of human culture, this being understood to include methods of food production.

If we look at the curve, $P=C/(2025-t)$, it is obvious that human culture has reached a period of crisis. The curve predicts that the world's population will rise to infinity in the year 2025, which of course is impossible. Somehow the actual trajectory of global population as a function of time must deviate from the hyperbolic curve, and in fact, the trajectory has already begun to fall away from the hyperbola. Because of the great amount of human suffering which may be involved, and the potentially catastrophic damage to the earth's environment, the question of how the actual trajectory of human population will come to deviate from the hyperbola is a matter of enormous importance. Will population overshoot the sustainable limit, and crash? Or will it gradually approach a maximum? In the case of the second alternative, will the checks which slow population growth be later marriage and family planning? Or will the grim Malthusian forces - famine, disease and war - act to hold the number of humans within the carrying capacity of their environment?

We can anticipate that as the earth's human population approaches 10 billion, severe famines will occur in many developing countries. The beginnings of this tragedy can already be seen. It is estimated that roughly 40,000 children now die every day from starvation, or from a combination of disease and

malnutrition.

An analysis of the global ratio of population to cropland shows that we have probably already exceeded the sustainable limit of population through our dependence on petroleum: Between 1950 and 1982, the use of cheap synthetic fertilizers increased by a factor of 8. Much of our present agricultural output depends on their use, but their production is expensive in terms of energy. Furthermore, petroleum-derived synthetic fibers have reduced the amount of cropland needed for growing natural fibers, and petroleum-driven tractors have replaced draft animals which required cropland for pasturage. Also, petroleum fuels have replaced fuelwood and other fuels derived for biomass. The reverse transition, from fossil fuels back to renewable energy sources, will require a considerable diversion of land from food production to energy production. For example, 1.1 hectares are needed to grow the sugarcane required for each alcohol-driven Brazilian automobile. This figure may be compared with the steadily falling average area of cropland available to each person in the world: .24 hectares in 1950, .16 hectares in 1982.

As population increases, the cropland per person will continue to fall, and we will be forced to make still heavier use of fertilizers to increase output per hectare. Also marginal land will be used in agriculture, with the probable result that much land will be degraded through erosion and salination. Climate change will reduce agricultural output. The Hubbert peaks for oil and natural gas will occur within one or two decades, and the fossil fuel era will be over by the end of 21st century. Thus there is a danger that just as global population reaches the unprecedented level of 10 billion or more, the agricultural base for supporting it may suddenly collapse. Ecological catastrophe, possibly compounded by war and other disorders, could produce famine and death on a scale unprecedented in history - a disaster of unimaginable proportions, involving billions rather than millions of people, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The resources of the earth and the techniques of modern science can support a global population of moderate size in comfort and security; but the optimum size is undoubtedly smaller than the world's present population (see Chapter 4). Given a sufficiently small global population, renewable sources of energy can be found to replace disappearing fossil fuels. Technology may also be able to find renewable substitutes for many disappearing mineral resources for a global population of a moderate size. What technology cannot do, however, is to give a global population of 10 billion people the standard of living which the industrialized countries enjoy today.

What would Malthus tell us if he were alive today? Certainly he would say that we have reached a period of human history where it is vital to stabilize the world's population if catastrophic environmental degradation and famine

are to be avoided. He would applaud efforts to reduce suffering by eliminating poverty, widespread disease, and war; but he would point out that, since it is necessary to stop the rapid increase of human numbers, it follows that whenever the positive checks to population growth are removed, it is absolutely necessary to replace them by preventive checks. Malthus' point of view became more broad in the successive editions of his *Essay*; and if he were alive today, he would probably agree that family planning is the most humane of the preventive checks.

In Malthus' *Essay on the Principle of Population*, population pressure appears as one of the main causes of war; and Malthus also discusses many societies in which war is one of the the principle means by which population is reduced to the level of the food supply. Thus, his *Essay* contains another important message for our own times: If he were alive today, Malthus would also say that there is a close link between the two most urgent tasks which history has given to the 21st century - stabilization of the global population, and abolition of the institution of war.

In most of the societies which Malthus described, a clear causal link can be seen, not only between population pressure and poverty, but also between population pressure and war. As one reads his *Essay*, it becomes clear why both these terrible sources of human anguish saturate so much of history, and why efforts to eradicate them have so often met with failure: The only possible way to eliminate poverty and war is to reduce the pressure of population by preventive checks, since the increased food supply produced by occasional cultural advances can give only very temporary relief. Today, the links between population pressure, poverty, and war are even more pronounced than they were in the past, because the growth of human population has brought us to the absolute limits imposed by ecological constraints.

2.3 Biology and economics

Classical economists like Smith and Ricardo pictured the world as largely empty of human activities. According to the "empty-world" picture of economics, the limiting factors in the production of food and goods are shortages of capital and labor. The land, forests, fossil fuels, minerals, oceans filled with fish, and other natural resources upon which human labor and capital operate, are assumed to be present in such large quantities that they are not limiting factors. In this picture, there is no naturally-determined upper limit to the total size of the human economy. It can continue to grow as long as new capital is accumulated, as long as new labor is provided by population growth, and as long as new technology replaces labor by automation.

Biology, on the other hand, presents us with a very different picture. Biologists remind us that if any species, including our own, makes demands on its environment which exceed the environment's carrying capacity, the result is a catastrophic collapse both of the environment and of the population which it supports. Only demands which are within the carrying capacity are sustainable. For example, there is a limit to regenerative powers of a forest. It is possible to continue to cut trees in excess of this limit, but only at the cost of a loss of forest size, and ultimately the collapse and degradation of the forest. Similarly, cattle populations may for some time exceed the carrying capacity of grasslands, but the ultimate penalty for overgrazing will be degradation or desertification of the land. Thus, in biology, the concept of the carrying capacity of an environment is extremely important; but in economic theory this concept has not yet been given the weight that it deserves.

The terminology of economics can be applied to natural resources: For example, a forest can be thought of as natural capital, and the sustainable yield from the forest as interest. Exceeding the biological carrying capacity then corresponds, in economic terms, to spending one's capital.

If it is to be prevented from producing unacceptable contrasts of affluence and misery within a society, the free market advocated by Adam Smith needs the additional restraints of ethical principles, as well as a certain amount of governmental regulation. Furthermore, in the absence of these restraints, it will destroy the natural environment of our planet.

There is much evidence to indicate that the total size of the human economy is rapidly approaching the absolute limits imposed by the carrying capacity of the global environment. For example, a recent study by Vitousek et. al. showed that 40 percent of the net primary product of landbased photosynthesis is appropriated, directly or indirectly, for human use. (The net primary product of photosynthesis is defined as the total quantity of solar energy converted into chemical energy by plants, minus the energy used by the plants themselves). Thus we are only a single doubling time away from 80 percent appropriation, which would imply a disastrous environmental degradation.

Another indication of our rapid approach to the absolute limits of environmental carrying capacity can be found in the present rate of loss of biodiversity. Biologists estimate that between 10,000 and 50,000 species are being driven into extinction each year as the earth's rainforests are destroyed.

The burning of fossil fuels and the burning of tropical rain forests have released so much carbon dioxide that the atmospheric concentration of this greenhouse gas has increased from a preindustrial value of 260 ppm to its present value: 380 ppm. Most scientists agree that unless steps are taken to halt the burning of rain forests and to reduce the use of fossil fuels, the earth's temperature will steadily rise during the coming centuries. This gradual long-term

climate change will threaten future agricultural output by changing patterns of rainfall. Furthermore, the total melting of the Arctic and Antarctic icecaps, combined with the thermal expansion of the oceans, threatens to produce a sea level rise of up to 12 meters. Although these are slow, long-term effects, we owe it to future generations to take steps now to halt global warming.

The switch from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources is vital not only because of the need to reduce global warming, but also because the earth's supply of fossil fuels is limited. A peak in the production and consumption of conventional petroleum is predicted within one or two decades. Such a peak in the use of any non-renewable natural resource is called a "Hubbert peak" after the oil expert Dr. M. King Hubbert. It occurs when reserves of the resource are approximately half exhausted. After that point, the resource does not disappear entirely, but its price increases steadily because supply fails to meet demand, and because of rising extraction costs. It is predicted that the Hubbert peak for both oil and natural gas will also occur within a few decades. The peak for oil may occur within the present decade. Thus, halfway through the 21st Century, oil and natural gas will become very expensive - perhaps so expensive that they will not be burned but will instead be reserved as starting points for chemical synthesis.

The reserves of coal are much larger, and at the present rate of use they would last for slightly more than two centuries. However, it seems likely that as petroleum is exhausted, coal will be converted into liquid fuels, as was done in Germany during World War II, and in South Africa during the oil embargo. Thus, in predicting a date for the end of the fossil fuel era, we ought to lump oil, natural gas and coal together. If we do so, we find the total supply has an energy content of 1260 terawatt-years. (1 terawatt is equal to 1,000,000,000,000 Watts). One finds in this way that if they are used at the present rate of 13 terawatts, fossil fuels will last about 100 years.

Resolute government intervention is needed to promote energy conservation measures and to bring about the switch from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, such as biomass, photovoltaics, solar thermal power, wind and wave power, and hydropower. Both subsidies for renewable energy technologies, to help them get started, and taxes on fossil fuels will be needed. Changes in tax structure could also encourage smaller families, encourage resource conservation, or diminish pollution. In general, taxation should be used, not merely to raise money, but, more importantly, to guide the evolution of society towards humane and sustainable goals.

2.4 Fossil fuel use and climate change

Melting of the polar ice caps

At present the amount of carbon in the atmosphere is increasing by about 6 gigatons per year because of human activities; and projections estimate that the CO_2 concentration will reach about 600 ppm by 2050 (more than double the preindustrial concentration). In addition to CO_2 , methane, CH_4 , and nitrous oxide, NO_2 , are also released into the atmosphere by human activities. Anthropogenic methane comes from the production and transportation of coal, natural gas and oil, decomposition of organic wastes in municipal landfills, cultivation of rice paddies, and the raising of livestock.

The greenhouse gasses (which include water vapor, carbon dioxide, methane, ozone, nitrous oxide, sulfur hexafluoride, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and many other gasses) absorb a part of the infrared radiation from the earth's surface, which otherwise would have been sent directly into outer space. Part of this energy is re-radiated into space, but a part is sent downward to the earth, where it is absorbed. The result is that the earth's surface is much warmer than it otherwise would be. The mechanism is much the same as that of a greenhouse, where the glass absorbs and re-radiates infrared radiation. A moderate greenhouse effect on earth is helpful to life, but climatologists believe that anthropogenic CO_2 and CH_4 emissions may produce a dangerous amount of global warming during the next few centuries.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change the percentages of greenhouse gas emissions contributed by various human activities are as follows:

Energy use	{	Transportation	13.5%
		Electricity and heat	24.6%
		Other fuel combustion	9.0%
		Industry	10.4%
		Fugitive emissions	3.9%

Other sources	{	Industrial processes	3.4%
		Land use change (deforestation)	18.2%
		Agriculture	13.5%
		Waste	3.6%

In thinking about global warming, it is important to remember that it is a very slow and long-term phenomenon. Stephen H. Schneider and Janica Lane of Stanford University, in an article entitled *An Overview of 'Dangerous' Climate Change* include a figure that emphasizes the long-term nature of global warming. The figure presupposes that CO_2 emissions will peak within 50 years and will thereafter be reduced. According to the figure, it will still take more than a century for the level of CO_2 in the atmosphere to stabilize. The establishment of temperature equilibrium will require several centuries. Sea level rises due to thermal expansion of ocean water will not be complete before the end of the millennium, while sea level rises due to melting of the polar icecaps might not be complete for several millennia!

It is worrying to think that total melting of the Greenland ice cap, which some authors think might begin in earnest during the 22nd century, would result in a sea level rise of up to 7 meters. Of course, society would have some time to adjust to this event. But a glance at maps and elevations makes one realize the extent of such a catastrophe and the importance of preventing it.

The IPCC and Stern reports

Models put forward by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2007 Report) suggest that if no steps are taken to reduce carbon emissions, a temperature increase of 1.4-5.6 degrees C will occur by 2100¹. Global warming may have some desirable effects, such as increased possibilities for agriculture in Canada, Sweden and Siberia. However, most of the expected effects of global warming will be damaging. These unwanted effects include ocean level rises, extreme weather conditions (such as heat waves, hurricanes and tropical cyclones), changes in the patterns of ocean currents, melting of polar ice and glaciers, abnormal spread of diseases, extinctions of plant and animal species, together with aridity and crop failures in some areas of the world which are now able to produce and export large quantities of grain.

¹relative to 1990 temperatures.

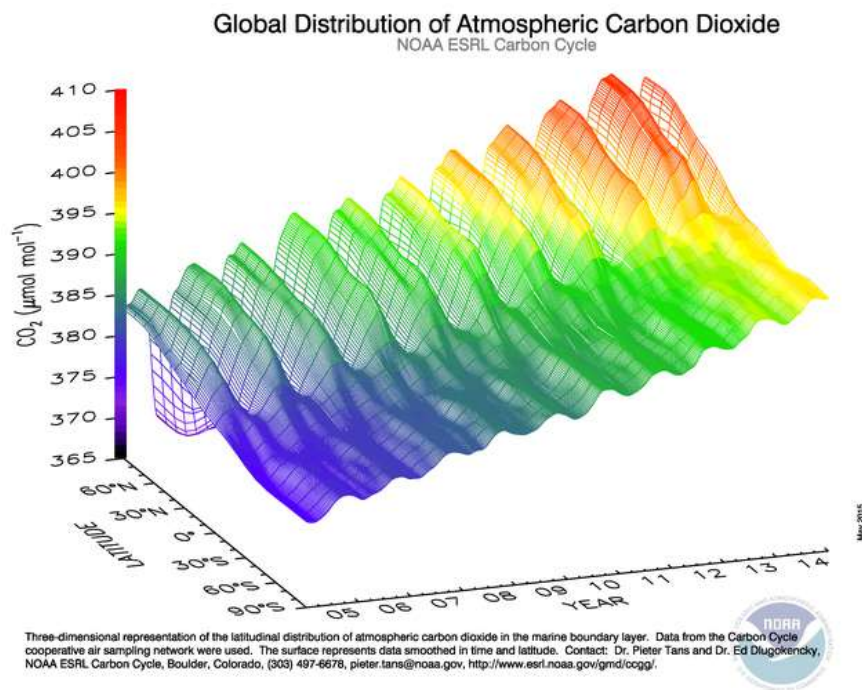


Figure 2.2: *Carbon Dioxide observations from 2005 to 2014 showing the seasonal variations and the difference between northern and southern hemispheres.* (Public domain)

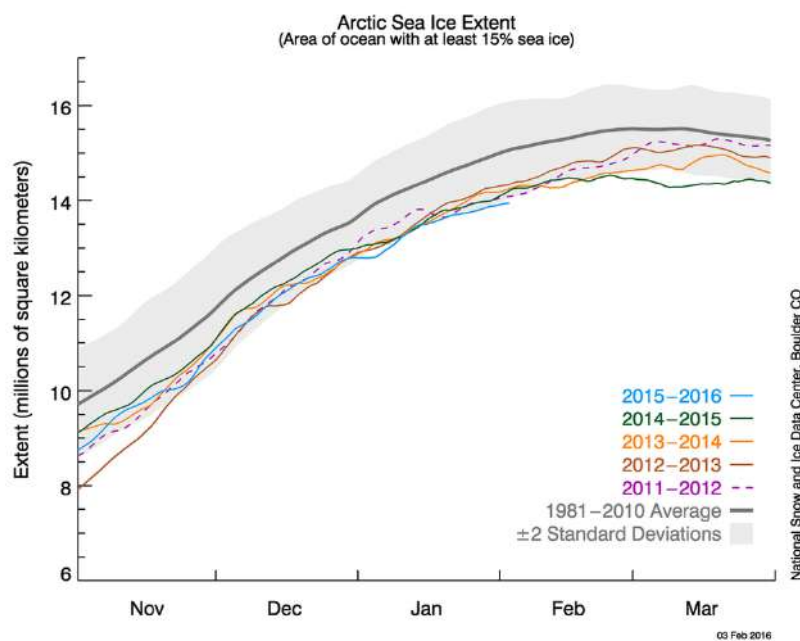


Figure 2.3: *Arctic sea ice extent as of February 3, 2016. January Arctic sea ice extent was the lowest in the satellite record. credit: NSIDC. The rapid nonlinear loss of Arctic sea ice has surprised IPCC scientists. (Public domain)*



Figure 2.4: *The collapsing Larsen-B iceshelf in the Antarctic is similar in size to the US state of Rhode Island.* (Wikipedia)

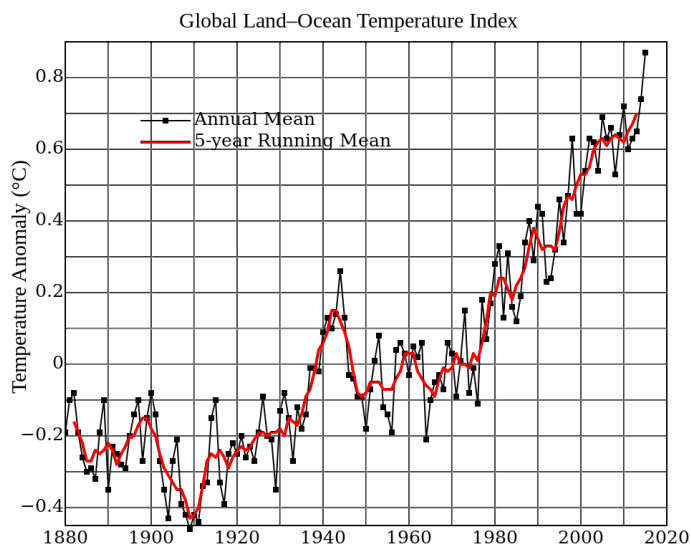


Figure 2.5: *Line plot of global mean land-ocean surface temperature index, 1880 to present, with the base period 1951-1980. The black line is the annual mean and the red line is the five-year running mean. 2016 is predicted to be the hottest year ever recorded, 1.3 °C above the 19th century baseline.* (Public domain)

According to a report presented to the Oxford Institute of Economic Policy by Sir Nicholas Stern on 31 January, 2006, areas likely to lose up to 30% of their rainfall by the 2050's because of climate change include much of the United States, Brazil, the Mediterranean region, Eastern Russia and Belarus, the Middle East, Southern Africa and Southern Australia. Meanwhile rainfall is predicted to increase up to 30% in Central Africa, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Siberia, and much of China.

Stern and his team point out that "We can... expect to see changes in the Indian monsoon, which could have a huge impact on the lives of hundreds of millions of people in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Most climate models suggest that the monsoon will change, although there is still uncertainty about exactly how. Nevertheless, small changes in the monsoon could have a huge impact. Today, a fluctuation of just 10% in either direction from average monsoon rainfall is known to cause either severe flooding or drought. A weak summer monsoon, for example, can lead to poor harvests and food shortages among the rural population - two-thirds of India's almost 1.1 billion people. Heavier-than-usual monsoon downpours can also have devastating consequences..."

In some regions, melting of glaciers can be serious from the standpoint of dry-season water supplies. For example, melts from glaciers in the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas now supply much of Asia, including China and India, with a dry-season water supply. Complete melting of these glacial systems would cause an exaggerated runoff for a few decades, after which there would be a drying out of some of the most densely populated regions of the world.

The threat of feed-back loops

The Discussion Paper presented by Stern on January 31, 2006, also notes that "Some of the potential risks could be irreversible and accelerate the process of global warming. Melting of permafrost in the Arctic could lead to the release of huge quantities of methane. Dieback of the Amazon forest could mean that the region starts to emit rather than absorb greenhouse gases. These feedbacks could lead to warming that is at least twice as fast as current high-emissions projections, leading to temperatures higher than seen in the past 50 million years. There are still uncertainties about how much warming would be needed to trigger these abrupt changes. Nevertheless, the consequences would be catastrophic if they do occur."

The much larger (700 page) Stern Report was made public on October 30, 2006. It explores not only the scientific basis for predictions of global warming but also the possible economic consequences. Unless we act promptly to prevent it, the Stern Report states, global warming could render swaths of

the planet uninhabitable, and do economic damage equal to that inflicted by the two world wars.

A large United Nations Climate Conference (COP15) took place in Copenhagen from December 7 to December 18, 2009. In order to make the latest results of researchers available to the 15,000 expected participants, a preliminary meeting of scientists was held at the University of Copenhagen in March, 2009. 2,500 delegates from 80 countries attended the meeting. Among the conclusions of this international congress of scientists were the following:

- **Climatic trends:** “Recent observations confirm that, given the high rates of observed emissions, the worst-case IPCC scenario trajectories (or even worse) are being realized. For many key parameters, the climate system is already moving beyond the patterns of natural variability within which our society and economy developed and thrived. These parameters include global mean surface temperature, sea-level rise, ocean and ice sheet dynamics, ocean acidification and extreme climate events. There is a significant risk that many of the trends will accelerate, leading to an increasing risk of abrupt or irreversible climatic shifts.”
- **Social disruption:** “Recent observations show that societies are highly vulnerable to even modest levels of climate change, with poor nations and communities particularly at risk. Temperature rises above 2° C will be very difficult for contemporary societies to cope with, and will increase the level of climate disruption through the rest of the century.”

To avoid temperature increases of more than 2° C, the scientists said that it will be necessary for the world to reduce its CO₂ emissions by 90% by 2050. In other words if dangerous climate change is to be avoided, the fossil fuel era must essentially end by that date.

Despite these clear and unanimous warnings from the scientific community, the United Nations climate conference in Copenhagen failed to reach an agreement sufficiently strong to avoid dangerous climate change. The problem encountered by the conference was a deep disagreement between developed and developing countries. The developing countries correctly maintained that historically, they have not been to blame for emission of greenhouse gases. Meanwhile, the industrialized countries pointed to the future, saying (also correctly) that unless the developing countries accepted their future responsibilities, there would be no hope of avoiding disaster.

At the last moment, the United States, China, India, Brazil and South Africa hammered out a weak agreement, the *Copenhagen Accord*, which the other nations at the conference agreed to “take note of”. The Copenhagen Accord recognizes the aim of limiting global warming to 2° C. However, it

does not provide mechanisms sufficiently strong to reach that goal. Another UN climate conference will be held in Mexico in November, 2010, and it is to be hoped that during the intervening months, negotiators will be able to build on the very modest results of COP15 and put together an adequate and legally binding treaty.

Geological extinction events and runaway climate change

The melting of Arctic sea ice is taking place far more rapidly than was predicted by IPCC reports. David Wasdell, Director of the Apollo-Gaia Project, points out that the observed melting has been so rapid that within less than five years, the Arctic will be free of sea ice at the end of each summer. It will, of course continue to re-freeze during the winters, but the thickness and extent of the winter ice will diminish.

It has also been observed that both the Greenland ice cap and the Antarctic ice shelves are melting much more rapidly than was predicted by the IPCC. Complete melting of both the Greenland ice cap and the Antarctic sea ice would raise ocean levels by 14 meters. It is hard to predict how fast this will take place, but certainly within 1-3 centuries.

Most worrying, however, is the threat that without an all-out effort by both developed and developing nations to immediately curb the release of greenhouse gases, climate change will reach a tipping point where feed-back loops will have taken over, and where it will then be beyond the power of human action to prevent exponentially accelerating warming.

By far the most dangerous of these feedback loops involves methane hydrates or clathrates. When organic matter is carried into the oceans by rivers, it decays to form methane. The methane then combines with water to form hydrate crystals, which are stable at the temperatures and pressures which currently exist on ocean floors. However, if the temperature rises, the crystals become unstable, and methane gas bubbles up to the surface. Methane is a greenhouse gas which is 70 times as potent as CO₂.

The worrying thing about the methane hydrate deposits on ocean floors is the enormous amount of carbon involved: roughly 10,000 gigatons. To put this huge amount into perspective, we can remember that the total amount of carbon in world CO₂ emissions since 1751 has only been 337 gigatons.

A runaway, exponentially increasing, feedback loop involving methane hydrates could lead to one of the great geological extinction events that have periodically wiped out most of the animals and plants then living. This must be avoided at all costs.²

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVwmi7HCmSI>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjZaFjXfLec>

The worst consequences of runaway climate change will not occur within our own lifetimes. However, we have a duty to all future human generations, and to the plants and animals with which we share our existence, to give them a future world in which they can survive.

Preventing a human-initiated 6th geological extinction event

Geologists studying the strata of rocks have observed 5 major extinction events. These are moments in geological time when most of the organisms then living suddenly became extinct. The largest of these was the Permian-Triassic extinction event, which occurred 252 million years ago. In this event, 96 percent of all marine species were wiped out, as well as 70 percent of all terrestrial vertebrates.

In 2012, the World Bank issued a report warning that without quick action to curb CO₂ emissions, global warming is likely to reach 4 degrees C during the 21st century. This is dangerously close to the temperature which initiated the Permian-Triassic extinction event: 6 degrees C above normal.³

The Permian-Triassic thermal maximum seems to have been triggered by global warming and CO₂ release from massive volcanic eruptions in a region of northern Russia known as the Siberian Traps. The amount of greenhouse gases produced by these eruptions is comparable to the amount emitted by human activities today.

Scientists believe that once the temperature passed 6 degrees C above normal, a feedback loop was initiated in which methane hydrate crystals on the ocean floors melted, releasing methane, a potent greenhouse gas. The more methane released the more methane hydrate crystals were destabilized, raising the temperature still further, releasing more methane gas, and so on in a vicious circle. This feedback loop raised the global temperature to 15 degrees C above normal, causing the Permian-Triassic mass extinction.⁴

No reputable doctor who diagnoses cancer would keep this knowledge from the patient. The reaction of the patient may be to reject the diagnosis and get another doctor, but no matter. It is very important that the threatened person should hear the diagnosis, because, with treatment, there is hope of a

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6pFDu7ILV4>

³ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2012/11/18/Climate-change-report-warns-dramatically-warmer-world-this-century>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRGVTK-AAvw>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVwmi7HCmSI>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjZaFjXfLec>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6pFDu7ILV4>

cure.

Similarly, the scientific community, when aware of a grave danger to our species and the biosphere, has a duty to bring this knowledge to the attention of as broad a public as possible, even at the risk of unpopularity. The size of the threatened catastrophe is so immense as to dwarf all other considerations. All possible efforts must be made to avoid it.

Consider what may be lost if a 6th mass extinction event occurs, caused by our own actions: It is possible that a few humans may survive in mountainous regions such as the Himalayas, but this will be a population of millions rather than billions. If an event comparable to the Permian-Triassic thermal maximum occurs, the family trees of virtually all of the people, animals and plants alive today will end in nothing.

The great and complex edifice of human civilization is a treasure whose value is almost above expression; and this may be lost unless we give up many of our present enjoyments. Each living organism, each animal or plant, is product of three billion years of evolution, and a miracle of harmony and complexity; and most of these will perish if we persist in our folly and greed.

Let us, for once, look beyond present pleasures, and acknowledge our duty to preserve a future world in which all forms of life can survive.

2.5 Loss of biodiversity

Agricultural monocultures

In modern agriculture it has become common to plant large regions with a single crop variety. For example, it is common to plant large regions with a single high-yield wheat variety. Monocultures of this kind offer farmers advantages of efficiency in the timing of planting and harvesting. With regard to pest and disease control, there may be short-term advantages, but these have to be weighed against the threat of long-term disasters. In the great Irish Potato Famine of 1845-1849, the potato monoculture which had sustained Ireland's growing population was suddenly devastated by *Phytophthora infestans*, commonly called "potato blight". The result was a catastrophic famine that resulted in the death or emigration of much of Ireland's population.

In general, monocultures are vulnerable to plant disease. Thus the replacement of traditional varieties with the high-yield crops developed by the "Green Revolution" carries serious risks. Adjustment to climate change also requires genetic diversity. In general, a genetically diverse population is far better to adjust to environmental changes than a genetically homogeneous population. This being so, it is vital to preserve civilization's heritage of genetically diverse crops.

Deforestation and loss of biodiversity

The earth's tropical rain forests are rapidly being destroyed for the sake of new agricultural land. Tropical rain forests are thought to be the habitat of more than half of the world's species of plants, animals and insects; and their destruction is accompanied by an alarming rate of extinction of species. The Harvard biologist, E.O. Wilson, estimates that the rate of extinction resulting from deforestation in the tropics may now exceed 4,000 species per year - 10,000 times the natural background rate (*Scientific American*, September, 1989).

The enormous biological diversity of tropical rain forests has resulted from their stability. Unlike northern forests, which have been affected by glacial epochs, tropical forests have existed undisturbed for millions of years. As a result, complex and fragile ecological systems have had a chance to develop. Professor Wilson expresses this in the following words:

“Fragile superstructures of species build up when the environment remains stable enough to support their evolution during long periods of time. Biologists now know that biotas, like houses of cards, can be brought tumbling down by relatively small perturbations in the physical environment. They are not robust at all.”

The number of species which we have until now domesticated or used in medicine is very small compared with the number of potentially useful species still waiting in the world's tropical rain forests. When we destroy them, we damage our future. But we ought to regard the annual loss of thousands of species as a tragedy, not only because biological diversity is potential wealth for human society, but also because every form of life deserves our respect and protection.

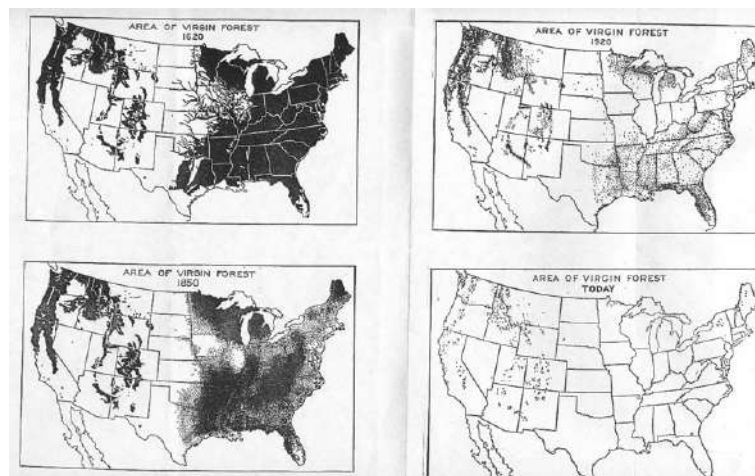


Figure 2.6: *Deforestation in the United States between 1620 and the present.* (From William B. Greeley's *The Relation of Geography to Timber Supply*)



Figure 2.7: *This satellite photograph illustrates slash-and-burn forest clearing along the Rio Xingu (Xingu River) in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil.* (Public domain)

2.6 Economics without growth

According to Adam Smith, the free market is the dynamo of economic growth. The true entrepreneur does not indulge in luxuries for himself and his family, but reinvests his profits, with the result that his business or factory grows larger, producing still more profits, which he again reinvests, and so on. This is indeed the formula for exponential economic growth.

Economists (with a few notable exceptions such as Aurelio Peccei and Herman Daly) have long behaved as though growth were synonymous with economic health. If the gross national product of a country increases steadily by 4% per year, most economists express approval and say that the economy is healthy. If the economy could be made to grow still faster (they maintain), it would be still more healthy. If the growth rate should fall, economic illness would be diagnosed. However, the basic idea of Malthus is applicable to exponential increase of any kind. It is obvious that on a finite Earth, neither population growth nor resource-using and pollution-generating economic growth can continue indefinitely.

A “healthy” economic growth rate of 4% per year corresponds to an increase by a factor of 50 in a century. (The reader is invited to calculate the factor of increase in five centuries. The answer is $50^5 = 312,500,000$.) No one can maintain that this type of growth is sustainable except by refusing to look more than a short distance into the future. Sooner or later (perhaps surprisingly soon) an entirely new form of economics will be needed - not the empty-world economics of Adam Smith, but what might be called “full-world economics”, or “steady-state economics”.

Economic activity is usually divided into two categories, 1) production of goods and 2) provision of services. It is the rate of production of goods that will be limited by the carrying capacity of the global environment. Services that have no environmental impact will not be constrained in this way. Thus a smooth transition to a sustainable economy will involve a shift of a large fraction the work force from the production of goods to the provision of services.

In his recent popular book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, the economist Richard Florida points out that in a number of prosperous cities - for example Stockholm - a large fraction of the population is already engaged in what might be called creative work - a type of work that uses few resources, and produces few waste products - work which develops knowledge and culture rather than producing material goods. For example, producing computer software requires few resources and results in few waste products. Thus it is an activity with a very small ecological footprint. Similarly, education, research, music, literature and art are all activities that do not weigh heavily on the carrying capacity of the global environment. Furthermore, cultural activities lead in a natural

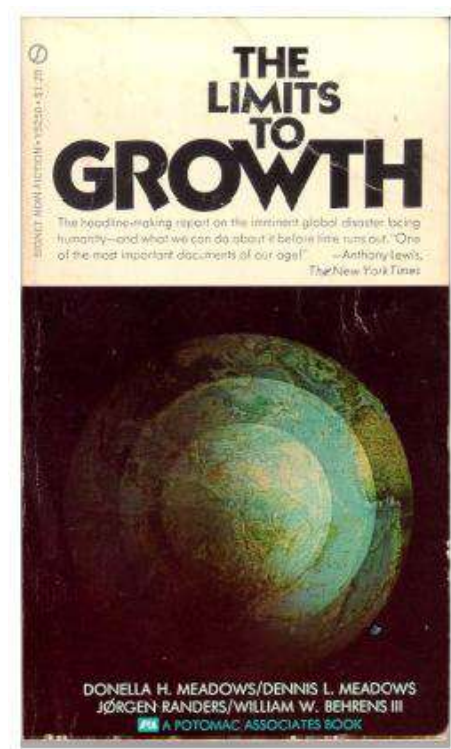


Figure 2.8: In 1968 Aurelio Pecci, Thorkil Kristensen and others founded the Club of Rome, an organization of economists and scientists devoted to studying the predicament of human society. One of the first acts of the organization was to commission an MIT study of future trends using computer models. The result was a book entitled “Limits to Growth”, published in 1972. From the outset the book was controversial, but it became a best-seller. (Great Change)

way to global cooperation and internationalism. Florida sees this as a pattern for the future, and maintains that everyone is capable of creativity. He visualizes the transition to a sustainable future economy as one in which a large fraction of the work force moves from industrial jobs to information-related work. Meanwhile, as Florida acknowledges, industrial workers feel uneasy and threatened by such trends.

The present use of resources by the industrialized countries is extremely wasteful. A growing national economy must, at some point, exceed the real needs of the citizens. It has been the habit of the developed countries to create artificial needs by means of advertising, in order to allow economies to grow beyond the point where all real needs have been met; but this extra growth is wasteful, and in the future it will be important not to waste the earth's diminishing supply of non-renewable resources.

Thus, the times in which we live present a challenge: We need a revolution in economic thought. We must develop a new form of economics, taking into account the realities of the world's present situation - an economics based on real needs and on a sustainable equilibrium with the environment, not on the thoughtless assumption that growth can continue forever.

Adam Smith was perfectly correct in saying that the free market is the dynamo of economic growth; but rapid growth of human population and economic activity have brought us, in a surprisingly short time, from the empty-world situation in which he lived to a full-world situation. In today's world, we are pressing against the absolute limits of the earth's carrying capacity, and further growth carries with it the danger of future collapse. Full-world economics, the economics of the future, will no longer be able to rely on growth to give profits to stockbrokers or to solve problems of unemployment or to alleviate poverty. In the long run, growth of any kind is not sustainable (except perhaps growth of culture and knowledge); and we are now nearing the environmentally-imposed limits.

Transition to a sustainable economy

Like a speeding bus headed for a brick wall, the earth's rapidly-growing population of humans and its rapidly-growing resource-using and pollution-generating economic activity are headed for a collision with a very solid barrier - the carrying capacity of the global environment. As in the case of the bus and the wall, the correct response to the situation is to apply the brakes in time - but fear prevents us from doing this. What will happen if we slow down very suddenly? Will not many of the passengers be injured? Undoubtedly. But what will happen if we hit the wall at full speed? Perhaps it would be wise, after all, to apply the brakes!

The memory of the great depression of 1929 makes us fear the consequences of an economic slowdown, especially since unemployment is already a serious problem in many parts of the world. Although the history of the 1929 depression is frightening, it may nevertheless be useful to look at the measures which were used then to bring the global economy back to its feet. A similar level of governmental responsibility may help us to avoid some of the more painful consequences of the necessary transition from the economics of growth to steady-state economics.

In the United States, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was faced with the difficult problems of the depression during his first few years in office. Roosevelt introduced a number of special governmental programs, such as the WPA, the Civilian Construction Corps and the Tennessee Valley Authority, which were designed to create new jobs on projects directed towards socially useful goals - building highways, airfields, auditoriums, harbors, housing projects, schools and dams. The English economist John Maynard Keynes, (1883-1946), provided an analysis of the factors that had caused the 1929 depression, and a theoretical justification of Roosevelt's policies.

The transition to a sustainable global society will require a similar level of governmental responsibility, although the measures needed are not the same as those which Roosevelt used to end the great depression. Despite the burst of faith in the free market which has followed the end of the Cold War, it seems unlikely that market mechanisms alone will be sufficient to solve problems of unemployment in the long-range future, or to achieve conservation of land, natural resources and environment.

The Worldwatch Institute, Washington D.C., lists the following steps as necessary for the transition to sustainability⁵:

1. Stabilizing population
2. Shifting to renewable energy
3. Increasing energy efficiency
4. Recycling resources
5. Reforestation
6. Soil Conservation

All of these steps are labor-intensive; and thus, wholehearted governmental commitment to the transition to sustainability can help to solve the problem of unemployment.

⁵L.R. Brown and P. Shaw, 1982.



Figure 2.9: *Lester R. Brown, founder of the Worldwatch Institute, and for many years its President. He is now the leader of the Earth Policy Institute. His recent book, “Plan B”, gives important information about the ecological crisis now facing the world. It may be downloaded free of charge from the website of the Earth Policy Institute. (Famous Birthdays)*

In much the same spirit that Roosevelt (with Keynes' approval) used governmental powers to end the great depression, we must now urge our governments to use their powers to promote sustainability and to reduce the trauma of the transition to a steady-state economy. For example, an increase in the taxes on fossil fuels could make a number of renewable energy technologies economically competitive; and higher taxes on motor fuels would be especially useful in promoting the necessary transition from private automobiles to bicycles and public transportation. Tax changes could also be helpful in motivating smaller families.

The present economic recession offers us an opportunity to take steps towards the creation of a sustainable steady-state economic system. Government measures to avoid unemployment could at the same time shift the work force to jobs that promote sustainability, i.e., jobs in the areas listed by the World-watch Institute.

Governments already recognize their responsibility for education. In the future, they must also recognize their responsibility for helping young people to make a smooth transition from education to secure jobs. If jobs are scarce, work must be shared, in a spirit of solidarity, among those seeking employment; hours of work (and if necessary, living standards) must be reduced to insure a fair distribution of jobs. Market forces alone cannot achieve this. The powers of government are needed.

Population and goods per capita

In the distant future, the finite carrying capacity of the global environment will impose limits on the amount of resource-using and waste-generating economic activity that it will be possible for the world to sustain. The consumption of goods per capita will be equal to this limited total economic activity divided by the number of people alive at that time. Thus, our descendants will have to choose whether they want to be very numerous and very poor, or less numerous and more comfortable, or very few and very rich. Perhaps the middle way will prove to be the best.

Given the fact that environmental carrying capacity will limit the sustainable level of resource-using economic activity to a fixed amount, average wealth in the distant future will be approximately inversely proportional to population over a certain range of population values. Obviously, if the number of people is reduced to such an extent that it approaches zero, the average wealth will not approach infinity, since a certain level of population is needed to maintain a modern economy. However, if the global population becomes extremely large, the average wealth will indeed approach zero.

In the 1970's the equation $I = P \times A \times T$ was introduced in the course

of a debate between Barry Commoner, Paul R. Ehrlich and John P. Holdren. Here I represents environmental impact, P is population, while A represents goods per capita, and T is an adjustable factor that depends on the technology used to produce the goods. The assertion of the previous paragraph can be expressed by solving for A and setting I equal to a constant: $A = I/(P \times T)$. In the distant future, the environmental impact I will not be allowed to increase, and therefore for a given value of T , A will be inversely proportional to P .

If the environmental impact I is broken up into several components, a few of them have historically fallen with increasing values of $A \times P$ because of diminishing T (thus exhibiting the *environmental Kuznets curve*). However, most components of I , such as energy, land and resource use, have historically increased with increasing $A \times P$.

Paris, India and coal

The MIT Technology Review recently published an important article entitled “India’s Energy Crisis”.⁶

The article makes alarming reading in view of the world’s urgent need to make a very rapid transition from fossil fuels to 100% renewable energy. We must make this change quickly in order to avoid a tipping point beyond which catastrophic climate change will be unavoidable.⁷

The MIT article states that “Since he took power in May, 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made universal access to electricity a key part of his administration’s ambitions. At the same time, he has pledged to help lead international efforts to limit climate change. Among other plans, he has promised to increase India’s total power generating capacity to 175 gigawatts, including 100 gigawatts of solar, by 2022. (That’s about the total power generation of Germany.)”

However India plans to expand its industrial economy, and to do this, it is planning to very much increase its domestic production and use of coal. The MIT article continues, pointing out that

“Such growth would easily swamp efforts elsewhere in the world to curtail carbon emissions, dooming any chance to head off the dire effects of global climate change. (Overall, the world will need to reduce its current annual emissions of 40 billion tons by 40 to 70 percent between now and 2050.) By 2050, India will have roughly 20 percent of the world’s population. If those

⁶ <http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/542091/indias-energy-crisis/>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bRrg96UtMc>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVwmi7HCmSI>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjZaFjXfLec>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVwmi7HCmSI>



Figure 2.10: *A logo for Coal India Limited. Although the government of India supports renewable energy, the country's use of coal is also increasing rapidly.*(Wikipedia)

people rely heavily on fossil fuels such as coal to expand the economy and raise their living standards to the level people in the rich world have enjoyed for the last 50 years, the result will be a climate catastrophe regardless of anything the United States or even China does to decrease its emissions. Reversing these trends will require radical transformations in two main areas: how India produces electricity, and how it distributes it.”

The Indian Minister of Power, Piyush Goyal, is an enthusiastic supporter of renewable energy expansion, but he also supports, with equal enthusiasm, the large-scale expansion of domestic coal production in India.

Meanwhile, the consequences of global warming are being felt by the people of India. For example, last May, a heat wave killed over 1,400 people and

melted asphalt streets.⁸

Have India's economic planners really thought about the long-term future? Have they considered the fact that drastic climate change could make India completely uninhabitable?

Jacob von Uexküll's speech to the World Future Council

In a recent speech to the World Future Council, the distinguished writer, philanthropist, activist and former politician Jacob von Uexküll outlined the future dangers facing our world with an accuracy and eloquence that has seldom been equaled. Here is a link to his speech:⁹

Jakob von Uexküll belongs to a brilliant family. His grandfather was a famous Baltic-German physiologist who founded the discipline of Biosemiotics. Besides being a former Member of the European Parliament and a leader of the German Green Party, von Uexküll himself founded both the Right Livelihood Award (sometimes called the Alternative Nobel Prize) and also the World Future Council.¹⁰

Here are a few excerpts from his speech:

"Today we are heading for unprecedented dangers and conflicts, up to and including the end of a habitable planet in the foreseeable future, depriving all future generations of their right to life and the lives of preceding generations of meaning and purpose."

"This apocalyptic reality is the elephant in the room. Current policies threaten temperature increases triggering permafrost melting and the release of ocean methane hydrates which would make our earth unliveable, according to research presented by the British Government Met office at the Paris Climate Conference."

"The myth that climate change is conspiracy to reduce freedom is spread by a powerful and greedy elite which has largely captured governments to preserve their privileges in an increasingly unequal world. Long before that point, our prosperity, security, culture and identity will disintegrate. A Europe unable to cope with a few million war refugees will collapse under the weight of tens or even hundreds of millions of climate refugees."

⁸ <https://www.rt.com/news/262641-india-heat-wave-killed/>

⁹ <http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/2016/03/15/world-future-forum-2016-opening-speech-jakob-von-uexkull/>

¹⁰ <http://www.rightlivelihood.org/>
<http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/>
<http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/gpact/>

Paris and the long-term future

We give our children loving care, but it makes no sense to do so and at the same time to neglect to do all that is within our power to ensure that they and their descendants will inherit an earth in which they can survive. We also have a responsibility to all the other living organisms with which we share the gift of life.

Human emotional nature is such that we respond urgently to immediate temptations or dangers, while long-term considerations are pushed into the background. Thus the temptations of immediate profit or advantage motivate politicians and the executives of fossil fuel corporations; and the temptations of continued overconsumption and luxury blind the general public. Public fears of terrorism have been magnified by our perfidious mass media to such an extent that the equally perfidious French Government has been able to use this fear as an excuse to exclude democracy and proper care for the long-term future from the Paris Climate Conference.

However, our generation has an urgent duty to think of the distant future. The ultimate fate of human civilization and the biosphere is in our hands. What we really have to fear, for the sake of our children and grandchildren and their descendants, is reaching a tipping point, beyond which uncontrollable feedback loops will make catastrophic climate change inevitable despite all human efforts to prevent it.

A feedback loop is a self-reinforcing cycle. The more it goes on, the stronger it becomes. An example of how such a feedback loop could drive climate change and make it uncontrollable is the albedo effect: When sunlight falls on sea ice in the Arctic or Antarctic, most of it is reflected by the white surface of the snow-covered ice. But when sunlight falls on dark sea water, it is almost totally absorbed. This cycle is self-reinforcing because warming the water reduces the ice cover. This is happening today, especially in the Arctic, and we have to stop it.

Another dangerous feedback loop involves the evaporation of sea water, which itself is a greenhouse gas. However, if we think of the long-term future, by far the most dangerous feedback loop is that which involves the melting of methane hydrate crystals, releasing the extremely powerful greenhouse gas methane into the atmosphere. Discussion of this highly dangerous feedback loop seems to be almost completely banned by our mass media.

When organic matter is carried into the oceans by rivers, it decays to form methane. The methane then combines with water to form hydrate crystals, which are stable at the temperatures and pressures which currently exist on ocean floors. However, if the temperature rises, the crystals become unstable, and methane gas bubbles up to the surface. Methane is a greenhouse gas which

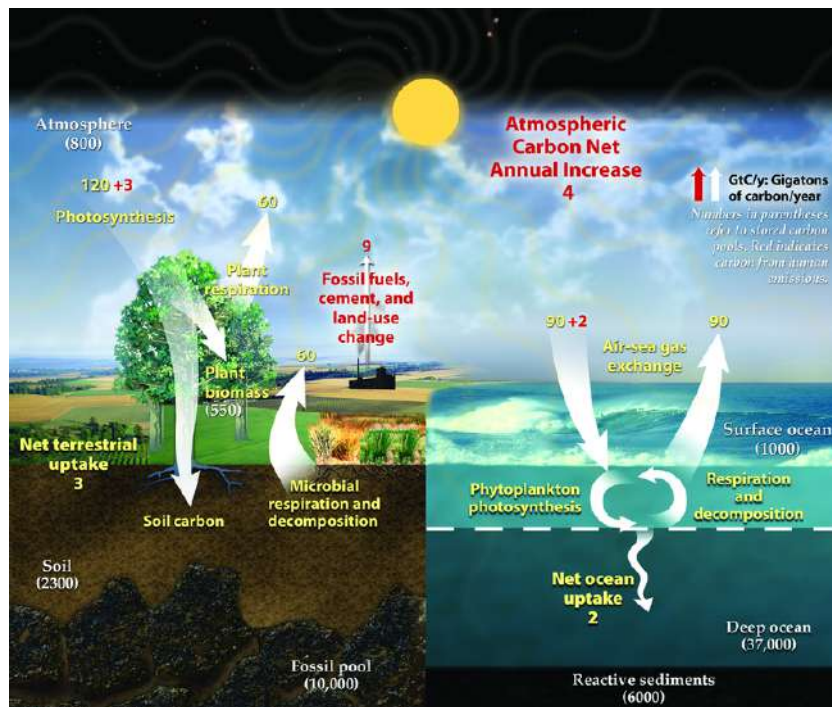


Figure 2.11: *This diagram shows a simplified representation of the contemporary global carbon cycle. Changes are measured in gigatons of carbon per year (GtC/y).* (Public domain)

is much more potent than CO₂.

The worrying thing about the methane hydrate deposits on ocean floors is the enormous amount of carbon involved: roughly 10,000 gigatons. To put this huge amount into perspective, we can remember that the total amount of carbon in world CO₂ emissions since 1751 has only been 337 gigatons.¹¹

A runaway, exponentially increasing feedback loop involving methane hydrates could lead to one of the great geological extinction events that have periodically wiped out most of the animals and plants then living. This must be avoided at all costs.

The worst consequences of runaway climate change will not occur within our own lifetimes. However, we have a duty to all future human generations, and to the plants and animals with which we share our existence, to give them a future world in which they can survive.

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bRrg96UtMc>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVwmi7HCmSI>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjZaFjXfLec>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVwmi7HCmSI>

We can also fear a catastrophic future famine, produced by a combination of climate change, population growth and the end of fossil-fuel-dependent high-yield modern agriculture.¹²

These very real and very large long-term disasters are looming on our horizon, but small short-term considerations blind us, so that we do not take the needed action. But what is at stake is the future of everyone's children and grandchildren and their progeny, your future family tree and mine, also the families of Francois Hollande and the executives of Exxon. They should think carefully about the consequences of making our beautiful world completely uninhabitable.

OPEC oil and climate change

In an amazing display of collective schizophrenia, our media treat oil production and the global climate emergency as though they were totally disconnected. But the use of all fossil fuels, including oil, must stop almost immediately if the world is to have a chance of avoiding uncontrollable and catastrophic climate change.

The recent Doha summit meeting of the Oil Producing and Exporting Countries (OPEC) aimed at reaching an agreement on limiting the production of oil. This aim did not stem from the climate emergency but rather a from desire to raise oil prices and profits. However, the OPEC meeting failed to reach an agreement. Production continues to be extremely high and prices low.¹³

Our high-energy lifestyles continue. Our profligate use of fossil fuels continues as though the life-threatening climate emergency did not exist.

Meanwhile, early spring temperatures in 2016 have totally smashed all previous records, and this is especially pronounced in the Arctic and Antarctic regions. Polar ice caps are melting in an alarmingly rapid and non-linear way. The rate of melting of the icecaps is far greater than predicted by conventional modeling which does not include feedback loops. Many island nations and coastal cities are threatened, not in the very distant future, but by the middle of our present century. Here are a few links reporting what is happening:¹⁴

¹² <http://human-wrongs-watch.net/2015/08/19/the-need-for-a-new-economic-system-part-vii-greadoval-food-crisis/>

¹³ <http://www.cnbc.com/2016/04/17/doha-oil-producers-meeting-ends-without-an-agreement.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/35398-climate-disruption-in-overdrive-submerged-cities-and-melting-that-feeds-on-itself>
<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/03/14/nasa-drops-major-bomb-march-toward-ever-warmer-planet>
<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/mar/15/record-breaking-temperatures->



Figure 2.12: *Iranian oil and gas facilities. An Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline has been proposed. Catastrophic climate change threatens to destroy human civilization and much of the biosphere. The production and consumption of oil must stop almost immediately; but pipeline wars continue just as though these threats did not exist.* (Public domain)

In the long-term future, catastrophic anthropogenic climate change threatens to destroy human civilization and to drive the majority of plant and animal species into extinction. To prevent this from happening, we need to stop subsidizing and accepting fossil fuel production. We need to vigorously support the transition to a sustainable economy based on renewable energy.

2.7 Our duty to future generations

Many traditional agricultural societies have an ethical code that requires them to preserve the fertility of the land for future generations. This recognition of a duty towards the distant future is in strong contrast to the shortsightedness

have-robbed-the-arctic-of-its-winter

<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/35283-arctic-sea-ice-volume-nears-record-low>

<http://dissidentvoice.org/2016/03/does-methane-threaten-life/>

<https://theconversation.com/meltdown-earth-the-shocking-reality-of-climate-change-kicks-in-but-who-is-listening-56255>

<http://www.countercurrents.org/bardi150316.htm>

<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article44427.htm>

<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/35202-antarctica-on-the-brink-nasa-emeritus-scientist-warns-of-dramatic-loss-of-glaciers>

<http://ecowatch.com/2016/03/02/february-record-hot/>

<http://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/charctic-interactive-sea-ice-graph/>

<http://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/>

<http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2016/03/01/3754891/arctic-sea-ice-growth/>

<http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2016/02/16/3749815/carbon-pollution-hottest-12-months-january/>

<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/35468-agriculture-on-the-brink>

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/03/21/after-unprecedented-year-warming-unwarns-we-must-curb-emissions-now>

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/04/15/hottest-march-record-earth-keeps-hurling-past-temperature-milestones>

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/04/04/amid-climate-fueled-food-crisis-filipino-forces-open-fire-starving-farmers>

<http://ecowatch.com/2016/04/08/mckibben-break-free/>

<http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2016/04/water-scarcity-wikileaks>

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/04/15/towards-common-good-mr-sanders-goes-vatican>

<http://ecowatch.com/2016/04/22/dicaprio-paris-climate-change-agreement/>

<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article44510.htm>

<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article44519.htm>

<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/35796-temperatures-in-2016-are-already-near-cop21-limit>

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2084835-unprecedented-global-warming-as-2016-approaches-1-5-c-mark/>



Figure 2.13: *Chief Luther Standing Bear (ca. 1873-1908), author of "Land of the Spotted Eagle"* (Public domain)

of modern economists. For example, John Maynard Keynes has been quoted as saying "In the long run, we will all be dead", meaning that we need not look that far ahead. By contrast, members of traditional societies recognize that their duties extend far into the distant future, since their descendants will still be alive.

Here is an ethical principle of the Native Americans: "Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It was loaned to you by your children." They also say: "We must protect the forests for our children, grandchildren, and children yet to be born. We must protect the forests for those who cannot speak for themselves, such as the birds, animals, fish and trees."

In his book, "The Land of the Spotted Eagle", the Lakota chief Luther Standing Bear (ca. 1834-1908) wrote: "The Lakota was a true lover of Nature. He loved the earth and all things of the earth... From Waken Tanka (the Great Spirit) there came a great unifying life force that flowered in and through all things: the flowers of the plains, blowing winds, rocks, trees, birds, animals, and was the same force that had been breathed into the first man. Thus all things were kindred and were brought together by the same Great Mystery."

In some parts of Africa, a man who plans to cut down a tree offers a prayer of apology, telling the tree why necessity has forced him to harm it. This preindustrial attitude is something from which industrialized countries could



Figure 2.14: *Mother Nature image, 17th century alchemical text, Atalanta Fugiens.* (Public domain)



Figure 2.15: *Aion, Gaia and four children.* (Public domain)



Figure 2.16: *Demonstrators declaring the rights of Mother Earth* (Earth Peoples)



Figure 2.17: *We are sawing off the branch on which we are sitting.* (Commentsmeme.com)

learn. In industrial societies, land “belongs” to someone, and the owner has the “right” to ruin the land or to kill the communities of creatures living on it, if this happens to give some economic advantage, in much the same way that a Roman slave-owner was thought to have the “right” to kill his slaves. Preindustrial societies have a much less rapacious and much more custodial attitude towards the land and towards its non-human inhabitants.

On April 22, 2010, the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba, Bolivia, adopted a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth. Here is a link:

<http://therightsofnature.org/universal-declaration/>

Contrast this expression of the deep ethical convictions of the world’s people with the cynical, money-centered results of various intergovernmental conferences on climate change!

Our economic system is built on the premise that individuals act out of self-interest, and as things are today, they do so with a vengeance. There is no place in the system for thoughts about the environment and the long-term future. All that matters is the bottom line. The machine moves on relentlessly, exhausting non-renewable resources, turning fertile land into deserts, driving animal species into extinction, felling the last of the world’s tropical rainforests, pumping greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere, and sponsoring TV programs that deny the reality of climate change, or other programs that extol the concept of never-ending industrial growth. But the economists, bankers, bribed politicians and corporation chiefs who destroy the earth today, are destroying the future for their own children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Does it make sense for them to saw off the branch on which they, like all of us, are sitting?

Recently an extremely grave danger to the long-term future of human civilization and the biosphere has become clear. The latest observations show that Arctic sea ice is melting far faster than was predicted by the IPCC. It now seems likely that the September Arctic sea ice will vanish by as early as 2016 or 2017. It will, of course, re-freeze in the winters, but its average total mass will continue to rapidly decrease.

The rapid and non-linear vanishing of Arctic sea ice is due to a feedback loop involving albedo, i.e the high reflectivity of white ice compared with dark sea water which absorbs most of the radiation that falls onto it. As Arctic sea ice disappears more radiation is absorbed, the Arctic temperature rises still further, still more ice melts, and so on in a vicious circle.

At present Arctic temperatures are roughly 4 degrees C higher than preindustrial levels, and this has led to increasingly rapid melting of the Greenland ice cap. It is now observed that during the summers, lakes of melted water form on the surface of Greenland’s inland ice. These lakes feed rivers that

run for some distance along the surface of the ice cap, but which ultimately fall through fissures to the bottom of the sheet, where they lubricate its flow. Through this mechanism, the Greenland ice cap is flowing more quickly and calving into massive icebergs much more rapidly than climate scientists expected.

Complete melting of the Greenland ice cap would raise ocean levels by 7 meters. Antarctic sea ice is also breaking up much more rapidly than expected. When it is totally gone, the disappearance of Antarctic sea ice would add another 7 meters to ocean levels, making a total of 14 meters. It is hard to predict how soon this will happen, but certainly within 1-3 centuries.

However, by far the most worrying threat to our long-term future comes from the danger of an out-of-control and exponentially accelerating feedback loop involving methane hydrates. When rivers carry organic matter into the ocean, it decays, forming methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. At the temperatures and pressures currently prevailing on ocean floors, the methane combines with water molecules to form stable crystals called methane hydrates. The amount of carbon stored in methane hydrates is immense: roughly 10,000 gigatons. By comparison, the amount of carbon emitted by human activities since preindustrial times is only 337 gigatons.

Geologists have observed that life on earth has experienced 5 major extinction events, the largest of which was the Permian-Triassic event, when 96 percent of all marine species and 70 percent of all terrestrial vertebrates disappeared from the fossil record. Predictions based on current CO₂ emission rates predict that early in the 22nd century, global temperature increases will have reached 6 degrees C, the temperature that is thought to have initiated the Permian-Triassic extinction event. These dangers are eloquently discussed in a short, important and clear video prepared by Thom Hartmann and his coworkers. It is available on www.lasthours.org

Must there be a human-initiated 6th geological extinction event? Is it inevitable that the long-term future will witness the disappearance of human civilization and most of the plants and animals that are alive today? No! Absolutely not! It is only inevitable if we persist in our greed and folly. It is only inevitable if we continue to value money more than nature. It is only inevitable if we are afraid to question the authority of corrupt politicians. It is only inevitable if we fail to cooperate globally, and if we fail to develop a new economic system with both a social conscience and an ecological conscience.

We are living today in a time of acute crisis. We need to act with a sense of urgency never before experienced. We need to have great courage to meet an unprecedented challenge. We need to fulfil our duty to future generations

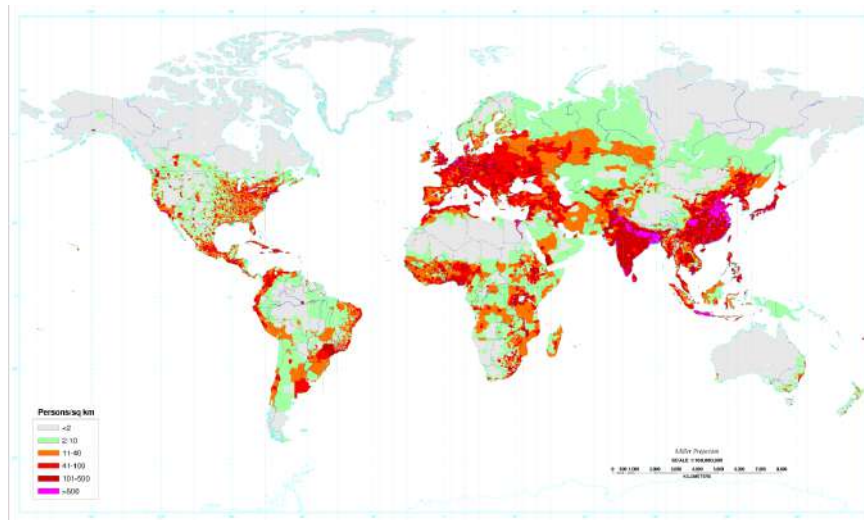


Figure 2.18: *Population density (people per km²) map of the world in 1994. It is vitally important that all countries should pass quickly through the demographic transition from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates. (Public domain)*

In the world as it is, population is increasing so fast that it doubles every thirty-nine years. Most of this increase is in the developing countries, and in many of these, the doubling time is less than twenty-five years. Famine is already present, and it threatens to become more severe and widespread in the future.

In the world as it could be, population would be stabilized at a level that could be sustained comfortably by the world's food and energy resources. Each country would be responsible for stabilizing its own population.



Figure 2.19: *There is a danger that a tipping point may be reached, where drying of tropical forests leads to their destruction by fires.* (World Visits)

In the world as it is, large areas of tropical rain forest are being destroyed by excessive timber cutting. The cleared land is generally unsuitable for farming.

In the world as it could be, it would be recognized that the conversion of carbon dioxide into oxygen by tropical forests is necessary for the earth's climatic stability. Tropical forests would also be highly valued because of their enormous diversity of plant and animal life, and large remaining areas of forest would be protected.



Figure 2.20: *Air pollution from a fossil fuel power station. Among the pollutants released into the atmosphere, greenhouse gases are the most dangerous. To avoid catastrophic climate change, we must very rapidly make the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy.* (Public domain)

In the world as it is, pollutants are dumped into our rivers, oceans and atmosphere. Some progress has been made in controlling pollution, but far from enough.

In the world as it could be, a stabilized and perhaps reduced population would put less pressure on the environment. Strict international laws would prohibit the dumping of pollutants into our common rivers, oceans and atmosphere. The production of greenhouse gasses would also be limited by international laws.

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Chapter 3

GROWING POPULATION, VANISHING RESOURCES

“Let us try to translate pollution and ruthless exploitation of the environment into economic language: Both of these mean that we are spending our capital, i.e., we are spending the earth’s riches of coal, oil and raw materials, as well as our inheritance of clean air, clean water, and places where one can be free from noise pollution. It is clear that economic growth, as we experience it today, means that we are spending more and more of humankind’s natural wealth. This cannot continue indefinitely.”

Professor Thorkil Kristensen, former Secretary General of the OECD

3.1 Introduction

Is a transition to 100% renewable energy possible? One answer to this question is that the transition must take place within a century or so because coal, oil and natural gas will become too rare and expensive to be used as fuels. But the vital point which we must remember is that, to avoid the threat of catastrophic climate change, the transition must take place very rapidly, within a few decades. This will require lifestyle changes in the industrialized countries, which at present use energy at a rate too high to be supported by the renewable energy that is likely to be available in the near future.

To avoid widespread famine, the less industrialized countries will also need to change their lifestyles. The impact of the end of the fossil fuel era, as well as the unavoidable early effects of climate change, will make food very expensive. It is therefore vital that countries with rapidly-growing populations should make information and materials for birth control available to all their citizens.

3.2 Fossil fuels: a long-term view

In Chapter 2 we saw that in order to avoid dangerous climate change, the world will have to reduce its CO₂ emissions by 90% by 2050. Thus the fossil fuel era will have to end by the middle of the 21st century in order to avoid disastrous climate change. But even if it were not for these considerations, the fossil fuel era would end within a century because of vanishing resources.

As oil becomes scarce, it is likely that coal will be converted to liquid fuels, as was done in Germany during World War II, and in South Africa during the oil embargo. In this process, coal is gasified to form syngas, which is a mixture of CO and H₂. These two gasses are then converted to light hydrocarbons by means of Fischer-Tropsch catalysts. Both gasoline and diesel fuel can be made in this way.

If coal is converted to liquid fuels on a large scale, the rate of use of coal will increase. Thus the projected date for the exhaustion of coal reserves based on the present consumption of coal is unrealistic. It is more accurate to lump all fossil fuels together and to predict a future date for their exhaustion based on the lumped consumption of coal, natural gas and oil. Doing so gives a figure of 95 years; but the true figure is likely to be less because of increased rates of consumption. We must remember also that the conversion of coal to liquid fuels requires energy. Of course, neither coal, nor oil, nor natural gas will disappear entirely, but they will become so expensive that their use as fuels will seem inappropriate, and they will be reserved as starting materials for synthesis.

The date at which the possibility for nuclear energy will end is more controversial and difficult to predict. However, it seems likely that if nuclear reactors are used as an energy source despite their great dangers, finite reserves of uranium and thorium will be exhausted by the end of the 21st century.

Optimists point to the possibility of using fusion of light elements, such as hydrogen, to generate power. However, although this can be done on a very small scale (and at great expense) in laboratory experiments, the practical generation of energy by means of thermonuclear reactions remains a mirage rather than a realistic prospect on which planners can rely. The reason for this is the enormous temperature required to produce thermonuclear reactions. This temperature is comparable to that existing in the interior of the sun, and it is sufficient to melt any ordinary container. Elaborate “magnetic bottles” have been constructed to contain thermonuclear reactions, and these have been used in successful very small scale experiments. However, despite 50 years of heavily-financed research, there has been absolutely no success in producing thermonuclear energy on a large scale, or at anything remotely approaching commercially competitive prices.

Thus, after the end of the fossil fuel era, our industrial civilization will probably have to rely on renewable sources to supply our energy needs. These sources include hydropower, wind and tidal power, biomass, geothermal energy and solar energy. Let us try to survey how much energy these sources can be expected to produce.

Before the start of the industrial era, human society relied exclusively on renewable energy sources - but can we do so again, with our greatly increased population and greatly increased demands? Will we ultimately be forced to reduce the global population or our per capita use of energy, or both? Let us now try to examine these questions.

Global energy resources

The total ultimately recoverable resources of fossil fuels amount to roughly 1260 terawatt-years of energy (1 terawatt-year $\equiv 10^{12}$ Watt-years $\equiv 1$ TWy is equivalent to 5 billion barrels of oil or 1 billion tons of coal). Of this total amount, 760 TWy is coal, while oil and natural gas each constitute roughly 250 TWy.¹ In 1890, the rate of global consumption of energy was 1 terawatt, but by 1990 this figure had grown to 13.2 TW, distributed as follows: oil, 4.6; coal, 3.2; natural gas, 2.4; hydropower, 0.8; nuclear, 0.7; fuelwood, 0.9; crop wastes, 0.4; and dung, 0.2. By 2005, the rate of oil, natural gas and coal consumption had risen to 6.0 TW, 3.7 TW and 3.5 TW respectively. Thus, if we continue to use oil at the 2005 rate, it will last for 42 years, while natural gas will last

¹British Petroleum, “B.P. Statistical Review of World Energy”, London, 1991

for 68 years. The reserves of coal are much larger; and used at the 2005 rate, coal would last for 217 years. However, it seems likely that as oil and natural gas become depleted, coal will be converted to liquid and gaseous fuels, and its rate of use will increase. Also, the total global energy consumption is likely to increase because of increasing population and rising standards of living in the developing countries.

The industrialized countries use much more than their fair share of global resources. For example, with only a quarter of world's population they use more than two thirds of its energy; and in the U.S.A. and Canada the average per capita energy consumption is 12 kilowatts, compared with 0.2 kilowatts in Bangladesh. If we are to avoid severe damage to the global environment, the industrialized countries must rethink some of their economic ideas, especially the assumption that growth can continue forever.

Hubbert peaks for oil and gas

One can predict that as the reserves of oil become exhausted, the price will rise to such an extent that production and consumption will diminish. Thus oil experts do not visualize a special date in the future after which oil will totally disappear, but rather a date at which the production and consumption of oil will reach a maximum and afterward diminish because of scarcity of the resource and increase in price. Such a peak in the production of any nonrenewable resource is called a *Hubbert peak*, after Dr. M. King Hubbert, who applied the idea to oil reserves.

Most experts agree that the Hubbert peak for oil will occur within a decade or two. Thus the era of cheap petroleum is rapidly approaching its end, and we must be prepared for the serious economic and political impacts of rising oil prices, as well as great changes in lifestyle in the industrialized countries. Halfway through the present century, petroleum will become too expensive and rare to be used as a fuel. It will be reserved almost exclusively for lubrication and as a starting material for the manufacture of plastics, paint, fertilizers and pharmaceuticals.

The United States uses petroleum at the rate of more than 7 billion barrels (7 Gb) per year, while that country's estimated reserves and undiscovered resources are respectively 50.7 Gb and 49.0 Gb. Thus if the United States were to rely only on its own resources for petroleum, then, at the 2001 rate of use, these would be exhausted within 14 years. In fact, the United States already imports more than half of its oil. According to the "National Energy Policy" report (sometimes called the "Cheney Report" after its chief author) US domestic oil production will decline from 3.1 Gb/y in 2002 to 2.6 Gb/y in 2020, while US consumption will rise from 7.2 Gb/y to 9.3 Gb/y. Thus

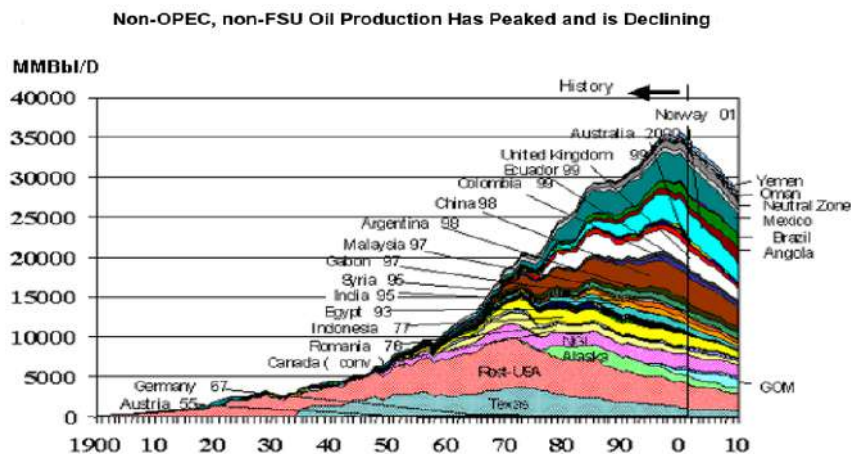


Figure 3.1: *The Hubbert Peak for non-OPEC non-FSU oil.* (Wikipedia)

the United States today imports 57% of its oil, but the report predicts that by 2020 this will rise to 72%. The predicted increment in US imports of oil between 2002 and 2020 is greater than the present oil consumption of China.

It is clear from these figures that if the United States wishes to maintain its enormous rate of petroleum use, it will have to rely on imported oil, much of it coming from regions of the world that are politically unstable, or else unfriendly to America, or both.

As the per-capita oil consumption of India and China increases, global production will fail to meet demand. For example, if the consumption in these two countries were to increase to 12 barrels per person per year (half the North American level), it would amount to 27 billion barrels per year - roughly the same amount of oil that the whole world uses today. Even a smaller increase in petroleum use by China and India may soon produce an energy crisis. One can anticipate that many voices will then be raised favoring widespread use of nuclear energy. However there would be great dangers associated with such a development.

Oilsands, tarsands and heavy oil

When the Hubbert peak for conventional oil has been passed, the price of oil will steadily increase, and this will make the extraction of oil from unconventional sources more economically feasible. For example, very large deposits of oilsands and tarsands exist in northern Alberta, Canada, a few miles north of Fort McMurray. These deposits, known as the Athabasca oil sands, con-

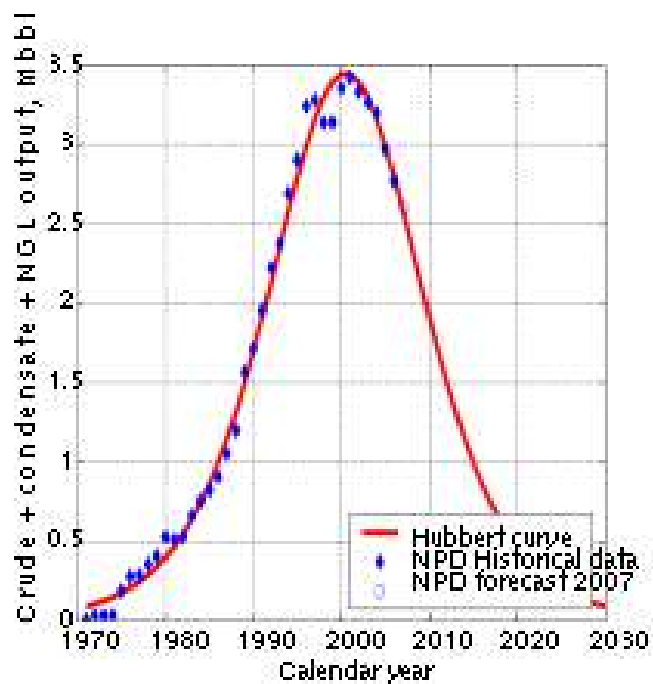


Figure 3.2: *The data for oil production by Norway closely follow the Hubbert model. The Hubbert Peak occurred slightly before 2000.* (Wikipedia)

sist of sand layers near to the surface. Each grain of sand in these deposits is surrounded by a thin film of water, outside of which there is a coating of oil. During the extraction process, the sand is transported to tanks where oil is stripped away from the grains by a hot water flotation process. The oil recovered in this way is too viscous to be pumped, but it can be upgraded to a pumpable fluid by the addition of naphtha. Besides the Athabasca deposit, whose area is twice the size of Lake Ontario, Alberta also has three other smaller oilsand deposits.

The energy inputs for extraction of oil from oilsands are high. It has been estimated that three barrels of oil in the sands can produce only one net barrel of output oil, because the other two barrels are needed to supply energy for the extraction process.

The world's largest deposit of superheavy oil is the "cinturon de la brea" (belt of tar) in Venezuela. This semi-solid material can be made more fluid by the addition of hydrogen. Alternatively it can be emulsified, and the emulsion can be burned in power plants.

The extremely large deposits of unconventional oil in Canada and Venezuela will to some extent cushion the economic shocks produced by scarcity of conventional oil. Nevertheless, because of the high extraction costs of unconventional oil, we must still anticipate that the price of oil will rise steadily after the Hubbert peak has been reached.

Coal

The remaining reserves of coal in the world amount to about 1 exagram, i.e. 10^{18} grams or 10^{12} metric tons. The average energy density of coal is 760 Watt-years/ton, and therefore the world's coal reserves correspond to 760 TWy. If coal continues to be consumed at the present rate of 3.5 TW, the global reserves will last a little more than two centuries. However, it seems likely that as petroleum becomes prohibitively expensive, coal will be converted into liquid fuels, so that the rate of use of coal will increase. Therefore it is more realistic to lump all fossil fuels together and to divide the total supply (1260 TWy) by the the total rate of use (13.2 TW). The result is a prediction that the era of inexpensive fossil fuels will end in less than a century, as is shown in Table 7.4.

67% of the world recoverable reserves of coal are located in four countries:

1. United States, 27%
2. Russia, 17%
3. China, 13%

4. India, 10%

The present rate of use of coal by China and India is 1.5 billion metric tons per year which is equal to 1.1 TW. However, the rate of coal use by China and India is expected to double by 2030.

3.3 Renewable energy

Solar energy

Biomass, wind energy, hydropower and wave power derive their energy indirectly from the sun, but in addition, various methods are available for utilizing the power of sunlight directly. These include photovoltaic panels, solar designs in architecture, solar systems for heating water and cooking, concentrating photovoltaic systems, and solar thermal power plants.

Photovoltaic cells and concentrating photovoltaic systems

Solar photovoltaic cells are thin coated wafers of a semiconducting material (usually silicon). The coatings on the two sides are respectively charge donors and charge acceptors. Cells of this type are capable of trapping solar energy and converting it into direct-current electricity. The electricity generated in this way can be used directly (as it is, for example, in pocket calculators) or it can be fed into a general power grid. Alternatively it can be used to split water into hydrogen and oxygen. The gases can then be compressed and stored, or exported for later use in fuel cells. In the future, we may see solar photovoltaic arrays in sun-rich desert areas producing hydrogen as an export product. As their petroleum reserves become exhausted, the countries of the Middle East and Africa may be able to shift to this new technology and still remain energy exporters.

The cost of manufacturing photovoltaic cells is currently falling at the rate of 3%-5% per year. The cost in 2006 was \$4.50 per peak Watt. Usually photovoltaic panels are warranted for a life of 20 years, but they are commonly still operational after 30 years or more. The cost of photovoltaic electricity is today 2-5 times the cost of electricity generated from fossil fuels, but photovoltaic costs are falling rapidly, while the costs of fossil fuels are rising equally rapidly.

Concentrating photovoltaic systems are able to lower costs still further by combining silicon solar cells with reflectors that concentrate the sun's rays. The most inexpensive type of concentrating reflector consists of a flat piece of aluminum-covered plastic material bent into a curved shape along one of its dimensions, forming a trough-shaped surface. (Something like this shape

results when we hold a piece of paper at the top and bottom with our two hands, allowing the center to sag.) The axis of the reflector can be oriented so that it points towards the North Star. A photovoltaic array placed along the focal line will then receive concentrated sunlight throughout the day.

Photovoltaic efficiency is defined as the ratio of the electrical power produced by a cell to the solar power striking its surface. For commercially available cells today, this ratio is between 9% and 14%. If we assume 5 hours of bright sunlight per day, this means that a photocell in a desert area near to the equator (where 1 kW/m^2 of peak solar power reaches the earth's surface) can produce electrical energy at the average rate of $20\text{--}30 \text{ W}_e/\text{m}^2$, the average being taken over an entire day and night. (The subscript e means "in the form of electricity". Energy in the form of heat is denoted by the subscript t , meaning "thermal".) Thus the potential power per unit area for photovoltaic systems is far greater than for biomass. However, the mix of renewable energy sources most suitable for a particular country depends on many factors. We saw above that biomass is a promising future source of energy for Sweden, because of Sweden's low population density and high rainfall. By contrast, despite the high initial investment required, photovoltaics are undoubtedly a more promising future energy source for southerly countries with clear skies.

In comparing photovoltaics with biomass, we should be aware of the difference between electrical energy and energy contained in the chemical bonds of a primary fuel such as wood or rapeseed oil. If Sweden (for example) were to supply all its energy needs from biomass, part of the biomass would have to be burned to generate electricity. The efficiency of energy conversion in electricity generation from fuel is 20%–35%. Of course, in dual use power plants, part of the left-over heat from electrical power generation can be used to heat homes or greenhouses. However, hydropower, wind power and photovoltaics have an advantage in generating electrical power, since they do so directly and without loss, whereas generation of electricity from biomass involves a loss from the inefficiency of the conversion from fuel energy to electrical energy. Thus a rational renewable energy program for Sweden should involve a mixture of biomass for heating and direct fuel use, with hydropower and wind power for generation of electricity. Perhaps photovoltaics will also play a role in Sweden's future electricity generation, despite the country's northerly location and frequently cloudy skies.

The global market for photovoltaics is expanding at the rate of 30% per year. This development is driven by rising energy prices, subsidies to photovoltaics by governments, and the realization of the risks associated with global warming and consequent international commitments to reduce carbon emissions. The rapidly expanding markets have resulted in lowered photovoltaic production costs, and hence further expansion, still lower costs, etc. - a virtu-



Figure 3.3: *Part of the 354 MW SEGS solar complex in northern San Bernardino County, California.* (Public domain)

ous feedback loop.

Solar thermal power plants

Solar Parabolic Troughs can be used to heat a fluid, typically oil, in a pipe running along the focal axis. The heated fluid can then be used to generate electrical power. The liquid that is heated in this way need not be oil. In a solar thermal power plant in California, reflectors move in a manner that follows the sun's position and they concentrate solar energy onto a tower, where molten salt is heated to a temperature of 1050 degrees F (566 degrees C). The molten salt stores the heat, so that electricity can be generated even when the sun is not shining. The California plant, now in a three-year operating and testing phase, generates 10 MW_e .

Solar designs in architecture

At present, the average global rate of use of primary energy is roughly 2 kW_t per person. In North America, the rate is 12 kW_t per capita, while in Europe, the figure is 6 kW_t . In Bangladesh, it is only 0.2 kW_t . This wide variation implies that considerable energy savings are possible, through changes in lifestyle, and through energy efficiency.



Figure 3.4: *The 11 megawatt Serpa photovoltaic installation in Portugal.* (Wikipedia)



Figure 3.5: *Students perform an experiment using a solar cooker built out of an umbrella* (Public domain)

Wind energy

Wind parks in favorable locations, using modern wind turbines, are able to generate $10 \text{ MW}_e/\text{km}^2$ or $10 \text{ W}_e/\text{m}^2$. Often wind farms are placed in offshore locations. When they are on land, the area between the turbines can be utilized for other purposes, for example for pasturage. For a country like Denmark, with good wind potential but cloudy skies, wind turbines can be expected to play a more important future role than photovoltaics. Denmark is already a world leader both in manufacturing and in using wind turbines. Today, 23% of all electricity used in Denmark is generated by wind power, and the export of wind turbines makes a major contribution to the Danish economy.

Globally, only 1.5% of all electricity generated comes from wind power. This corresponds to 121 GW_e or 0.121 TW_e . However, the use of wind power is currently growing at the rate of 38% per year. In the United States, it is the fastest-growing form of electricity generation.

The location of wind parks is important, since the energy obtainable from wind is proportional to the cube of the wind velocity. We can understand this cubic relationship by remembering that the kinetic energy of a moving object is proportional to the square of its velocity multiplied by the mass. Since the mass of air moving past a wind turbine is proportional to the wind velocity, the result is the cubic relationship just mentioned.

Before the decision is made to locate a wind park in a particular place, the wind velocity is usually carefully measured and recorded over an entire year. For locations on land, mountain passes are often very favorable locations, since wind velocities increase with altitude, and since the wind is concentrated in the passes by the mountain barrier. Other favorable locations include shorelines and offshore locations on sand bars. This is because onshore winds result when warm air rising from land heated by the sun is replaced by cool marine air. Depending on the season, the situation may be reversed at night, and an offshore wind may be produced if the water is warmer than the land.

The cost of wind-generated electrical power is currently about 5 US cents per kilowatt hour, i.e., lower than the cost of electricity generated by burning fossil fuels.

The “energy payback ratio” of a power installation is defined as the ratio of the energy produced by the installation over its lifetime, divided by the energy required to manufacture, construct, operate and decommission the installation. For wind turbines, this ratio is 17-39, compared with 11 for coal-burning plants. The construction energy of a wind turbine is usually paid back within three months.

Besides the propeller-like design for wind turbines there are also designs where the rotors turn about a vertical shaft. One such design was patented



Figure 3.6: *A geothermal power plant at Nesjavellir in Iceland.* (Wikipedia)

in 1927 by the French aeronautical engineer Georges Jean Marie Darrieus. The blades of a Darrieus wind turbine are airfoils similar to the wings of an aircraft. As the rotor turns in the wind, the stream of air striking the airfoils produces a force similar to the “lift” of an airplane wing. This force pushes the rotor in the direction that it is already moving. The Darrieus design has some advantages over conventional wind turbine design, since the generator can be placed at the bottom of the vertical shaft, where it may be more easily serviced. Furthermore, the vertical shaft can be lighter than the shaft needed to support a conventional wind turbine.

One problem with wind power is that it comes intermittently, and demand for electrical power does not necessarily come at times when the wind is blowing most strongly. To deal with the problem of intermittency, wind power can be combined with other electrical power sources in a grid. Alternatively, the energy generated can be stored, for example by pumped hydroelectric storage or by using hydrogen technology, as will be discussed below.

Bird lovers complain that birds are sometimes killed by rotor blades. This is true, but the number killed is small. For example, in the United States, about 70,000 birds per year are killed by turbines, but this must be compared with 57 million birds killed by automobiles and 97.5 million killed by collisions with plate glass.

The aesthetic aspects of wind turbines also come into the debate. Perhaps in the future, as wind power becomes more and more a necessity and less a



Figure 3.7: *Erection of an Enercon E70-4 in Germany* (Wikipedia)

matter of choice, this will be seen as a “luxury argument”.

The case of Samsø.

The Danish island of Samsø is only 112 square kilometers in size, and its population numbers only 4,300. Nevertheless, it has a unique distinction. Samsø was the first closed land area to declare its intention of relying entirely on renewable energy, and it has now achieved this aim, provided that one stretches the definitions slightly.

In 1997, the Danish Ministry of Environment and Energy decided to sponsor a renewable-energy contest. In order to enter, communities had to submit plans for how they could make a transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. An engineer (who didn’t live there) thought he knew how the island could do this, and together with the island’s mayor he submitted a plan which won the contest. As a result, the islanders became interested in renewable energy. They switched from furnaces to heat pumps, and formed cooperatives for the construction of windmill parks in the sea near to the island. By 2005, Samsø was producing, from renewable sources, more energy than it was using. The islanders still had gasoline-driven automobiles, but they exported from

their windmill parks an amount of electrical energy that balanced the fossil fuel energy that they imported. This is a story that can give us hope for the future, although a farming community like Samsø cannot serve as a model for the world.

Biomass

Biomass is defined as any energy source based on biological materials produced by photosynthesis - for example wood, sugar beets, rapeseed oil², crop wastes, dung, urban organic wastes, processed sewage, etc. Using biomass for energy does not result in the net emission of CO₂, since the CO₂ released by burning the material had previously been absorbed from the atmosphere during photosynthesis. If the biological material had decayed instead of being burned, it would have released the same amount of CO₂ as in the burning process.

The solar constant has the value 1.4 kilowatts/m². It represents the amount of solar energy per unit area³ that reaches the earth, before the sunlight has entered the atmosphere. Because the atmosphere reflects 6% and absorbs 16%, the peak power at sea level is reduced to 1.0 kW/m². Clouds also absorb and reflect sunlight. Average cloud cover reduces the energy of sunlight a further 36%. Also, we must take into account the fact that the sun's rays do not fall perpendicularly onto the earth's surface. The angle that they make with the surface depends on the time of day, the season and the latitude.

In Sweden, which lies at a northerly latitude, the solar energy per unit of horizontal area is less than for countries nearer the equator. Nevertheless, Göran Persson, the Prime Minister of Sweden, recently announced that his government intends to make the country independent of imported oil by 2020 through a program that includes energy from biomass.

In his thesis, *Biomass in a Sustainable Energy System*, the Swedish researcher Pål Börjesson states that of various crops grown as biomass, the largest energy yields come from short-rotation forests (*Salix viminalis*, a species of willow) and sugar beet plantations. These have an energy yield of from 160 to 170 GJ_t per hectare-year. One can calculate that this is equivalent to about 0.5 MW_t/km², or 0.5 W_t/m². Thus, although 1.0 kW/m² of solar energy reaches the earth at noon at the equator, the trees growing in northerly Sweden can harvest a day-and-night and seasonal average of only 0.5 Watts of thermal energy per horizontal square meter⁴. Since Sweden's present primary energy use is approximately 0.04 TW_t, it follows that if no other sources of energy were used, a square area of *Salix* forest 290 kilometers on each side would

²canola, a cultivar of *Brassica napus* or *Brassica rapa*

³The area is assumed to be perpendicular to the sun's rays.

⁴In tropical regions, the rate of biomass production can be more than double this amount.

supply Sweden's present energy needs. This corresponds to an area of 84,000 km², about 19% of Sweden's total area⁵. Of course, Sweden's renewable energy program will not rely exclusively on energy crops, but on a mixture of sources, including biomass from municipal and agricultural wastes, hydropower, wind energy and solar energy.

At present, both Sweden and Finland derive about 30% of their electricity from biomass, which is largely in the form of waste from the forestry and paper industries of these two countries.

Despite their northerly location, the countries of Scandinavia have good potentialities for developing biomass as an energy source, since they have small population densities and adequate rainfall. In Denmark, biodiesel oil derived from rapeseed (canola) has been used as fuel for experimental buses. Rapeseed fields produce oil at the rate of between 1,000 and 1,300 liters per hectare-crop. The energy yield is 3.2 units of fuel product energy for every unit of fuel energy used to plant the rapeseed, and to harvest and process the oil. After the oil has been pressed from rapeseed, two-thirds of the seed remains as a protein-rich residue which can be fed to cattle.

Miscanthus is a grassy plant found in Asia and Africa. Some forms will also grow in Northern Europe, and it is being considered as an energy crop in the United Kingdom. *Miscanthus* can produce up to 18 dry tonnes per hectare-year, and it has the great advantage that it can be cultivated using ordinary farm machinery. The woody stems are very suitable for burning, since their water content is low (20-30%).

Jatropha is a fast-growing woody shrub about 4 feet in height, whose seeds can be used to produce diesel oil at the cost of about \$43 per barrel. The advantage of *Jatropha* is that it is a hardy plant, requiring very little fertilizer and water. It has a life of roughly 50 years, and can grow on wasteland that is unsuitable for other crops. The Indian State Railway has planted 7.5 million *Jatropha* shrubs beside its right of way. The oil harvested from these plants is used to fuel the trains.

For some southerly countries, honge oil, derived from the plant *Pongamia pinnata* may prove to be a promising source of biomass energy. Studies conducted by Dr. Udishi Shrinivasa at the Indian Institute of Sciences in Bangalore indicate that honge oil can be produced at the cost of \$150 per ton. This price is quite competitive when compared with other potential fuel oils.

Recent studies have also focused on a species of algae that has an oil content of up to 50%. Algae can be grown in desert areas, where cloud cover is minimal. Farm waste and excess CO₂ from factories can be used to speed the growth of the algae.

⁵Additional land area would be needed to supply the energy required for planting, harvesting, transportation and utilization of the wood.

It is possible that in the future, scientists will be able to create new species of algae that use the sun's energy to generate hydrogen gas. If this proves to be possible, the hydrogen gas may then be used to generate electricity in fuel cells, as will be discussed below in the section on hydrogen technology. Promising research along this line is already in progress at the University of California, Berkeley.

Biogas is defined as the mixture of gases produced by the anaerobic digestion of organic matter. This gas, which is rich in methane (CH_4), is produced in swamps and landfills, and in the treatment of organic wastes from farms and cities. The use of biogas as a fuel is important not only because it is a valuable energy source, but also because methane is a potent greenhouse gas, which should not be allowed to reach the atmosphere. Biogas produced from farm wastes can be used locally on the farm, for cooking and heating, etc. When biogas has been sufficiently cleaned so that it can be distributed in a pipeline, it is known as "renewable natural gas". It may then be distributed in the natural gas grid, or it can be compressed and used in internal combustion engines. Renewable natural gas can also be used in fuel cells, as will be discussed below in the section on Hydrogen Technology.

Biofuels are often classified according to their generation. Those that can be used alternatively as food are called first-generation biofuels. By contrast, biofuels of the second generation are those that make use of crop residues or other cellulose-rich materials. Cellulose molecules are long chains of sugars, and by breaking the inter-sugar bonds in the chain using enzymes or other methods, the sugars can be freed for use in fermentation. In this way lignocellulosic ethanol is produced. The oil-producing and hydrogen-producing algae mentioned above are examples of third-generation biofuels.

We should notice that growing biofuels locally (even first-generation ones) may be of great benefit to smallholders in developing countries, since they can achieve local energy self-reliance in this way.

Competition between food and biofuels

Although it is largely a future problem rather than a present one, we can see today the start of a competition between food production and first-generation biofuels. In 2007, 27% of the US corn (maize) crop was used to produce ethanol for motor fuel, an increase by a factor of more than 5 from 1996. In 1996, none of the soybean oil produced in the US was used for biodiesel, while in 2007, more than 17% of the crop was used for fuel. South American soybean oil is also used for biodiesel. In Europe, biodiesel comes mainly from rapeseed (canola) oil, but this can also be used for food. Brazilian ethanol comes from sugar cane produced on land that alternatively could be used for

food production. Biodiesel from South East Asia is mainly edible palm oil. Thus, many (but not all!) of the major biofuels are produced from feedstocks that could be used to produce food, or are grown on land that could be used for food production.

There is a danger that a food-versus-fuel competition will develop between the world's 860 million automobiles and its 2 billion poorest people. As Lester Brown puts it in his book *Plan B*, "Suddenly the world is faced by a moral and political issue for which there is no precedent: Should we use grain to fuel cars or to feed people? The average income of the world's automobile owners is roughly \$30,000 a year; the 2 billion poorest people earn on average less than \$3,000 a year. The market says, 'Let's fuel the cars'." It is up to the world's collective conscience to overrule the market on this point.

Future food output will also be decreased because, as petroleum prices become prohibitively high, synthetic fibers based on petroleum feedstocks will be less and less used. The additional land area needed to produce wool, cotton or linen for clothing will have to be subtracted from the area available for growing food. Finally, as petroleum disappears, draft animals may again be used in farming, and pasturage for them will have to be subtracted from the land available for agriculture. These factors will contribute to the predicted global food crisis discussed in Chapter 4.

Hydroelectric power

At present 20% of the world's electricity comes from hydroelectric power. In the developed countries, the potential for increasing this percentage is small, because most of the suitable sites for dams are already in use. Mountainous regions of course have the greatest potential for hydroelectric power, and this correlates well with the fact that virtually all of the electricity generated in Norway comes from hydro, while in Iceland and Austria the figures are respectively 83% and 67%. Among the large hydroelectric power stations now in use are the La Grande complex in Canada (16 GW_e) and the Itapú station on the border between Brazil and Paraguay (14 GW_e). The Three Gorges Dam under construction in China is planned to produce 18.2 GW_e by 2009.

Even in regions where the percentage of hydro in electricity generation is not so high, it plays an important role because hydropower can be used selectively at moments of peak demand. Pumping of water into reservoirs can also be used to store energy.

The creation of lakes behind new dams in developing countries often involves problems, for example relocation of people living on land that will be covered by water, and loss of the land for other purposes⁶. However the energy

⁶Over a million people were displaced by the construction of the Three Gorges Dam in



Figure 3.8: *Construction of the Three Gorges Dam (2006).* (Wikimedia Commons)

gain per unit area of lake can be very large - over $100 \text{ W}_e/\text{m}^2$. Fish ladders can be used to enable fish to reach their spawning grounds above dams. In addition to generating electrical power, dams often play useful roles in flood control and irrigation.

At present, hydroelectric power is used in energy-intensive industrial processes, such as the production of aluminum. However, as the global energy crisis becomes more severe, we can expect that metals derived from electrolysis, such as aluminum and magnesium, will be very largely replaced by other materials, because the world will no longer be able to afford the energy needed to produce them.

Geothermal energy

The ultimate source of geothermal energy is the decay of radioactive nuclei in the interior of the earth. Because of the heat produced by this radioactive decay, the temperature of the earth's core is 4300 degrees C. The inner core is composed of solid iron, while the outer core consists of molten iron and sulfur compounds. Above the core is the mantle, which consists of a viscous liquid containing compounds of magnesium, iron, aluminum, silicon and oxygen. The temperature of the mantle gradually decreases from 3700 degrees C near the core to 1000 degrees C near the crust. The crust of the earth consists of

China, and many sites of cultural value were lost

relatively light solid rocks and it varies in thickness from 5 to 70 km.

The outward flow of heat from radioactive decay produces convection currents in the interior of the earth. These convection currents, interacting with the earth's rotation, produce patterns of flow similar to the trade winds of the atmosphere. One result of the currents of molten conducting material in the interior of the earth is the earth's magnetic field. The crust is divided into large sections called "tectonic plates", and the currents of molten material in the interior of the earth also drag the plates into collision with each other. At the boundaries, where the plates collide or split apart, volcanic activity occurs. Volcanic regions near the tectonic plate boundaries are the best sites for collection of geothermal energy.

The entire Pacific Ocean is ringed by regions of volcanic and earthquake activity, the so-called Ring of Fire. This ring extends from Tierra del Fuego at the southernmost tip of South America, northward along the western coasts of both South America and North America to Alaska. The ring then crosses the Pacific at the line formed by the Aleutian Islands, and it reaches the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia. From there it extends southward along the Kuril Island chain and across Japan to the Philippine Islands, Indonesia and New Zealand. Many of the islands of the Pacific are volcanic in nature. Another important region of volcanic activity extends northward along the Rift Valley of Africa to Turkey, Greece and Italy. In the Central Atlantic region, two tectonic plates are splitting apart, thus producing the volcanic activity of Iceland. All of these regions are very favorable for the collection of geothermal power.

The average rate at which the energy created by radioactive decay in the interior of the earth is transported to the surface is $0.06 \text{ W}_t/\text{m}^2$. However, in volcanic regions near the boundaries of tectonic plates, the rate at which the energy is conducted to the surface is much higher - typically $0.3 \text{ W}_t/\text{m}^2$. If we insert these figures into the thermal conductivity law

$$q = K_T \frac{\Delta T}{z}$$

we can obtain an understanding of the types of geothermal resources available throughout the world. In the thermal conductivity equation, q is the power conducted per unit area, while K_T is the thermal conductivity of the material through the energy is passing. For sandstones, limestones and most crystalline rocks, thermal conductivities are in the range $2.5\text{-}3.5 \text{ W}_t/(\text{m } ^\circ\text{C})$. Inserting these values into the thermal conductivity equation, we find that in regions near tectonic plate boundaries we can reach temperatures of 200°C by drilling only 2 kilometers into rocks of the types named above. If the strata at that depth contain water, it will be in the form of highly-compressed steam. Such

a geothermal resource is called a *high-enthalpy* resource⁷.

In addition to high-enthalpy geothermal resources there are *low-enthalpy* resources in nonvolcanic regions of the world, especially in basins covered by sedimentary rocks. Clays and shales have a low thermal conductivity, typically $1\text{--}2 \text{ W}_t/(\text{m } ^\circ\text{C})$. When we combine these figures with the global average geothermal power transmission, $q = 0.06 \text{ W}_t/\text{m}^2$, the thermal conduction equation tells us that $\Delta T/z = 0.04 ^\circ\text{C}/\text{m}$. In such a region the geothermal resources may not be suitable for the generation of electrical power, but nevertheless adequate for heating buildings. The Creil district heating scheme north of Paris is an example of a project where geothermal energy from a low enthalpy resource is used for heating buildings.

The total quantity of geothermal electrical power produced in the world today is 8 GW_e , with an additional 16 GW_t used for heating houses and buildings. In the United States alone, 2.7 GW_e are derived from geothermal sources. In some countries, for example Iceland and Canada, geothermal energy is used both for electrical power generation and for heating houses.

There are three methods for obtaining geothermal power in common use today: Deep wells may yield dry steam, which can be used directly to drive turbines. Alternatively water so hot that it boils when brought to the surface may be pumped from deep wells in volcanic regions. The steam is then used to drive turbines. Finally, if the water from geothermal wells is less hot, it may be used in binary plants, where its heat is exchanged with an organic fluid which then boils. In this last method, the organic vapor drives the turbines. In all three methods, water is pumped back into the wells to be reheated. The largest dry steam field in the world is The Geysers, 145 kilometers north of San Francisco, which produces $1,000 \text{ MW}_e$.

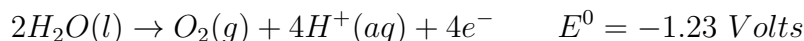
There is a fourth method of obtaining geothermal energy, in which water is pumped down from the surface and is heated by hot dry rocks. In order to obtain a sufficiently large area for heat exchange the fissure systems in the rocks must be augmented, for example by pumping water down at high pressures several hundred meters away from the collection well. The European Union has established an experimental station at Soultz-sous-Forêts in the Upper Rhine to explore this technique. The experiments performed at Soultz will determine whether the “hot dry rock” method can be made economically viable. If so, it can potentially offer the world a very important source of renewable energy.

The molten lava of volcanoes also offers a potential source of geothermal energy that may become available in the future, but at present, no technology has been developed that is capable of using it.

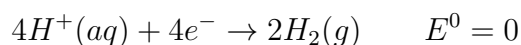
⁷Enthalpy $\equiv H \equiv U + PV$ is a thermodynamic quantity that takes into account not only the internal energy U of a gas, but also energy PV that may be obtained by allowing it to expand.

Hydrogen technologies

When water containing a little acid is placed in a container with two electrodes and subjected to an external direct current voltage greater than 1.23 Volts, bubbles of hydrogen gas form at one electrode (the cathode), while bubbles of oxygen gas form at the other electrode (the anode). At the cathode, the half-reaction

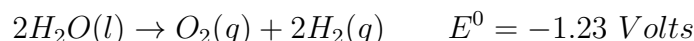


takes place, while at the anode, the half-reaction



occurs.

Half-reactions differ from ordinary chemical reactions in containing electrons either as reactants or as products. In electrochemical reactions, such as the electrolysis of water, these electrons are either supplied or removed by the external circuit. When the two half-reactions are added together, we obtain the total reaction:



Notice that $4H^+$ and $4e^-$ cancel out when the two half-reactions are added. The total reaction does not occur spontaneously (as is discussed in Appendix A), but it can be driven by an external potential E , provided that the magnitude of E is greater than 1.23 volts.

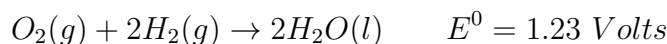
When this experiment is performed in the laboratory, platinum is often used for the electrodes, but electrolysis of water can also be performed using electrodes made of graphite.

Electrolysis of water to produce hydrogen gas has been proposed as a method for energy storage in a future renewable energy system. For example, it might be used to store energy generated by photovoltaics in desert areas of the world. Compressed hydrogen gas could then be transported to other regions and used in fuel cells. Electrolysis of water and storage of hydrogen could also be used to solve the problem of intermittency associated with wind energy or solar energy.

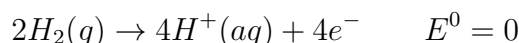
Hydrogen fuel cells

Fuel cells allow us to convert the energy of chemical reactions directly into electrical power. In hydrogen fuel cells, for example, the exact reverse of the

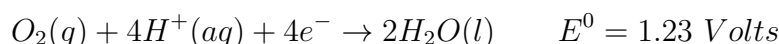
electrolysis of water takes place. Hydrogen reacts with oxygen, and produces electricity and water, the reaction being



The arrangement of the a hydrogen fuel cell is such that the hydrogen cannot react directly with the oxygen, releasing heat. Instead, two half reactions take place, one at each electrode, as was just mentioned in connection with the electrolysis of water. In a hydrogen fuel cell, hydrogen gas produces electrons and hydrogen H^+ ions at one of the electrodes.



The electrons flow through the external circuit to the oxygen electrode, while the hydrogen ions complete the circuit by flowing through the interior of the cell (from which the hydrogen and oxygen molecules are excluded by semipermeable membranes) to the oxygen electrode. Here the electrons react with oxygen molecules and H^+ ions to form water.



In this process, a large part of the chemical energy of the reaction becomes available as electrical power.

We can recall that the theoretical maximum efficiency of a heat engine operating between a cold reservoir at temperature T_C and a hot reservoir at T_H is $1 - T_C/T_H$, where the temperatures are expressed on the Kelvin scale. Since fuel cells are not heat engines, their theoretical maximum efficiency is not limited in this way. Thus it can be much more efficient to generate electricity by reacting hydrogen and oxygen in a fuel cell than it would be to burn the hydrogen in a heat engine and then use the power of the engine to drive a generator.

Hydrogen technologies are still at an experimental stage. Furthermore, they do not offer us a source of renewable energy, but only means for storage, transportation and utilization of energy derived from other sources. Nevertheless, it seems likely that hydrogen technologies will have great importance in the future.

Germany's ban on internal combustion energy vehicles

The Parliament of Germany recently voted to ban the sale of internal combustion engine motor vehicles after 2030⁸.

⁸<http://www.ecowatch.com/germany-bans-combustion-engine-cars-2037788435.html>

Germany's Bundesrat, its upper house of parliament, passed a bipartisan resolution calling for a ban on sales of new vehicles powered by internal combustion engines, which includes both gasoline and diesel.

In a statement reported in the newsmagazine *Der Spiegel*, the Green Party lawmaker Oliver Krischer said: "If the Paris agreement to curb climate-warming emissions is to be taken seriously, no new combustion engine cars should be allowed on roads after 2030".

This remarkably farsighted action by the German Parliament will have enormously important consequences. More than a million electric vehicles are already on the world's roads⁹. They need a network of stations at which their batteries can be recharged, but once a critical number is passed, such recharging stations will become very widespread. Germany's farsighted action gives advance warning to the automotive industry, so that it can start today to re-tool for the coming revolution in transportation.

Some concluding remarks on energy

It can be seen from our discussion of renewable energy technologies that they can potentially offer a partial replacement for the fossil fuels on which the world is now dependent. All forms of renewable energy should be developed simultaneously, since all will be needed. Energy conservation and changes of lifestyle will also be necessary. Much of the limited amount of energy that will be available in the future will be needed for agriculture, and therefore less energy will be available for transportation and industry.

It seems likely that photovoltaics, solar thermal power, wind power, biomass and wave power will become the major energy sources of the future. In addition, hydropower is extremely helpful in overcoming the problem of intermittency, while other forms of renewable energy may have great advantages in certain locations.

The transition to renewable energy will require wholehearted governmental commitment, tax changes, and a considerable investment in research. At present nuclear energy, nuclear research and the oil industry all receive enormous governmental support. It is vital that this support should go instead to renewable energy technologies.

The time factor is also important. The Hubbert peak for oil will occur in a decade, and the peak for natural gas in two decades. After that, the outlook for the future is that petroleum and natural gas will become more and more expensive - finally so expensive that they will not be used as fuels. To minimize the shock of these events, and to avoid dangerous climate change,

⁹<http://www.ecowatch.com/1-million-electric-cars-are-now-on-the-worlds-roads-1891162177.html>

serious work on substitutes must begin immediately, and on a large scale. At present the development of renewable energy is proceeding so slowly that if the trend is not corrected, we can anticipate a period of great energy scarcity and economic trauma.

The transition to renewable energy will involve rededication of much land from agriculture to energy generation. This will be easiest in countries where the population density is low, and difficult in countries that already have problems in feeding their people.

3.4 Metals

W. David Menzie (Chief of the Minerals Information Team of the U.S. Geological Survey) testified to a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006 that global reserves of copper are approximately 470 million tons. He also stated that world consumption of copper in 2000 was 14.9 million tons per year, but that it is increasing at 3.1% per year and is expected to reach 27 Mt/y by 2020. Menzie predicted that most of this increase will be in the developing countries. For example, China's use of copper is expected to increase from 2 Mt/y in 2000 to 5.6 Mt/y in 2020, while for India, the increase will be from 0.4 Mt/y to 1.6 Mt/y.

At the 2000 rate of use, global copper reserves will be exhausted in 31 years, while if used at a higher rate, the reserves will last for a shorter time. It is predicted that a Hubbert peak will occur for copper, analogous to the Hubbert peaks for petroleum and natural gas. Thus, copper will not disappear entirely, but there will be a date when the production of copper will reach a maximum and afterward decline because of rising prices.

Reserve indices

The reserve index of a metal is defined as the size of its reserves divided by the current annual rate of production. Today, many metals have reserve indices between 10 years and 100 years. These include indium, tantalum, gold, bismuth, silver, cadmium, cobalt, arsenic, tungsten, molybdenum, tin, nickel, lead, zinc, and copper, while magnesium and iron have reserve indices of approximately 100 years¹⁰.

¹⁰Craig, J.R., Vaughn, D.J. and Skinner, B.J., *Resources of the Earth: Origin, Use and Environmental Impact, Third Edition*, page 64.

Recycling metals

Future exploration may increase the size of known reserves of metals; and future advances in technology may also make it possible to use lower grade ores. However, we must remember that the extraction of metals from their ores requires much energy. In the long-term future, energy will probably not be available for the production of (for example) iron, steel, and aluminum on the scale that we know today. Thus, recycling will assume great importance.

Substitutes for metals

It seems likely that composite materials, such as carbon-fiber-reinforced plastic and glass-reinforced plastic (fiberglass), will become important in the future as substitutes for metals. Carbon fiber consists of threads of carbon as thin as 6 microns (0.006 mm). The carbon atoms in such a fiber are bonded together in crystals, aligned along the axis of the fiber, and in this configuration they have incredible strength in relation to their weight. In the composite material, the carbon fibers are protected by a resin. The result is a material that has both toughness and an extremely high strength-to-weight ratio.

Suggestions for further reading

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Chapter 4

THE GLOBAL FOOD AND REFUGEE CRISIS

“Unless progress with agricultural yields remains very strong, the next century will experience human misery that, on a sheer numerical scale, will exceed everything that has come before”

Nobel Laureate Norman Borlaug speaking of a global food crisis in the 21st century

4.1 Introduction

As glaciers melt in the Himalayas, depriving India and China of summer water supplies; as sea levels rise, drowning the fertile rice fields of Viet Nam and Bangladesh; as drought threatens the productivity of grain-producing regions of North America; and as the end of the fossil fuel era impacts modern high-yield agriculture, there is a threat of wide-spread famine. There is a danger that the 1.5 billion people who are undernourished today will not survive an even more food-scarce future.

People threatened with famine will become refugees, desperately seeking entry into countries where food shortages are less acute. Wars, such as those currently waged in the Middle East, will add to the problem.

What can we do to avoid this crisis, or at least to reduce its severity? We must urgently address the problem of climate change; and we must shift money from military expenditure to the support of birth control programs and agricultural research. We must also replace the institution of war by a system of effective global governance and enforceable international laws.

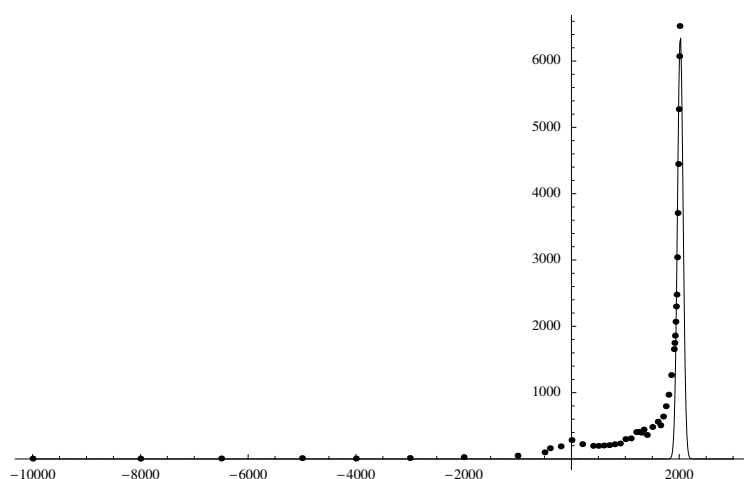


Figure 4.1: *Population growth and fossil fuel use, seen on a time-scale of several thousand years. The dots are population estimates in millions from the US Census Bureau. Fossil fuel use appears as a spike-like curve, rising from almost nothing to a high value, and then falling again to almost nothing in the space of a few centuries. When the two curves are plotted together, the explosive rise of global population is seen to be simultaneous with, and perhaps partially driven by, the rise of fossil fuel use. This raises the question of whether the world's population is headed for a crash when the fossil fuel era has ended. (Author's own graph)*

4.2 Optimum population in the distant future

What is the optimum population of the world? It is certainly not the maximum number that can be squeezed onto the globe by eradicating every species of plant and animal that cannot be eaten. The optimum global population is one that can be supported in comfort, equality and dignity - and with respect for the environment.

In 1848 (when there were just over one billion people in the world), John Stuart Mill described the optimal global population in the following words:

“The density of population necessary to enable mankind to obtain, in the greatest degree, all the advantages of cooperation and social intercourse, has, in the most populous countries, been attained. A population may be too crowded, although all be amply supplied with food and raiment.”

“... Nor is there much satisfaction in contemplating the world with nothing left to the spontaneous activity of nature; with every rood of land brought into cultivation, which is capable of growing food for human beings; every flowery waste or natural pasture plowed up, all quadrupeds or birds which are not domesticated for man’s use exterminated as his rivals for food, every hedgerow or superfluous tree rooted out, and scarcely a place left where a wild shrub or flower could grow without being eradicated as a weed in the name of improved agriculture. If the earth must lose that great portion of its pleasantness which it owes to things that the unlimited increase of wealth and population would extirpate from it, for the mere purpose of enabling it to support a larger, but not better or happier population, I sincerely hope, for the sake of posterity, that they will be content to be stationary, long before necessity compels them to it.”¹

Has the number of humans in the world already exceeded the earth’s sustainable limits? Will the global population of humans crash catastrophically after having exceeded the carrying capacity of the environment? There is certainly a danger that this will happen - a danger that the 21st century will bring very large scale famines to vulnerable parts of the world, because modern energy-intensive agriculture will be dealt a severe blow by prohibitively high petroleum prices, and because climate change will reduce the world’s agricultural output. When the major glaciers in the Himalayas have melted, they will no longer be able to give India and China summer water supplies; rising oceans will drown much agricultural land; and aridity will reduce the output of many regions that now produce much of the world’s grain. Falling water tables in overdrawn aquifers, and loss of topsoil will add to the problem. We should be aware of the threat of a serious global food crisis in the 21st century

¹John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy, With Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy*, (1848).

if we are to have a chance of avoiding it.

The term *ecological footprint* was introduced by William Rees and Mathis Wackernagel in the early 1990's to compare demands on the environment with the earth's capacity to regenerate. In 2005, humanity used environmental resources at such a rate that it would take 1.3 earths to renew them. In other words, we have already exceeded the earth's carrying capacity. Since eliminating the poverty that characterizes much of the world today will require more resources per capita, rather than less, it seems likely that in the era beyond fossil fuels, the optimum global population will be considerably less than the present population of the world.

4.3 Population growth and the Green Revolution

Limitations on cropland

In 1944 the Norwegian-American plant geneticist Norman Borlaug was sent to Mexico by the Rockefeller Foundation to try to produce new wheat varieties that might increase Mexico's agricultural output. Borlaug's dedicated work on this project was spectacularly successful. He remained with the project for 16 years, and his group made 6,000 individual crossings of wheat varieties to produce high-yield disease-resistant strains.

In 1963, Borlaug visited India, bringing with him 100 kg. of seeds from each of his most promising wheat strains. After testing these strains in Asia, he imported 450 tons of the Lerma Rojo and Sonora 64 varieties - 250 tons for Pakistan and 200 for India. By 1968, the success of these varieties was so great that school buildings had to be commandeered to store the output. Borlaug's work began to be called a "Green Revolution". In India, the research on high-yield crops was continued and expanded by Prof. M.S. Swaminathan and his coworkers. The work of Green Revolution scientists, such as Norman Borlaug and M.S. Swaminathan, has been credited with saving the lives of as many as a billion people.

Despite these successes, Borlaug believes that the problem of population growth is still a serious one. "Africa and the former Soviet republics", Borlaug states, "and the Cerrado², are the last frontiers. After they are in use, the world will have no additional sizable blocks of arable land left to put into production, unless you are willing to level whole forests, which you should not do. So, future food-production increases will have to come from higher yields. And though I have no doubt that yields will keep going up, whether they

² The Cerrado is a large savanna region of Brazil.



Figure 4.2: *Professor M.S. Swaminathan, father of the Green Revolution in India.* (Open and Shut7)



Figure 4.3: *Norman Borlaug and agronomist George Harrer in 1943.* (Human Wrongs Watch)

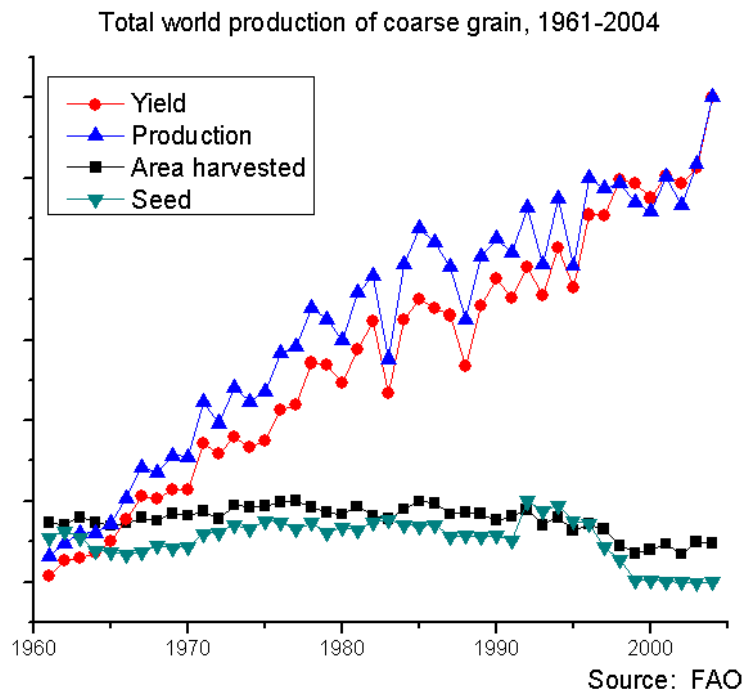


Figure 4.4: *This graph shows the total world production of coarse grain between 1960 and 2004. Because of high-yield varieties, the yield of grain increased greatly. Notice, however, that the land under cultivation remained almost constant. High-yield agriculture depends on large inputs of fossil fuel energy and irrigation, and may be difficult to maintain in the future. (FAO)*

can go up enough to feed the population monster is another matter. Unless progress with agricultural yields remains very strong, the next century will experience human misery that, on a sheer numerical scale, will exceed the worst of everything that has come before.”

With regard to the prospect of increasing the area of cropland, a report by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (*Provisional Indicative World Plan for Agricultural Development*, FAO, Rome, 1970) states that “In Southern Asia,... in some countries of Eastern Asia, in the Near East and North Africa... there is almost no scope for expanding agricultural area... In the drier regions, it will even be necessary to return to permanent pasture the land that is marginal and submarginal for cultivation. In most of Latin America and Africa south of the Sahara, there are still considerable possibilities for expanding cultivated areas; but the costs of development are high, and it will often be more economical to intensify the utilization of areas already settled.” Thus there is a possibility of increasing the area of cropland in Africa south of the Sahara and in Latin America, but only at the cost of heavy investment and at the additional cost of destruction of tropical rain forests.

Rather than an increase in the global area of cropland, we may encounter a future loss of cropland through soil erosion, salination, desertification, loss of topsoil, depletion of minerals in topsoil, urbanization and failure of water supplies. In China and in the southwestern part of the United States, water tables are falling at an alarming rate. The Ogallala aquifer (which supplies water to many of the plains states in the central and southern parts of the United States) has a yearly overdraft of 160%.

In the 1950's, both the U.S.S.R and Turkey attempted to convert arid grasslands into wheat farms. In both cases, the attempts were defeated by drought and wind erosion, just as the wheat farms of Oklahoma were overcome by drought and dust in the 1930's.

If irrigation of arid lands is not performed with care, salt may be deposited, so that the land is ruined for agriculture. This type of desertification can be seen, for example, in some parts of Pakistan. Another type of desertification can be seen in the Sahel region of Africa, south of the Sahara. Rapid population growth in the Sahel has led to overgrazing, destruction of trees, and wind erosion, so that the land has become unable to support even its original population.

Especially worrying is a prediction of the International Panel on Climate Change concerning the effect of global warming on the availability of water: According to Model A1 of the IPCC, global warming may, by the 2050's, have reduced by as much as 30% the water available in large areas of world that

now a large producers of grain³.

Added to the agricultural and environmental problems, are problems of finance and distribution. Famines can occur even when grain is available somewhere in the world, because those who are threatened with starvation may not be able to pay for the grain, or for its transportation. The economic laws of supply and demand are not able to solve this type of problem. One says that there is no “demand” for the food (meaning demand in the economic sense), even though people are in fact starving.

4.4 Energy-dependence of modern agriculture

Food prices and energy prices

A very serious problem with Green Revolution plant varieties is that they require heavy inputs of pesticides, fertilizers and irrigation. Because of this, the use of high-yield varieties contributes to social inequality, since only rich farmers can afford the necessary inputs. Monocultures, such as the Green Revolution varieties may also prove to be vulnerable to future epidemics of plant diseases, such as the epidemic that caused the Irish Potato Famine in 1845. Even more importantly, pesticides, fertilizers and irrigation all depend on the use of fossil fuels. One must therefore ask whether high agricultural yields can be maintained in the future, when fossil fuels are expected to become prohibitively scarce and expensive.

Modern agriculture has become highly dependent on fossil fuels, especially on petroleum and natural gas. This is especially true of production of the high-yield grain varieties introduced in the Green Revolution, since these require especially large inputs of fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation. Today, fertilizers are produced using oil and natural gas, while pesticides are synthesized from petroleum feedstocks, and irrigation is driven by fossil fuel energy. Thus agriculture in the developed countries has become a process where inputs of fossil fuel energy are converted into food calories. If one focuses only on the farming operations, the fossil fuel energy inputs are distributed as follows:

1. Manufacture of inorganic fertilizer, 31%
2. Operation of field machinery, 19%
3. Transportation, 16%
4. Irrigation, 13%

³See the discussion of the Stern Report in Chapter 7.

5. Raising livestock (not including livestock feed), 8%
6. Crop drying, 5%
7. Pesticide production, 5%
8. Miscellaneous, 8%

The ratio of the fossil fuel energy inputs to the food calorie outputs depends on how many energy-using elements of food production are included in the accounting. David Pimental and Mario Giampietro of Cornell University estimated in 1994 that U.S. agriculture required 0.7 kcal of fossil fuel energy inputs to produce 1.0 kcal of food energy. However, this figure was based on U.N. statistics that did not include fertilizer feedstocks, pesticide feedstocks, energy and machinery for drying crops, or electricity, construction and maintenance of farm buildings. A more accurate calculation, including these inputs, gives an input/output ratio of approximately 1.0. Finally, if the energy expended on transportation, packaging and retailing of food is included, Pimental and Giampietro found that the input/output ratio for the U.S. food system was approximately 10, and this figure did not include energy used for cooking.

The Brundtland Report's ⁴ estimate of the global potential for food production assumes "that the area under food production can be around 1.5 billion hectares (3.7 billion acres - close to the present level), and that the average yields could go up to 5 tons of grain equivalent per hectare (as against the present average of 2 tons of grain equivalent)." In other words, the Brundtland Report assumes an increase in yields by a factor of 2.5. This would perhaps be possible if traditional agriculture could everywhere be replaced by energy-intensive modern agriculture using Green Revolution plant varieties. However, Pimental and Giampietro's studies show that modern energy-intensive agricultural techniques cannot be maintained after fossil fuels have been exhausted.

At the time when the Brundtland Report was written (1987), the global average of 2 tons of grain equivalent per hectare included much higher yields from the sector using modern agricultural methods. Since energy-intensive petroleum-based agriculture cannot be continued in the post-fossil-fuel era, future average crop yields will probably be much less than 2 tons of grain equivalent per hectare.

The 1987 global population was approximately 5 billion. This population was supported by 3 billion tons of grain equivalent per year. After fossil fuels have been exhausted, the total world agricultural output is likely to be considerably less than that, and therefore the population that it will be possible

⁴ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, (1987). This book is often called "The Brundtland Report" after Gro Harlem Brundtland, the head of WCED, who was then Prime Minister of Norway.

to support will probably be considerably less than 5 billion, assuming that our average daily per capita use of food calories remains the same, and assuming that the amount of cropland and pasturage remains the same (1.5 billion hectares cropland, 3.0 billion hectares pasturage).

The Brundtland Report points out that “The present (1987) global average consumption of plant energy for food, seed and animal feed amounts to 6,000 calories daily, with a range among countries of 3,000-15,000 calories, depending on the level of meat consumption.” Thus there is a certain flexibility in the global population that can survive on a given total agricultural output. If the rich countries were willing to eat less meat, more people could be supported.

4.5 Effects of climate change on agriculture

Effects of temperature increase on crops

There is a danger that when climate change causes both temperature increases and increased aridity in regions like the US grain belt, yields will be very much lowered. Of the three main grain types (corn, wheat and rice) corn is the most vulnerable to the direct effect of increases in temperature. One reason for this is the mechanism of pollination of corn: A pollen grain lands on one end of a corn-silk strand, and the germ cell must travel the length of the strand in order to fertilize the kernel. At high temperatures, the corn silk becomes dried out and withered, and is unable to fulfill its biological function. Furthermore, heat can cause the pores on the underside of the corn leaf to close, so that photosynthesis stops.

According to a study made by Mohan Wali and coworkers at Ohio State University, the photosynthetic activity of corn increases until the temperature reaches 20 degrees Celsius. It then remains constant until the temperature reaches 35 degrees, after which it declines. At 40 degrees and above, photosynthesis stops altogether.

Scientists in the Philippines report that the pollination of rice fails entirely at 40 degrees Celsius, leading to crop failures. Wheat yields are also markedly reduced by temperatures in this range.

Predicted effects on rainfall

According to the Stern Report, some of the major grain-producing areas of the world might lose up to 30% of their rainfall by 2050. These regions include much of the United States, Brazil, the Mediterranean region, Eastern Russia and Belarus, the Middle East, Southern Africa and Australia. Of course possibilities for agriculture may simultaneously increase in other regions, but

the net effect of climate change on the world's food supply is predicted to be markedly negative.

Unsustainable use of groundwater

It may seem surprising that fresh water can be regarded as a non-renewable resource. However, groundwater in deep aquifers is often renewed very slowly. Sometimes renewal requires several thousand years. When the rate of withdrawal of groundwater exceeds the rate of renewal, the carrying capacity of the resource has been exceeded, and withdrawal of water becomes analogous to mining a mineral. However, it is more serious than ordinary mining because water is such a necessary support for life.

In many regions of the world today, groundwater is being withdrawn faster than it can be replenished, and important aquifers are being depleted. In China, for example, groundwater levels are falling at an alarming rate. Considerations of water supply in relation to population form the background for China's stringent population policy.

At a recent lecture, Lester Brown of the Worldwatch Institute was asked by a member of the audience to name the resource for which shortages would most quickly become acute. Most of the audience expected him to name oil, but instead he replied "water". Lester Brown then cited China's falling water table. He predicted that within decades, China would be unable to feed itself. He said that this would not cause hunger in China itself: Because of the strength of China's economy, the country would be able to purchase grain on the world market. However Chinese purchases of grain would raise the price, and put world grain out of reach of poor countries in Africa. Thus water shortages in China will produce famine in parts of Africa, Brown predicted.

Under many desert areas of the world are deeply buried water tables formed during glacial periods when the climate of these regions was wetter. These regions include the Middle East and large parts of Africa. Water can be withdrawn from such ancient reservoirs by deep wells and pumping, but only for a limited amount of time.

In oil-rich Saudi Arabia, petroenergy is used to drill wells for ancient water and to bring it to the surface. Much of this water is used to irrigate wheat fields, and this is done to such an extent that Saudi Arabia exports wheat. The country is, in effect, exporting its ancient heritage of water, a policy that it may, in time, regret. A similarly short-sighted project is Muammar Qaddafi's enormous pipeline, which will bring water from ancient sub-desert reservoirs to coastal cities of Libya.

In the United States, the great Ogallala aquifer is being overdrawn. This aquifer is an enormous stratum of water-saturated sand and gravel underlying



Figure 4.5: *Whitechuck Glacier in the North Cascades National Park in 1973.* (Nicholas College)



Figure 4.6: *The same glacier in 2006* (Nicholas College)

parts of northern Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming and South Dakota. The average thickness of the aquifer is about 70 meters. The rate of water withdrawal from the aquifer exceeds the rate of recharge by a factor of eight.

Thus we can see that in many regions, the earth's present population is living on its inheritance of water, rather than its income. This fact, coupled with rapidly increasing populations and climate change, may contribute to a food crisis partway through the 21st century.

Glacial melting and summer water supplies

The summer water supplies of both China and India are threatened by the melting of glaciers. The Gangotri glacier, which is the principle glacier feeding India's great Ganges River, is reported to be melting at an accelerating rate, and it could disappear within a few decades. If this happens, the Ganges could become seasonal, flowing only during the monsoon season.

Chinese agriculture is also threatened by disappearing Himalayan glaciers, in this case those on the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau. The respected Chinese glaciologist Yao Tandong estimates that the glaciers feeding the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers are disappearing at the rate of 7% per year.

The Indus and Mekong Rivers will be similarly affected by the melting of glaciers. Lack of water during the summer season could have a serious impact on the irrigation of rice and wheat fields.

Forest loss and climate change

Mature forests contain vast amounts of sequestered carbon, not only in their trees, but also in the carbon-rich soil of the forest floor. When a forest is logged or burned to make way for agriculture, this carbon is released into the atmosphere. One fifth of the global carbon emissions are at present due to destruction of forests. This amount is greater than the CO₂ emissions for the world's transportation systems.

An intact forest pumps water back into the atmosphere, increasing inland rainfall and benefiting agriculture. By contrast, deforestation, for example in the Amazonian rainforest, accelerates the flow of water back into the ocean, thus reducing inland rainfall. There is a danger that the Amazonian rainforest may be destroyed to such an extent that the region will become much more dry. If this happens, the forest may become vulnerable to fires produced by lightning strikes. This is one of the feedback loops against which the Stern Report warns - the drying and burning of the Amazonian rainforest may become irreversible, greatly accelerating climate change, if destruction of the forest proceeds beyond a certain point.

Erosion of topsoil

Besides depending on an adequate supply of water, food production also depends on the condition of the thin layer of topsoil that covers the world's croplands. This topsoil is being degraded and eroded at an alarming rate: According to the World Resources Institute and the United Nations Environment Programme, "It is estimated that since World War II, 1.2 billion hectares... has suffered at least moderate degradation as a result of human activity. This

is a vast area, roughly the size of China and India combined.” This area is 27% of the total area currently devoted to agriculture ⁵. The report goes on to say that the degradation is greatest in Africa.

The risk of topsoil erosion is greatest when marginal land is brought into cultivation, since marginal land is usually on steep hillsides which are vulnerable to water erosion when wild vegetation is removed.

David Pimental and his associates at Cornell University pointed out in 1995 that “Because of erosion-associated loss of productivity and population growth, the per capita food supply has been reduced over the past 10 years and continues to fall. The Food and Agricultural Organization reports that the per capita production of grains which make up 80% of the world’s food supply, has been declining since 1984.”

Pimental et al. add that “Not only is the availability of cropland per capita decreasing as the world population grows, but arable land is being lost due to excessive pressure on the environment. For instance, during the past 40 years nearly one-third of the world’s cropland (1.5 billion hectares) has been abandoned because of soil erosion and degradation. Most of the replacement has come from marginal land made available by removing forests. Agriculture accounts for 80% of the annual deforestation.”

Topsoil can also be degraded by the accumulation of salt when irrigation water evaporates. The worldwide area of irrigated land has increased from 8 million hectares in 1800 to more than 100 million hectares today. This land is especially important to the world food supply because it is carefully tended and yields are large in proportion to the area. To protect this land from salination, it should be irrigated in such a way that evaporation is minimized.

Finally cropland with valuable topsoil is being be lost to urban growth and highway development, a problem that is made more severe by growing populations and by economic growth.

Laterization

Every year, more than 100,000 square kilometers of rain forest are cleared and burned, an area which corresponds to that of Switzerland and the Netherlands combined. Almost half of the world’s tropical forests have already been destroyed. Ironically, the land thus cleared often becomes unsuitable for agriculture within a few years.

Tropical soils may seem to be fertile when covered with luxuriant vegetation, but they are usually very poor in nutrients because of leeching by heavy

⁵The total area devoted to agriculture throughout the world is 1.5 billion hectares of cropland and 3.0 billion hectares of pasturage.

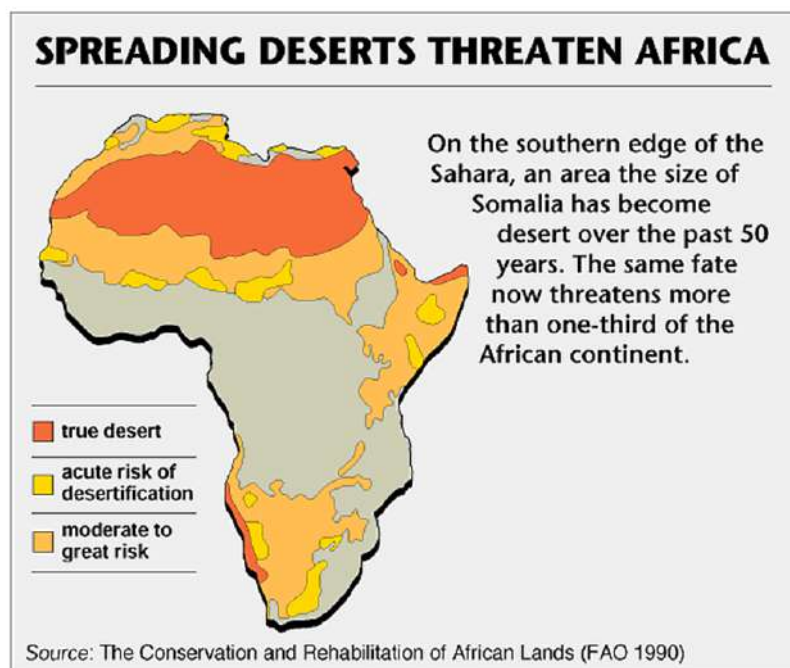


Figure 4.7: *Desert regions of the Africa that are in danger of spreading.* (FAO)

rains. The nutrients which remain are contained in the vegetation itself; and when the forest cover is cut and burned, the nutrients are rapidly lost.

Often the remaining soil is rich in aluminum oxide and iron oxide. When such soils are exposed to oxygen and sun-baking, a rocklike substance called Laterite is formed. The temples of Angkor Wat in Cambodia are built of Laterite; and it is thought that laterization of the soil contributed to the disappearance of the Khmer civilization, which built these temples.

4.6 Harmful effects of industrialized farming

A major global public health crisis may soon be produced by the wholesale use of antibiotics in the food of healthy farm animals. The resistance factors produced by shovelling antibiotics into animal food produces resistance factors (plasmids) which can easily be transferred to human pathogens. A related problem is the excessive use of pesticides and artificial fossil-fuel-derived fertilizers in agriculture. Pharming is not a joke. It is a serious threat.⁶

Plasmids

Bacteria belong to a class of organisms (prokaryotes) whose cells do not have a nucleus. Instead, the DNA of the bacterial chromosome is arranged in a large loop. In the early 1950's, Joshua Lederberg discovered that bacteria can exchange genetic information. He found that a frequently-exchanged gene, the F-factor (which conferred fertility), was not linked to other bacterial genes; and he deduced that the DNA of the F-factor was not physically a part of the main bacterial chromosome. In 1952, Lederberg coined the word "plasmid" to denote any extrachromosomal genetic system.

In 1959, it was discovered in Japan that genes for resistance to antibiotics can be exchanged between bacteria; and the name "R-factors" was given to these genes. Like the F-factors, the R-factors did not seem to be part of the main loop of bacterial DNA.

⁶<http://ecowatch.com/2014/03/06/misuse-antibiotics-fatal-superbug-crisis/>
<http://ecowatch.com/2013/12/06/8-scary-facts-about-antibiotic-resistance/>
<http://ecowatch.com/2015/03/27/obama-fight-superbug-crisis/>
<http://ecowatch.com/2014/03/12/fda-regulation-antibiotics-factory-farms/>
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<http://sustainableagriculture.net/about-us/>
<https://pwccc.wordpress.com/programa/>

Because of the medical implications of this discovery, much attention was focused on the R-factors. It was found that they were plasmids, small loops of DNA existing inside the bacterial cell, but not attached to the bacterial chromosome. Further study showed that, in general, between one percent and three percent of bacterial genetic information is carried by plasmids, which can be exchanged freely even between different species of bacteria.

In the words of the microbiologist, Richard Novick, "Appreciation of the role of plasmids has produced a rather dramatic shift in biologists' thinking about genetics. The traditional view was that the genetic makeup of a species was about the same from one cell to another, and was constant over long periods of time. Now a significant proportion of genetic traits are known to be variable (present in some individual cells or strains, absent in others), labile (subject to frequent loss or gain) and mobile, all because those traits are associated with plasmids or other atypical genetic systems."

Because of the ease with which plasmids conferring resistance to antibiotics can be transferred from animal bacteria to the bacteria carrying human disease, the practice of feeding antibiotics to healthy farm animals is becoming a major human health hazard. The World Health Organization has warned that if we lose effective antibiotics through this mechanism, "Many common infections will no longer have a cure, and could kill unabated". The US Center for Disease Control has pointed to the emergence of "nightmare bacteria", and the chief medical officer for England Prof Dame Sally Davies has evoked parallels with the "apocalypse".

Pesticides, artificial fertilizers and topsoil

A closely analogous danger results from the overuse of pesticides and petroleum-derived fertilizers in agriculture. A very serious problem with Green Revolution plant varieties is that they require heavy inputs of pesticides, fertilizers and irrigation. Because of this, the use of high-yield varieties contributes to social inequality, since only rich farmers can afford the necessary inputs. Monocultures, such as the Green Revolution varieties may also prove to be vulnerable to future plant diseases, such as the epidemic that caused the Irish Potato Famine in 1845. Even more importantly, pesticides, fertilizers and irrigation all depend on the use of fossil fuels. One must ask, therefore, whether high-yield agriculture can be maintained in the post-fossil-fuel era.

Topsoil is degraded by excessive use of pesticides and artificial fertilizers. Natural topsoil is rich in organic material, which contains sequestered carbon that would otherwise be present in our atmosphere in the form of greenhouse gases. In addition, natural topsoil contains an extraordinarily rich diversity of bacteria and worms that act to convert agricultural wastes from one year's

harvest into nutrients for the growth of next year's crop. Pesticides kill these vital organisms, and make the use of artificial fertilizers necessary.

Finally, many small individual farmers, whose methods are sustainable, are being eliminated by secret land-grabs or put out of business because they cannot compete with unsustainable high-yield agriculture. Traditional agriculture contains a wealth of knowledge and biodiversity, which it would be wise for the world to preserve.

4.7 The demographic transition

The phrase “developing countries” is more than a euphemism; it expresses the hope that with the help of a transfer of technology from the industrialized nations, all parts of the world can achieve prosperity. Some of the forces that block this hope have just been mentioned. Another factor that prevents the achievement of worldwide prosperity is population growth.

In the words of Dr. Halfdan Mahler, former Director General of the World Health Organization, “Country after country has seen painfully achieved increases in total output, food production, health and educational facilities and employment opportunities reduced or nullified by excessive population growth.”

The growth of population is linked to excessive urbanization, infrastructure failures and unemployment. In rural districts in the developing countries, family farms are often divided among a growing number of heirs until they can no longer be subdivided. Those family members who are no longer needed on the land have no alternative except migration to overcrowded cities, where the infrastructure is unable to cope so many new arrivals. Often the new migrants are forced to live in excrement-filled makeshift slums, where dysentery, hepatitis and typhoid are endemic, and where the conditions for human life sink to the lowest imaginable level. In Brazil, such shanty towns are called “favelas”.

If modern farming methods are introduced in rural areas while population growth continues, the exodus to cities is aggravated, since modern techniques are less labor-intensive and favor large farms. In cities, the development of adequate infrastructure requires time, and it becomes a hopeless task if populations are growing rapidly. Thus, population stabilization is a necessary first step for development.

It can be observed that birth rates fall as countries develop. However, development is sometimes blocked by the same high birth rates that economic progress might have prevented. In this situation (known as the “demographic trap”), economic gains disappear immediately because of the demands of an exploding population.



Figure 4.8: *Child suffering with the deficiency disease Marasmus in India.* (Public domain)

For countries caught in the demographic trap, government birth control programs are especially important, because one cannot rely on improved social conditions to slow birth rates. Since health and lowered birth rates should be linked, it is appropriate that family-planning should be an important part of programs for public health and economic development.

A recent study conducted by Robert F. Lapham of Demographic Health Surveys and W. Parker Maudlin of the Rockefeller Foundation has shown that the use of birth control is correlated both with socio-economic setting and with the existence of strong family-planning programs. The implication of this study is that even in the absence of increased living standards, family-planning programs can be successful, provided they have strong government support.

China, the world's most populous nation, has adopted the somewhat draconian policy of allowing only one child for families in living in towns and cities (35.9% of the population). Chinese leaders obtained popular support for their one-child policy by means of an educational program which emphasized future projections of diminishing water resources and diminishing cropland per person if population increased unchecked. Like other developing countries, China has a very young population, which will continue to grow even when fertility has fallen below the replacement level because so many of its members are contributing to the birth rate rather than to the death rate. China's present population is 1.3 billion. Its projected population for the year 2025 is 1.5 billion. China's one-child policy is supported by 75% of the country's people, but the methods of enforcement are sometimes criticized, and it has led to a M/F sex ratio of 1.17/1.00. The natural baseline for the sex ratio ranges between 1.03/1.00 and 1.07/1.00.

Education of women and higher status for women are vitally important measures, not only for their own sake, but also because in many countries these social reforms have proved to be the key to lower birth rates. Religious leaders who oppose programs for the education of women and for family planning on "ethical" grounds should think carefully about the scope and consequences of the catastrophic global famine which will undoubtedly occur within the next 50 years if population is allowed to increase unchecked. Do these leaders really wish to be responsible for the suffering and death from starvation of hundreds of millions of people?

At the United Nations Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in September, 1994, a theme which emerged very clearly was that one of the most important keys to controlling the global population explosion is giving women better education and equal rights. These goals are desirable for the sake of increased human happiness, and for the sake of the uniquely life-oriented point of view which women can give us; but in addition, education



Figure 4.9: *Education of women and higher status for women are vitally important measures, not only for their own sake, but also because these social reforms have proved to be the key to lower birth rates.* (Kundan Srivastava)

and improved status for women have shown themselves to be closely connected with lowered birth rates. When women lack education and independent careers outside the home, they can be forced into the role of baby-producing machines by men who do not share in the drudgery of cooking, washing and cleaning; but when women have educational, legal, economic, social and political equality with men, experience has shown that they choose to limit their families to a moderate size.

Sir Partha Dasgupta of Cambridge University has pointed out that the changes needed to break the cycle of overpopulation and poverty are all desirable in themselves. Besides education and higher status for women, they include state-provided social security for old people, provision of water supplies near to dwellings, provision of health services to all, abolition of child labor and general economic development.

The UN Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants

On September 19, 2016, the United Nations General Assembly held a 1-day summit meeting to address the pressing problem of refugees. It is a problem that has been made acute by armed conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, and by climate change.

One of the outcomes of the summit was the a Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. Here is a statement of the severity of the problem from paragraph 3 of the Declaration:

“We are witnessing in today’s world an unprecedented level of human mobility. More people than ever before live in a country other than the one in which they were born. Migrants are present in all countries of the world. Most of them move without incident. In 2015, their number surpassed 244 million, growing at a rate faster than the world’s population. However, there are 65 million forcibly displaced persons, including over 21 million refugees, 3 million asylum seekers and over 40 million internally displaced persons.”

Sadly, the world’s response to the tragic plight of refugees fleeing from zones of armed conflict has been less than generous. Men, women and many children, trying to escape from almost certain death in the war-torn Middle East, have been met, not with sympathy and kindness, but with barbed wire and tear gas.

Germany’s Chancellor, Angela Merkel, courageously made arrangements for her country to accept a large number of refugees, but as a consequence her party has suffered political setbacks. On the whole, European governments have moved to the right, as anti-refugee parties gained strength. The United States, Canada Australia and Russia, countries that could potentially save the lives of many refugees, have accepted almost none. In contrast, tiny Lebanon, despite all its problems, has become the home of so many refugees that they are a very large fraction of the country’s total population.

As the effects of climate change become more pronounced, we can expect the suffering and hopelessness of refugees to become even more severe. This is a challenge which the world must meet with humanity and solidarity.

The World Cities Report, 2016

According to the World Cities Report⁷, by 2030, two thirds of the world’s population will be living in cities. As the urban population increases, the land area occupied by cities is increasing at a higher rate. It is projected that by 2030, the urban population of developing countries will double, while the area covered by cities could triple.

Commenting on this, the UN-Habitat Executive Director, Joan Clos, said: “In the twenty years since the Habitat II conference, the world has seen a gathering of its population in urban areas. This has been accompanied by socioeconomic growth in many instances. But the urban landscape is changing and with it, the pressing need for a cohesive and realistic approach to urbanization”.

⁷<http://wcr.unhabitat.org/>

“Such urban expansion is wasteful in terms of land and energy consumption and increases greenhouse gas emissions. The urban centre of gravity, at least for megacities, has shifted to the developing regions.”

One can foresee that in the future, as fossil fuels become increasingly scarce, the problem of feeding urban populations will become acute.

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Chapter 5

CLIMATE CHANGE AND AGRICULTURE

5.1 Lester Brown's lecture in Copenhagen

After a lecture at the University of Copenhagen in the 1980's, Lester R. Brown of the Earth Policy Institute was asked which resource would be the first to become critically scarce. Everyone in the audience expected him to say "oil", but instead he said "fresh water". He went on to explain that falling water tables in China would soon make China unable to feed its population. This would not cause famine in China itself because of the strength of the Chinese economy, which would allow the Chinese to purchase grain on the world market. However, shortages of fresh water in China would indeed cause famine, for example in Africa, because Chinese demand for grain would raise prices on the world market beyond the ability of poor countries to pay.



Figure 5.1: *Lester R. Brown*

5.2 Predictions of drought in the Stern Review

According to a report presented to the Oxford Institute of Economic Policy by Sir Nicholas Stern on 31 January, 2006, areas likely to lose up to 30% of their rainfall by the 2050's because of climate change include much of the United States, Brazil, the Mediterranean region, Eastern Russia and Belarus, the Middle East, Southern Africa and Southern Australia. Meanwhile rainfall is predicted to increase up to 30% in Central Africa, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Siberia, and much of China.

Stern and his team point out that "We can... expect to see changes in the Indian monsoon, which could have a huge impact on the lives of hundreds of millions of people in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Most climate models suggest that the monsoon will change, although there is still uncertainty about exactly how. Nevertheless, small changes in the monsoon could have a huge impact. Today, a fluctuation of just 10% in either direction from average monsoon rainfall is known to cause either severe flooding or drought. A weak summer monsoon, for example, can lead to poor harvests and food shortages among the rural population - two-thirds of India's almost 1.1 billion people. Heavier-than-usual monsoon downpours can also have devastating consequences..."

In some regions, melting of glaciers can be serious from the standpoint of dry-season water supplies. For example, melts from glaciers in the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas now supply much of Asia, including China and India, with a dry-season water supply. Complete melting of these glacial systems would cause an exaggerated runoff for a few decades, after which there would be a drying out of some of the most densely populated regions of the world.

5.3 Ocean current changes and failure of monsoons

It is expected that climate change will affect ocean currents, and hence also affect monsoon rainfall. We are already experiencing a diversion of the Gulf Stream due to southward currents of cold water from melting ice in the Arctic. This has caused what is known as the *North Atlantic Anomaly*. While most regions of the world are experiencing rising temperatures, the North Atlantic and several northern European countries are exceptions to this rule, and have cooled. Complete failure of the Gulf Stream would lead to much colder temperatures in Europe.

Changes in ocean currents have already lead to the failure of the West African Monsoon, and this has already produced severe food insecurity in West Africa.

In the future, climate-changed ocean currents may lead to failures of monsoons in South-east Asia, and thus damage the food supply of almost two billion people.

5.4 Falling water tables around the world

Under many desert areas of the world are deeply buried water tables formed during glacial periods when the climate of these regions was wetter. These regions include the Middle East and large parts of Africa. Water can be withdrawn from such ancient reservoirs by deep wells and pumping, but only for a limited amount of time.

In oil-rich Saudi Arabia, petroenergy is used to drill wells for ancient water and to bring it to the surface. Much of this water is used to irrigate wheat fields, and this is done to such an extent that Saudi Arabia exports wheat. The country is, in effect, exporting its ancient heritage of water, a policy that it may, in time, regret. A similarly short-sighted project is Muammar Qaddafi's enormous pipeline, which will bring water from ancient sub-desert reservoirs to coastal cities.

In the United States, the great Ogallala aquifer is being overdrawn. This aquifer is an enormous stratum of water-saturated sand and gravel under-lying parts of northern Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming and South Dakota. The average thickness of the aquifer is about 70 meters. The rate of water withdrawal from the aquifer exceeds the rate of recharge by a factor of eight.

Thus we can see that in many regions, the earth's present population is living on its inheritance of water, rather than its income. This fact, coupled with rapidly increasing populations and climate change, may contribute to a very serious food crisis partway through the 21st century.

5.5 Glacial melting and summer water supplies

The summer water supplies of both China and India are threatened by the melting of glaciers. The Gangotri glacier, which is the principle glacier feeding India's great Ganges River, is reported to be melting at an accelerating rate,

and it could disappear within a few decades. If this happens, the Ganges could become seasonal, flowing only during the monsoon season. Chinese agriculture is also threatened by disappearing Himalayan glaciers, in this case those on the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau. The respected Chinese glaciologist Yao Tandong estimates that the glaciers feeding the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers are disappearing at the rate of 7% per year.¹

5.6 Advances in desalinization technology

Scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have developed a new desalinization process, called shock electrodialysis. In this process, water flows through a porous material - in this case, made of tiny glass particles, called a frit - with membranes or electrodes sandwiching the porous material on each side. When an electric current flows through the system, the salty water divides into regions where the salt concentration is either depleted or enriched. When that current is increased to a certain point, it generates a shockwave between these two zones, sharply dividing the streams and allowing the fresh and salty regions to be separated by a simple physical barrier at the center of the flow.

“It generates a very strong gradient,” says Martin Bazant, a researcher involved with the project².

Even though the system can use membranes on each side of the porous material, Bazant explains, the water flows across those membranes, not through them. That means they are not as vulnerable to fouling - a buildup of filtered material - or to degradation due to water pressure, as happens with conventional membrane-based desalination, including conventional electrodialysis. “The salt doesn’t have to push through something,” Bazant says. “The charged salt particles, or ions, just move to one side”.

5.7 The Green Revolution

In 1944 the Norwegian-American plant geneticist Norman Borlaug was sent to Mexico by the Rockefeller Foundation to try to produce new wheat varieties that might increase Mexico’s agricultural output. Borlaug’s dedicated work on this project was spectacularly successful. He remained with the project for 16 years, and his group made 6,000 individual crossings of wheat varieties to produce high-yield disease-resistant strains.

¹<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2015/08/04/global-glaciers-melting-three-times-rate-20th-century>

² He was quoted in an article published in *MIT News*, November 12, 2015



Figure 5.2: *Norman Borlaug's work on developing high-yield disease-resistant plant varieties won him a Nobel Peace Prize in 1970.*

In 1963, Borlaug visited India, bringing with him 100 kg. of seeds from each of his most promising wheat strains. After testing these strains in Asia, he imported 450 tons of the Lerma Rojo and Sonora 64 varieties - 250 tons for Pakistan and 200 for India. By 1968, the success of these varieties was so great that school buildings had to be commandeered to store the output. Borlaug's work began to be called a "Green Revolution". In India, the research on high-yield crops was continued and expanded by Prof. M.S. Swaminathan and his coworkers. The work of Green Revolution scientists, such Norman Borlaug and M.S. Swaminathan, has been credited with saving the lives of as many as a billion people.

Despite these successes, Borlaug believes that the problem of population growth is still a serious one. "Africa and the former Soviet republics", Borlaug states, "and the Cerrado³, are the last frontiers. After they are in use, the world will have no additional sizable blocks of arable land left to put into production, unless you are willing to level whole forests, which you should not do. So, future food-production increases will have to come from higher yields. And though I have no doubt that yields will keep going up, whether they can go up enough to feed the population monster is another matter. Unless progress with agricultural yields remains very strong, the next century will

³ The Cerrado is a large savanna region of Brazil.

experience human misery that, on a sheer numerical scale, will exceed the worst of everything that has come before.”

A very serious problem with Green Revolution plant varieties is that they require heavy inputs of pesticides, fertilizers and irrigation. Because of this, the use of high-yield varieties contributes to social inequality, since only rich farmers can afford the necessary inputs. Monocultures, such as the Green Revolution varieties may also prove to be vulnerable to future epidemics of plant diseases, such as the epidemic that caused the Irish Potato Famine in 1845. Even more importantly, pesticides, fertilizers and irrigation all depend on the use of fossil fuels. One must therefore ask whether high agricultural yields can be maintained in the future, when fossil fuels are expected to become prohibitively scarce and expensive.

5.8 Energy inputs of agriculture

Modern agriculture has become highly dependent on fossil fuels, especially on petroleum and natural gas. This is especially true of production of the high-yield grain varieties introduced in the Green Revolution, since these require especially large inputs of fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation. Today, fertilizers are produced using oil and natural gas, while pesticides are synthesized from petroleum feedstocks, and irrigation is driven by fossil fuel energy. Thus agriculture in the developed countries has become a process where inputs of fossil fuel energy are converted into food calories. If one focuses only on the farming operations, the fossil fuel energy inputs are distributed as follows:

1. Manufacture of inorganic fertilizer, 31%
2. Operation of field machinery, 19%
3. Transportation, 16%
4. Irrigation, 13%
5. Raising livestock (not including livestock feed), 8%
6. Crop drying, 5%
7. Pesticide production, 5%
8. Miscellaneous, 8%

The ratio of the fossil fuel energy inputs to the food calorie outputs depends on how many energy-using elements of food production are included in

the accounting. David Pimentel and Mario Giampietro of Cornell University estimated in 1994 that U.S. agriculture required 0.7 kcal of fossil fuel energy inputs to produce 1.0 kcal of food energy. However, this figure was based on U.N. statistics that did not include fertilizer feedstocks, pesticide feedstocks, energy and machinery for drying crops, or electricity, construction and maintenance of farm buildings. A more accurate calculation, including these inputs, gives an input/output ratio of approximately 1.0. Finally, if the energy expended on transportation, packaging and retailing of food is included, Pimentel and Giampietro found that the input/output ratio for the U.S. food system was approximately 10, and this figure did not include energy used for cooking.

5.9 Sustainable future populations

In an important and detailed study entitled *Will Limited Land, Water, and Energy Control Human Population Numbers in the Future?*, David Pimentel et al.⁴ discuss the problem of agriculture and global population in the post fossil fuel era. Here are some quotations from the article:

“Nearly 60% of the world’s human population is malnourished and the numbers are growing. Shortages of basic foods related to decreases in per capita cropland, water, and fossil energy resources contribute to spreading malnutrition and other diseases. The suggestion is that in the future only a smaller number of people will have access to adequate nourishment. In about 100 years, when it is reported that the planet will run out of fossil energy, we suggest that a world population of about two billion might be sustainable if it relies on renewable energy technologies and also reduces per capita use of the earth’s natural resources.

“Developed and developing nations need to provide a good quality life for their people while coping with rapid population growth, but ‘Population is the issue no one wants to touch’ (Meadows 2000). The current world population is about 6.8 billion. Based on the present growth rate of 1.2% per year, the population is projected to double in approximately 58 years (Chiras 2006; PRB 2008). Because population growth cannot continue indefinitely, society can either voluntarily control its numbers or let natural forces such as disease, malnutrition, and other disasters limit human numbers (Bartlett 1997-98; Pimentel et al. 1999). Increasing human numbers especially in urban areas, and increasing pollution of food, water, air, and soil by pathogenic disease organisms and chemicals, are causing a rapid increase in the prevalence of disease and human mortality (Murray and Lopez 1996; Pimentel et al. 2007). Currently, more than 3.7 billion humans are malnourished worldwide - the largest

⁴D. Pimentel et al., Human Ecology DOI 10.1007/s10745-010-9346-y, (2010)

number ever (WHO 2005a, b).

“The planet’s numerous environmental problems highlight the urgent need to evaluate available land, water, and energy resources and how they relate to the requirements of a rapidly growing human population (Pimentel and Pimentel 2008). In this article we assess the carrying capacity of the Earth’s natural resources, and suggest that humans should voluntarily limit their population growth, rather than letting natural forces control their numbers (Ferguson 1998; Pimentel et al. 1999). In addition, we suggest appropriate policies and technologies that would improve standards of living and quality of life worldwide...

“In 1960, when the world population numbered about 3 billion, approximately 0.5 ha of cropland was available per capita worldwide. This half a hectare is needed to provide a diverse, healthy, nutritious diet of plant and animal products...”

Pimentel et al. state that worldwide, the average cropland per capita has now fallen to 0.22 hectares. This number will continue to fall because global population is increasing at the rate of almost one billion people per decade, while the global area available for cropland is not increasing. On the contrary, it is decreasing because of desertification, erosion, salination and urban sprawl. Pimentel et al. state that cropland is being degraded and lost at a rate of more than 20 million hectares per year-

The current cropland per capita in the United States is 0.56 hectares, and thus still quite large, but in China, the figure is dangerously low: only 0.1 hectares. China will soon be unable to feed its population and will have to buy grain on the world market. As Lester Brown pointed out in his Copenhagen lecture, China will be able to import grain because of its strong economy, but this will raise food prices and will cause widespread famine in other parts of the world.

Added to the agricultural and environmental problems, are problems of finance and distribution. Famines can occur even when grain is available somewhere in the world, because those who are threatened with starvation may not be able to pay for the grain, or for its transportation. The economic laws of supply and demand are not able to solve this type of problem. One says that there is no “demand” for the food (meaning demand in the economic sense), even though people are in fact starving.

What is the optimum population of the world? It is certainly not the maximum number that can be squeezed onto the globe by eradicating every species of plant and animal that cannot be eaten. The optimum global population is one that can be supported in comfort, equality and dignity - and with respect for the environment.

In 1848 (when there were just over one billion people in the world), John

Stuart Mill described the optimal global population in the following words:

“The density of population necessary to enable mankind to obtain, in the greatest degree, all the advantages of cooperation and social intercourse, has, in the most populous countries, been attained. A population may be too crowded, although all be amply supplied with food and raiment.”

“... Nor is there much satisfaction in contemplating the world with nothing left to the spontaneous activity of nature; with every rood of land brought into cultivation, which is capable of growing food for human beings; every flowery waste or natural pasture plowed up, all quadrupeds or birds which are not domesticated for man’s use exterminated as his rivals for food, every hedgerow or superfluous tree rooted out, and scarcely a place left where a wild shrub or flower could grow without being eradicated as a weed in the name of improved agriculture. If the earth must lose that great portion of its pleasantness which it owes to things that the unlimited increase of wealth and population would extirpate from it, for the mere purpose of enabling it to support a larger, but not better or happier population, I sincerely hope, for the sake of posterity, that they will be content to be stationary, long before necessity compels them to it.”⁵

Dennis Meadows, one of the authors of *Limits to Growth*, stated recently that the optimum human population in the distant future may be about 2 billion people.

But what about the near future? Will the global population of humans crash catastrophically after having exceeded the carrying capacity of the environment? There is certainly a danger that this will happen - a danger that the 21st century will bring very large scale famines to vulnerable parts of the world, because modern energy-intensive agriculture will be dealt a severe blow by prohibitively high petroleum prices. At present, there are only a few major food-exporting countries, notably the United States, Canada, Australia and Argentina. There is a danger that within a few decades, the United States will no longer be able to export food because of falling production and because of the demands of a growing population. We should be aware of these serious future problems if we are to have a chance of avoiding them.

5.10 The demographic transition

The developed industrial nations of the modern world have gone through a process known as the “demographic transition” - a shift from an equilibrium where population growth is held in check by the grim Malthusian forces of

⁵John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy, With Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy*, (1848).

disease, starvation and war, to one where it is held in check by birth control and late marriage.

The transition begins with a fall in the death rate, caused by various factors, among which the most important is the application of scientific knowledge to the prevention of disease. Malthus gives the following list of some of the causes of high death rates: "...unwholesome occupations, severe labour and exposure to the seasons, extreme poverty, bad nursing of children, great towns, excesses of all kinds, the whole train of common diseases and epidemics, wars, plague and famine." The demographic transition begins when some of the causes of high death rates are removed.

Cultural patterns require some time to adjust to the lowered death rate, and so the birth rate continues to be high. Families continue to have six or seven children, just as they did when most of the children died before having children of their own. Therefore, at the start of the demographic transition, the population increases sharply. After a certain amount of time, however, cultural patterns usually adjust to the lowered death rate, and a new equilibrium is established, where both the birth rate and the death rate are low.

In Europe, this period of adjustment required about two hundred years. In 1750, the death rate began to fall sharply: By 1800, it had been cut in half, from 35 deaths per thousand people in 1750 to 18 in 1800; and it continued to fall. Meanwhile, the birth rate did not fall, but even increased to 40 births per thousand per year in 1800. Thus the number of children born every year was more than twice the number needed to compensate for the deaths!

By 1800, the population was increasing by more than two percent every year. In 1750, the population of Europe was 150 million; by 1800, it was roughly 220 million; by 1950 it had exceeded 540 million, and in 1970 it was 646 million.

Meanwhile the achievements of medical science and the reduction of the effects of famine and warfare had been affecting the rest of the world: In 1750, the non-European population of the world was only 585 million. By 1850 it had reached 877 million. During the century between 1850 and 1950, the population of Asia, Africa and Latin America more than doubled, reaching 1.8 billion in 1950. In the twenty years between 1950 and 1970, the population of Asia, Africa and Latin America increased still more sharply, and in 1970, this segment of the world's population reached 2.6 billion, bringing the world total to 3.6 billion. The fastest increase was in Latin America, where population almost doubled during the twenty years between 1950 and 1970.

The latest figures show that population has stabilized or in some cases is even decreasing in Europe, Russia, Canada, Japan, Cuba and New Zealand. In Argentina, the United States, China, Myanmar, Thailand and Australia, the rates of population increase are moderate - 0.6%-1.0%; but even this moderate

The Stages of the Demographic Transition.

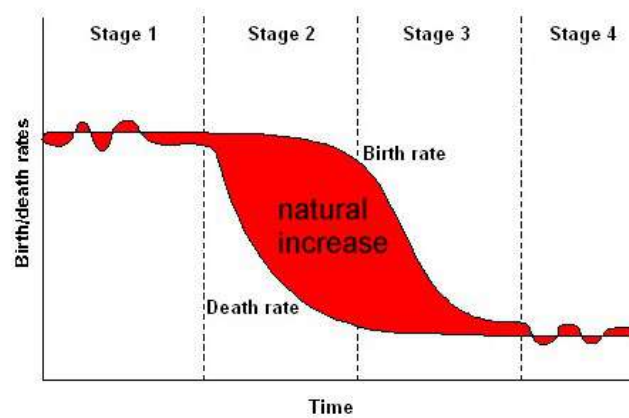


Figure 5.3: *The demographic transition.*

rate of increase will have a heavy ecological impact, particularly in the United States, with its high rates of consumption.

The population of the remainder of the world is increasing at breakneck speed - 2%-4% per year - and it cannot continue to expand at this rate for very much longer without producing widespread famines, since modern intensive agriculture cannot be sustained beyond the end of the fossil fuel era. The threat of catastrophic future famines makes it vital that all countries that have not completed the demographic transition should do so as rapidly as possible.

5.11 Urbanization

The global rate of population growth has slowed from 2.0 percent per year in 1972 to 1.7 percent per year in 1987; and one can hope that it will continue to fall. However, it is still very high in most developing countries. For example, in Kenya, the population growth rate is 4.0 percent per year, which means that the population of Kenya will double in seventeen years.

During the 60 years between 1920 and 1980 the urban population of the developing countries increased by a factor of 10, from 100 million to almost a billion. In 1950, the population of Sao Paulo in Brazil was 2.7 million. By 1980, it had grown to 12.6 million; and it is expected to reach 24.0 million by the year 2000. Mexico City too has grown explosively to an unmanageable size. In 1950, the population of Mexico City was 3.05 million; in 1982 it was



Figure 5.4: *Because of the threat of widespread famine, it is vital that all countries should complete the demographic transition as quickly as possible.*

16.0 million; and the population in 2000 was 17.8 million.

A similar explosive growth of cities can be seen in Africa and in Asia. In 1968, Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, and Lagos, the capital of Nigeria, were both growing at the rate of 14 percent per year, doubling in size every 5 years. In 1950, Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, had a population of 0.14 million. In a 1999 census, it was estimated to be between 3 and 4 million, having increased by a factor of 25.

In 1972, the population of Calcutta was 7.5 million. By the turn of the century in 2000, it had almost doubled in size. This rapid growth produced an increase in the poverty and pollution from which Calcutta already suffered in the 1970's. The Hooghly estuary near Calcutta is choked with untreated industrial waste and sewage, and a large percentage of Calcutta's citizens suffer from respiratory diseases related to air pollution.

Governments in the third world, struggling to provide clean water, sanitation, roads, schools, medical help and jobs for all their citizens, are defeated by rapidly growing urban populations. Often the makeshift shantytowns inhabited by new arrivals have no piped water; or when water systems exist, the pressures may be so low that sewage seeps into the system.

Many homeless children, left to fend for themselves, sleep and forage in the streets of third world cities. These conditions have tended to become worse with time rather than better. Whatever gains governments can make are immediately canceled by growing populations.



Figure 5.5: *Sir Partha Dasgupta of Cambridge University has pointed out that all the changes needed for population stabilization are desirable in themselves. These include education for women, higher status for women, state provision of old-age help for the poor, universal health care, and making safe drinking water available near to dwellings.*

5.12 Achieving economic equality

Today's world is characterized by intolerable economic inequalities, both between nations and within nations. A group of countries including (among others) Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States, has only 13% of the world's population, but receives 45% of the global PPP⁶ income. By contrast, a second group, including 2.1 Billion people (45% of the world's population) receives only 9% of the global PPP income. Another indicator of inequality is the fact that the 50 million richest people in the world receive as much as the 2,700 million poorest.

18 million of our fellow humans die each year from poverty-related causes. Each year, 11 million children die before reaching their fifth birthday. 1.1 billion people live on less than \$1 per day; 2.7 billion live on less than \$2.

At the United Nations Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in September, 1994, a theme which emerged very clearly was that one of the most important keys to controlling the global population explosion is giving women better education and equal rights. These goals are desirable for their own sake, and for the sake of the uniquely life-oriented point of view which women can give us; but in addition, education and improved status for women have shown themselves to be closely connected with lowered birth rates. When women lack education and independent careers outside the home, they can be forced into the role of baby-producing machines by men who do not share in the drudgery of cooking, washing and cleaning; but when women have educational, legal, economic, social and political equality with men, experience has shown that they choose to limit their families to a moderate size.

As glaciers melt in the Himalayas, depriving India and China of summer water supplies; as sea levels rise, drowning the fertile rice fields of Viet Nam and Bangladesh; as drought threatens the productivity of grain-producing regions of North America; and as the end of the fossil fuel era impacts modern high-yield agriculture, there is a threat of wide-spread famine. There is a danger that the 1.5 billion people who are undernourished today will not survive an even more food-scarce future.

People threatened with famine will become refugees, desperately seeking entry into countries where food shortages are less acute. Wars, such as those currently waged in the Middle East, will add to the problem.

What can we do to avoid this crisis, or at least to reduce its severity? We must urgently address the problem of climate change; and we must shift money from military expenditure to the support of birth control programs and agricultural research. We must also replace the institution of war by a system of effective global governance and enforceable international laws.

⁶Purchasing Power Parity



Figure 5.6: *Education of women and higher status for women are vitally important measures, not only for their own sake, but also because these social reforms have proved to be the key to lower birth rates.*

5.13 Achieving a steady-state economic system

Endless economic growth on a finite planet is a logical impossibility. Just as population growth is limited by ecological constraints, so too is the growth of resource-using and pollution-producing industrial production. Culture, of course, can and should continue to grow,

A number of economists have studied this problem, and in particular, outstanding contributions have been made by Frederick Soddy, Nickolas Georgescu-Roegan and Herman Daly. These authors have taken into account the role which entropy plays in economics.

5.14 Harmful effects of industrialized farming

Pharming

A major global public health crisis may soon be produced by the wholesale use of antibiotics in the food of healthy farm animals. The resistance factors produced by shovelling antibiotics into animal food produces resistance factors (plasmids) which can easily be transferred to human pathogens. A re-

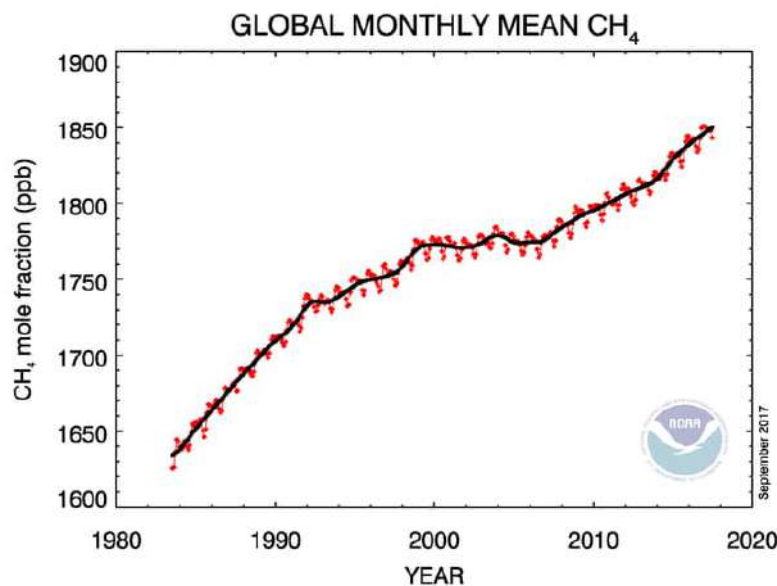


Figure 5.7: *Methane emissions are steadily increasing. A new report has shown ruminants are largely responsible for increases in rates of emission.*

lated problem is the excessive use of pesticides and artificial fossil-fuel-derived fertilizers in agriculture. Pharming is not a joke. It is a serious threat.⁷

Meat and methane

Methane is an extremely powerful greenhouse gas. and it is emitted in large quantities by ruminants, such as cattle produced for beef. A new report⁸ finds that cattle are not the biggest contributor to the annual methane budget in the atmosphere, but they may be the biggest contributor to increases in methane

⁷<http://ecowatch.com/2014/03/06/misuse-antibiotics-fatal-superbug-crisis/>
<http://ecowatch.com/2013/12/06/8-scary-facts-about-antibiotic-resistance/>
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⁸J. Wolf et al., *Revised methane emissions factors and spatially distributed annual carbon fluxes for global livestock*, Carbon Balance and Management 2017, 12:16

emissions over recent years.

One must also remember that by eating less meat, and in particular less beef, we can shorten the food chain and thus help famine-threatened populations.

Pesticides, artificial fertilizers and topsoil

A closely analogous danger results from the overuse of pesticides and petroleum-derived fertilizers in agriculture. A very serious problem with Green Revolution plant varieties is that they require heavy inputs of pesticides, fertilizers and irrigation. Because of this, the use of high-yield varieties contributes to social inequality, since only rich farmers can afford the necessary inputs. Monocultures, such as the Green Revolution varieties may also prove to be vulnerable to future plant diseases, such as the epidemic that caused the Irish Potato Famine in 1845. Even more importantly, pesticides, fertilizers and irrigation all depend on the use of fossil fuels. One must ask, therefore, whether high-yield agriculture can be maintained in the post-fossil-fuel era.

Topsoil is degraded by excessive use of pesticides and artificial fertilizers. Natural topsoil is rich in organic material, which contains sequestered carbon that would otherwise be present in our atmosphere in the form of greenhouse gases. In addition, natural topsoil contains an extraordinarily rich diversity of bacteria and worms that act to convert agricultural wastes from one year's harvest into nutrients for the growth of next year's crop. Pesticides kill these vital organisms, and make the use of artificial fertilizers necessary.

Finally, many small individual farmers, whose methods are sustainable, are being eliminated by secret land-grabs or put out of business because they cannot compete with unsustainable high-yield agriculture. Traditional agriculture contains a wealth of knowledge and biodiversity, which it would be wise for the world to preserve.

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Chapter 6

REFUGEES FROM CLIMATE CHANGE

6.1 Climate change as genocide

Climate change does not affect all parts of the world equally. The harshest effects of the extreme weather that we are already experiencing are disproportionately felt by the poorest people of the world.

In March, 2017, the Security Council was informed ¹ that 20 million people in four countries, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, were in danger of dying unless provided with immediate help. The cost of the necessary aid was estimated to be \$4.4 billion. The developed world's response has been a shrug of indifference. By the midsummer, 2017 only a tenth of the amount needed had been raised.

Conflicts and famine are interlinked. The struggle for food produces conflicts; and famine is often used as an instrument of war. Food aid, when available, is often deliberately blocked or destroyed by warring factions. Boko Haram in Nigeria, al-Shabaab in Somalia, assorted militias and the government in South Sudan, and Saudi-backed forces in Yemen all interfered with the delivery of aid supplies.

In the future, the effects of rising temperatures and reduced rainfall will disproportionately affect poor farmers of Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Latin America. If the more affluent parts of the world continue to produce greenhouse gasses in a business-as-usual scenario, and if they continue to ignore calls for help from starving people, these actions will amount to genocide.

¹by Stephen O'Brian, UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs



Figure 6.1: *A starving child in Somalia.*

6.2 The United Nations High Commission on Refugees

In an article on *Climate Change and Disasters* the United Nations High Commission on Refugees makes the following statement:

“The Earth’s climate is changing at a rate that has exceeded most scientific forecasts. Some families and communities have already started to suffer from disasters and the consequences of climate change, forced to leave their homes in search of a new beginning.

“For UNHCR, the consequences of climate change are enormous. Scarce natural resources such as drinking water are likely to become even more limited. Many crops and some livestock are unlikely to survive in certain locations if conditions become too hot and dry, or too cold and wet. Food security, already a concern, will become even more challenging.

“People try to adapt to this situation, but for many this will mean a conscious move to another place to survive. Such moves, or the effects of climate change on natural resources, may spark conflict with other communities, as an increasing number of people compete for a decreasing amount of resources.

“Since 2009, an estimated one person every second has been displaced by a disaster, with an average of 22.5 million people displaced by climate- or

weather-related events since 2008 (IDMC 2015). Disasters and slow onsets, such as droughts in Somalia in 2011 and 2012, floods in Pakistan between 2010 and 2012, and the earthquake in Nepal in 2015, can leave huge numbers of people traumatized without shelter, clean water and basic supplies.”

6.3 Populations displaced by sea level rise

In a recent article² discussed the long-term effects of sea level rise and the massive refugee crisis that it might create. By 2060, about 1.4 billion people could be climate change refugees, according to the paper, and that number could reach 2 billion by 2100.

The lead author, Prof. Emeritus Charles Geisler of Cornell University says: “The colliding forces of human fertility, submerging coastal zones, residential retreat, and impediments to inland resettlement is a huge problem. We offer preliminary estimates of the lands unlikely to support new waves of climate refugees due to the residues of war, exhausted natural resources, declining net primary productivity, desertification, urban sprawl, land concentration, ‘paving the planet’ with roads and greenhouse gas storage zones offsetting permafrost melt.”

We should notice that Prof. Geisler’s estimate of 2 billion climate refugees by 2100 includes all causes, not merely sea level rise. However, the number of refugees from sea level rise alone will be very large, since all the world’s coastal cities, and many river deltas will be at risk.

6.4 Populations displaced by drought and famine

Climate change could produce a refugee crisis that is “unprecedented in human history”, Barack Obama has warned as he stressed global warming was the most pressing issue of the age.

Speaking at an international food conference in Milan, the former US President said rising temperatures were already making it more difficult to grow crops and rising food prices were “leading to political instability”.

If world leaders put aside “parochial interests” and took action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by enough to restrict the rise to one or two degrees Celsius, then humanity would probably be able to cope.

Failing to do this, Mr Obama warned, increased the risk of “catastrophic” effects in the future, “not only real threats to food security, but also increases

²Geisler C. et al., *Impediments to inland resettlement under conditions of accelerated sea level rise*, Land Use Policy, Vol 55, July 2017, Pages 322-330

in conflict as a consequence of scarcity and greater refugee and migration patterns”.

“If you think about monsoon patterns in the Indian subcontinent, maybe half a billion people rely on traditional rain patterns in those areas,”

6.5 Populations displaced by rising temperatures

A new study published in *Nature: Climate Change* has warned that up to 75% of the world’s population could face deadly heat waves by 2100 unless greenhouse gas emissions are rapidly controlled.³ The following is an excerpt from the article:

“Here we conducted a global analysis of documented lethal heat events to identify the climatic conditions associated with human death and then quantified the current and projected occurrence of such deadly climatic conditions worldwide. We reviewed papers published between 1980 and 2014, and found 783 cases of excess human mortality associated with heat from 164 cities in 36 countries.

“Based on the climatic conditions of those lethal heat events, we identified a global threshold beyond which daily mean surface air temperature and relative humidity become deadly. Around 30% of the world’s population is currently exposed to climatic conditions exceeding this deadly threshold for at least 20 days a year.

“By 2100, this percentage is projected to increase to 48% under a scenario with drastic reductions of greenhouse gas emissions and 74% under a scenario of growing emissions. An increasing threat to human life from excess heat now seems almost inevitable, but will be greatly aggravated if greenhouse gases are not considerably reduced.”⁴

³Mora, C. et al., *Global risk of deadly heat*, *Nature: Climate Change*, 19 June 2017

⁴See also <https://phys.org/news/2017-08-deadly-south-asia-century.html> and <https://cleantechnica.com/2017/09/28/extreme-heatwaves-like-recent-lucifer-heatwave-become-normal-europe-2050s/>

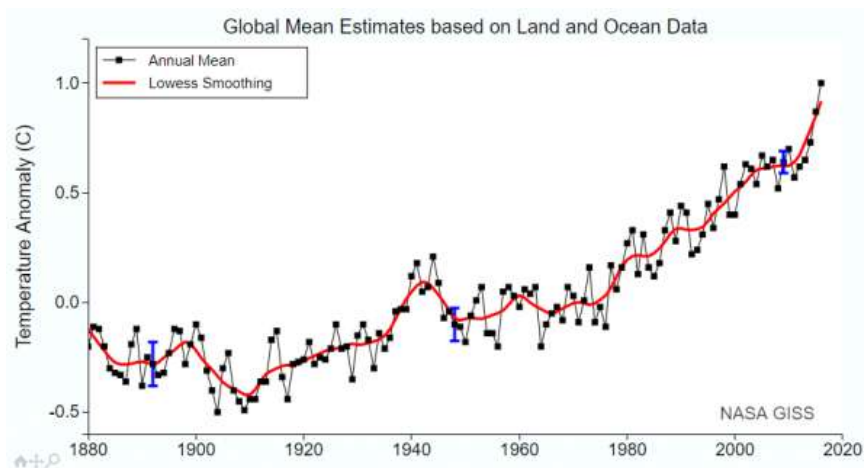


Figure 6.2: *This figure shows an alarming upward turn in the average global temperature*

6.6 Populations displaced by war

A recent article in *The Guardian*⁵ discusses the relationship between climate change and war. Here are some excerpts from the article:

“Climate change is set to cause a refugee crisis of ‘unimaginable scale’, according to senior military figures, who warn that global warming is the greatest security threat of the 21st century and that mass migration will become the ‘new normal’.

“The generals said the impacts of climate change were already factors in the conflicts driving a current crisis of migration into Europe, having been linked to the Arab Spring, the war in Syria and the Boko Haram terrorist insurgency.

“Military leaders have long warned that global warming could multiply and accelerate security threats around the world by provoking conflicts and migration. They are now warning that immediate action is required.

“‘Climate change is the greatest security threat of the 21st century,’ said Maj Gen Muniruzzaman.

“Muniruzzaman, chairman of the Global Military Advisory Council on climate change and a former military adviser to the president of Bangladesh. He said one meter of sea level rise will flood 20% of his nation. ‘We’re going to see refugee problems on an unimaginable scale, potentially above 30 million people.’

“Previously, Bangladesh’s finance minister, Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, called

⁵Thursday, 1 December, 2016

on Britain and other wealthy countries to accept millions of displaced people.

“Brig Gen Stephen Cheney, a member of the US Department of State’s foreign affairs policy board and CEO of the American Security Project, said: ‘Climate change could lead to a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions. We’re already seeing migration of large numbers of people around the world because of food scarcity, water insecurity and extreme weather, and this is set to become the new normal’.

6.7 Political reactions to migration

Brexit

Across the developed world, the reaction to threatened migration of refugees from climate change has been less than generous, to say the least. The recent decision of Britain to leave the European Union was motivated largely by the fear of British workers that EU laws would force their country to accept large numbers of refugees.

Swings to the right in Europe

In Germany, Angela Merkel’s generous policies towards refugees have cost her votes, while an openly racist party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, has gained in strength. Frauke Petry, 40, the party’s leader, has said border guards might need to turn guns on anyone crossing a frontier illegally. The party’s policy platform says “Islam does not belong in Germany” and calls for a ban on the construction of mosques.

In September, 2017, eight people from the neo-Nazi Freital Group were put on trial in Dresden for bomb attacks on homes for asylum applicants. Hundreds of similar assaults occur in Germany every year, but they had never before been tried as terrorism in a federal court.

In the German election, which took place on Sunday, October 1, 2017, Angela Merkel won a fourth term as Chancellor, but her party won only 33% of the votes, a percentage much reduced from the 41% won in the election of 2013. Angela Merkel was paying a high price for her refugee-friendly policies.

Meanwhile the far right anti-immigration AfD party made a historic breakthrough, winning 13.5% of the vote, thus becoming the first overtly nationalist party to sit in the Bundestag in 60 years. The Greens have already complained that “Nazis have returned to parliament”. In fact, members of the AfD party have begun to say that Germans should stop being ashamed of their country’s Nazi past.

In France, the National Front is a nationalist party that uses populist rhetoric to promote its anti-immigration and anti-European Union positions. The party favors protectionist economic policies and would clamp down on government benefits for immigrants.

Similarly, in the Netherlands, the anti-European Union, anti-Islam Party for Freedom has called for closing all Islamic schools and recording the ethnicity of all Dutch citizens. In early November, the party was leading in polls ahead of next year's parliamentary elections.

Other far-right anti-immigrant parties in Europe include Golden Dawn (Greece), Jobbic (Hungary), Sweden Democrats (Sweden), Freedom Party (Austria), and People's Party - Our Slovakia (Slovakia). All of these parties have gained in strength because of the widespread fear of immigration.

Populism in the United States

The election of Donald Trump, who ran for President in 2016 on an openly racist and anti-immigrant platform, can also be seen as the result of fear of immigration, especially on the part of industrial workers.

6.8 A more humane response to the refugee crisis

In the long-term future, climate change will make the refugee crisis much more severe. Heat and drought will make large regions of the world uninhabitable, and will threaten many populations with famine. The severity of the refugee crisis will depend on how quickly we reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

While making many parts of the world uninhabitable, long-term climate change will make other regions more suitable for human habitation and agriculture. For example, farming will become more possible in Siberia, Greenland, the Canadian Arctic, Alaska and Patagonia. A humane response to the refugee crisis could include the generous opening of these regions to refugees.

The global population of humans is currently increasing by almost a billion people every decade. Global population must be stabilized, and in the long run, gradually reduced. Money currently wasted (or worse than wasted) on armaments could be used instead to promote universal primary health care, and with it, universal access to the knowledge and materials needed for family planning.

Finally, reduced consumption of meat, particularly beef, would shorten the food chain thus make more food available for famine relief.

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Chapter 7

LIMITS TO GROWTH

7.1 Population and fossil fuel consumption

Today we are able to estimate the population of the world at various periods in history, and we can also make estimates of global population in prehistoric times. Looking at the data, we can see that the global population of humans has not followed an exponential curve as a function of time, but has instead followed an information-driven and technology-driven hyperbolic trajectory. At the time of Christ, the population of the world is believed to have been approximately 220 million. By 1500, the earth contained 450 million people, and by 1750, the global population exceeded 700 million. As the industrial and scientific revolution has accelerated, global population has responded by increasing at a break-neck speed: In 1930, the population of the world reached two billion; in 1958 three billion; in 1974 four billion; in 1988 five billion, and in 1999, six billion.

Almost a billion people are currently being added to the world's population every decade. But our food supply cannot keep increasing at this rate. On the contrary, the amount of food available to us is threatened by water shortages, climate change and the end of petroleum-supported high-yield agriculture. Thus, facing the threat of an extremely large-scale global famine, we need to listen to the warning voice of Malthus.

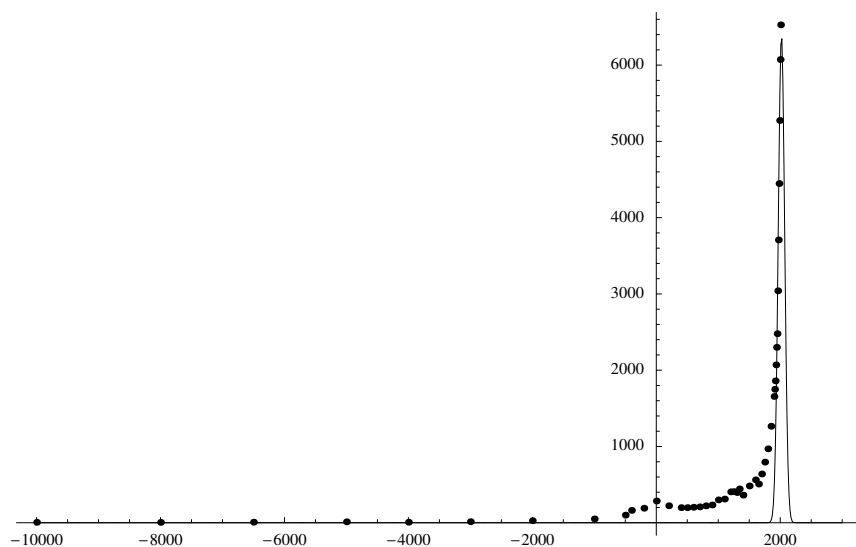


Figure 7.1: *When global population and fossil fuel use are plotted on the same graph over a period of several thousand years, the burning of fossil fuels appears as a sharp spike, rising from almost nothing to a high value over a period of a few hundred years and then falling abruptly to almost zero again. Recent population growth appears to be simultaneous with, and perhaps driven by, fossil fuel use. This raises the question of whether population of humans is headed for a crash when the fossil fuel era inevitably ends.*

7.2 Population stabilization today

The phrase “developing countries” is more than a euphemism; it expresses the hope that with the help of a transfer of technology from the industrialized nations, all parts of the world can achieve prosperity. Some of the forces that block this hope have just been mentioned. Another factor that prevents the achievement of worldwide prosperity is population growth.

In the words of Dr. Halfdan Mahler, former Director General of the World Health Organization, “Country after country has seen painfully achieved increases in total output, food production, health and educational facilities and employment opportunities reduced or nullified by excessive population growth.”

The growth of population is linked to excessive urbanization, infrastructure failures and unemployment. In rural districts in the developing countries, family farms are often divided among a growing number of heirs until they can no longer be subdivided. Those family members who are no longer needed on the land have no alternative except migration to overcrowded cities, where the infrastructure is unable to cope so many new arrivals. Often the new migrants are forced to live in excrement-filled makeshift slums, where dysentery, hepatitis and typhoid are endemic, and where the conditions for human life sink to the lowest imaginable level. In Brazil, such shanty towns are called “favelas”.

If modern farming methods are introduced in rural areas while population growth continues, the exodus to cities is aggravated, since modern techniques are less labor-intensive and favor large farms. In cities, the development of adequate infrastructure requires time, and it becomes a hopeless task if populations are growing rapidly. Thus, population stabilization is a necessary first step for development.

It can be observed that birth rates fall as countries develop. However, development is sometimes blocked by the same high birth rates that economic progress might have prevented. In this situation (known as the “demographic trap”), economic gains disappear immediately because of the demands of an exploding population.

For countries caught in the demographic trap, government birth control programs are especially important, because one cannot rely on improved social conditions to slow birth rates. Since health and lowered birth rates should be linked, it is appropriate that family-planning should be an important part of programs for public health and economic development.

A recent study conducted by Robert F. Lapham of Demographic Health Surveys and W. Parker Maudlin of the Rockefeller Foundation has shown that the use of birth control is correlated both with socio-economic setting and with the existence of strong family-planning programs. The implication of

this study is that even in the absence of increased living standards, family-planning programs can be successful, provided they have strong government support.

China, the world's most populous nation, has adopted the somewhat draconian policy of allowing only one child for families in living in towns and cities (35.9% of the population). Chinese leaders obtained popular support for their one-child policy by means of an educational program which emphasized future projections of diminishing water resources and diminishing cropland per person if population increased unchecked. Like other developing countries, China has a very young population, which will continue to grow even when fertility has fallen below the replacement level because so many of its members are contributing to the birth rate rather than to the death rate. China's present population is 1.4 billion. Its projected population for the year 2025 is 1.6 billion. China's one-child policy is supported by 75% of the country's people, but the methods of enforcement are sometimes criticized, and it has led to a M/F sex ratio of 1.17/1.00. The natural baseline for the sex ratio ranges between 1.03/1.00 and 1.07/1.00.

Education of women and higher status for women are vitally important measures, not only for their own sake, but also because in many countries these social reforms have proved to be the key to lower birth rates. Religious leaders who oppose programs for the education of women and for family planning on "ethical" grounds should think carefully about the scope and consequences of the catastrophic global famine which will undoubtedly occur within the next 50 years if population is allowed to increase unchecked. Do these leaders really wish to be responsible for the suffering and death from starvation of hundreds of millions of people?

At the United Nations Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in September, 1994, a theme which emerged very clearly was that one of the most important keys to controlling the global population explosion is giving women better education and equal rights. These goals are desirable for the sake of increased human happiness, and for the sake of the uniquely life-oriented point of view which women can give us; but in addition, education and improved status for women have shown themselves to be closely connected with lowered birth rates. When women lack education and independent careers outside the home, they can be forced into the role of baby-producing machines by men who do not share in the drudgery of cooking, washing and cleaning; but when women have educational, legal, economic, social and political equality with men, experience has shown that they choose to limit their families to a moderate size.

Sir Partha Dasgupta of Cambridge University has pointed out that the changes needed to break the cycle of overpopulation and poverty are all de-

sirable in themselves. Besides education and higher status for women, they include state-provided social security for old people, provision of water supplies near to dwellings, provision of health services to all, abolition of child labor and general economic development.

7.3 Entropy and economics

Introduction

We urgently need to shift quickly from fossil fuels to renewable energy if we are to avoid a tipping point after which human efforts to avoid catastrophic climate change will be futile because feedback loops will have taken over. The dangerous methane hydrate feedback loop is discussed in an excellent short video made by Thom Hartmann and the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation.¹

Celebrated author and activist Naomi Klein has emphasized the link between need for economic reform and our urgent duty to address climate change.²

Rebel economist Prof. Tim Jackson discusses the ways in which our present economic system has failed us, and the specific reforms that are needed. In one of his publications, he says: “The myth of growth has failed us. It has failed the two billion people who still live on 2 dollars a day. It has failed the fragile ecological systems on which we depend for survival. It has failed, spectacularly, in its own terms, to provide economic stability and secure people’s livelihood.”³

What is entropy?

Entropy is a quantity, originally defined in statistical mechanics and thermodynamics. It is a measure of the statistical probability of any state of a system: The greater the entropy, the greater the probability. The second law of thermodynamics asserts that entropy of the universe always increases with time. In other words, the universe as a whole is constantly moving towards states of greater and greater probability.

For any closed system, the same is true. Such systems move in time towards states of greater and greater probability. However, the earth, with its

¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRGVTK-AAvw>
<http://lasthours.org/>

²<http://thischangeeverything.org/naomi-klein/>
<http://www.theguardian.com/profile/naomiklein>

³<http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/rio-20-tim-jackson-leaders-green-economy?newsfeed=true>
<http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/consumerism-sustainability-short-termism>

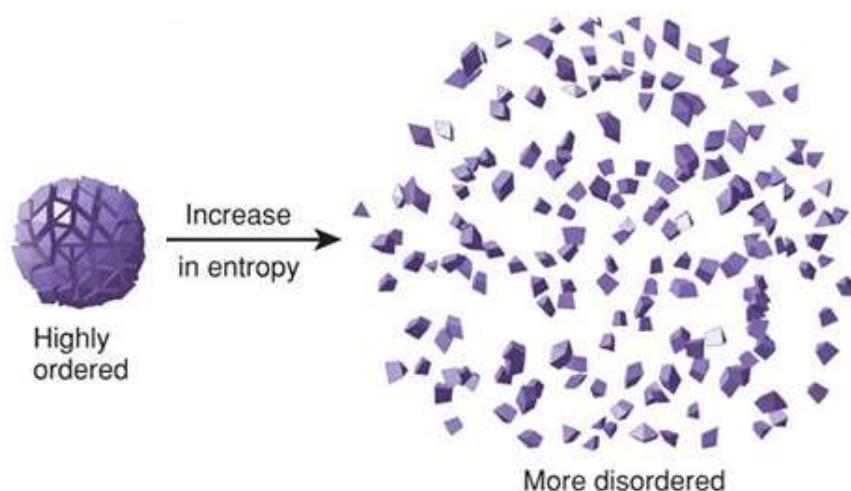


Figure 7.2: *An increase in entropy is an increase in disorder.*

biosphere, is not a closed system. The earth constantly receives an enormous stream of light from the sun. The radiation which we receive from the sun brings us energy that can be used to perform work, and in physics this is called “free energy”. Because of this flood of incoming sunlight, plants, animals and humans are able to create structures which from a statistical point of view are highly unlikely.

The disorder and statistical probability of the universe is constantly increasing, but because the earth is not a closed system, we are able to create local order, and complex, statistically improbable structures, like the works of Shakespeare, the Mona Lisa and the Internet. The human economy is driven by the free energy which we receive as income from the sun. Money is, in fact, a symbol for free energy, and free energy might be thought of as “negative entropy”. There is also a link between free energy and information.⁴

Human society as a superorganism, with the global economy as its digestive system

A completely isolated human being would find it as difficult to survive for a long period of time as would an isolated ant or bee or termite. Therefore it seems correct to regard human society as a superorganism. In the case of humans, the analog of the social insects’ nest is the enormous and complex material structure of civilization. It is, in fact, what we call the human economy. It consists of functioning factories, farms, homes, transportation links, water

⁴<http://www.amazon.com/Information-Theory-And-Evolution-Edition/dp/9814401234>

supplies, electrical networks, computer networks and much more.

Almost all of the activities of modern humans take place through the medium of these external “exosomatic” parts of our social superorganism. The terms “exosomatic” and “endosomatic” were coined by the American scientist Alfred Lotka (1880-1949). A lobster’s claw is endosomatic; it is part of the lobster’s body. The hammer used by a human is exosomatic, like a detachable claw. Lotka spoke of “exosomatic evolution”, including in this term not only cultural evolution but also the building up of the material structures of civilization.

The economy associated with the human superorganism “eats” resources and free energy. It uses these inputs to produce local order, and finally excretes them as heat and waste. The process is closely analogous to food passing through the alimentary canal of an individual organism. The free energy and resources that are the inputs of our economy drive it just as food drives the processes of our body, but in both cases, waste products are finally excreted in a degraded form.

Almost all of the free energy that drives the human economy came originally from the sun’s radiation, the exceptions being geothermal energy which originates in the decay of radioactive substances inside the earth, and tidal energy, which has its origin in the slowing of the motions of the earth-moon system. However, since the start of the Industrial Revolution, our economy has been using the solar energy stored in fossil fuels. These fossil fuels were formed over a period of several hundred million years. We are using them during a few hundred years, i.e., at a rate approximately a million times the rate at which they were formed.

The present rate of consumption of fossil fuels is more than 13 terawatts and, if used at the present rate, fossil fuels would last less than a century. However, because of the very serious threats posed by climate change, human society would be well advised to stop the consumption of coal, oil and natural gas well before that time.

The rate of growth of new renewable energy sources is increasing rapidly. These sources include small hydro, modern biomass, solar, wind, geothermal, wave and tidal energy. There is an urgent need for governments to set high taxes on fossil fuel consumption and to shift subsidies from the petroleum and nuclear industries to renewables. These changes in economic policy are needed to make the prices of renewables more competitive.

The shock to the global economy that will be caused by the end of the fossil fuel era will be compounded by the scarcity of other non-renewable resources, such as metals. While it is true (as neoclassical economists emphasize) that “matter and energy can neither be created nor destroyed”, free energy can be degraded into heat, and concentrated deposits of minerals can be dispersed.



Figure 7.3: *Frederick Soddy won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1921. His concern for social problems then made him turn his attention to economics. He was the first to focus on the economic effects of entropy.*

Both the degradation of free energy into heat and the dispersal of minerals involve increases of entropy.

Frederick Soddy

One of the first people to call attention to the relationship between entropy and economics was the English radiochemist Frederick Soddy (1877-1956). Soddy won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1921 for his work with Ernest Rutherford demonstrating the transmutation of elements in radioactive decay processes. His concern for social problems then led him to a critical study of the assumptions of classical economics. Soddy believed that there is a close connection between free energy and wealth, but only a very tenuous connection between wealth and money.

Soddy was extremely critical of the system of “fractional reserve banking” whereby private banks keep only a small fraction of the money that is entrusted to them by their depositors and lend out the remaining amount. He pointed out that this system means that the money supply is controlled by the private banks rather than by the government, and also that profits made from any expansion of the money supply go to private corporations instead of being

used to provide social services. Fractional reserve banking exists today, not only in England but also in many other countries. Soddy's criticisms of this practice cast light on the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008 and the debt crisis of 2011.

As Soddy pointed out, real wealth is subject to the second law of thermodynamics. As entropy increases, real wealth decays. Soddy contrasted this with the behavior of debt at compound interest, which increases exponentially without any limit, and he remarked:

"You cannot permanently pit an absurd human convention, such as the spontaneous increment of debt [compound interest] against the natural law of the spontaneous decrement of wealth [entropy]". Thus, in Soddy's view, it is a fiction to maintain that being owed a large amount of money is a form of real wealth.

Frederick Soddy's book, "Wealth, virtual wealth and debt: The solution of the economic paradox", published in 1926 by Allen and Unwin, was received by the professional economists of the time as the quixotic work of an outsider. Today, however, Soddy's common-sense economic analysis is increasingly valued for the light that it throws on the problems of our fractional reserve banking system, which becomes more and more vulnerable to failure as economic growth falters.⁵

Currency reform, and nationalization of banks

Frederick Soddy was writing at a time when England's currency was leaving the gold standard, and in order to replace this basis for the currency, he proposed an index system. Soddy's index was to be based on a standard shopping basket containing household items, such as bread, milk, potatoes and so on. If the price of the items in the basket rose, more currency would be issued by the nationalized central bank. If the price fell, currency would be withdrawn.

Nationalization of banks was proposed by Soddy as a means of avoiding the evils of the fractional reserve banking system. Today we see a revival of the idea of nationalized banks, or local user-owned cooperative banks. The Grameen Bank, founded by Prof. Muhammad Yunus, pioneered the idea of socially-motivated banks for the benefit poor people who would ordinarily be unable to obtain loans. The bank and its founder won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.⁶

⁵www.fadedpage.com/link.php?file=20140873-a5.pdf
<http://human-wrongs-watch.net/2015/07/08/debt-slavery/>

⁶<http://www.grameen-info.org/history/>
<http://www.ibtimes.com/greece-drawing-contingency-plans-nationalize-banks-bring-parallel-currency-report-1868830>

Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen

The incorporation of the idea of entropy into economic thought also owes much to the mathematician and economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (1906-1994), the son of a Romanian army officer. Georgescu-Roegen's talents were soon recognized by the Romanian school system, and he was given an outstanding education in mathematics, which later contributed to his success and originality as an economist.

Between 1927 and 1930 the young Georgescu studied at the Institute de Statistique in Paris, where he completed an award-winning thesis: "On the problem of finding out the cyclical components of phenomena". He then worked in England with Karl Pearson from 1930 to 1932, and during this period his work attracted the attention of a group of economists who were working on a project called the Harvard Economic Barometer. He received a Rockefeller Fellowship to join this group, but when he arrived at Harvard, he found that the project had been disbanded.

In desperation, Georgescu-Roegen asked the economist Joseph Schumpeter for an appointment to his group. Schumpeter's group was in fact a remarkably active and interesting one, which included the future Nobel laureate Wassily Leontief; and there followed a period of intense intellectual activity during which Georgescu-Roegen became an economist.

Despite offers of a permanent position at Harvard, Georgescu-Roegen returned to his native Romania in the late 1930's and early 1940's in order to help his country. He served as a member of the Central Committee of the Romanian National Peasant Party. His experiences at this time led to his insight that economic activity involves entropy. He was also helped to this insight by Borel's monograph on Statistical Mechanics, which he had read during his Paris period.

Georgescu-Roegen later wrote: "The idea that the economic process is not a mechanical analogue, but an entropic, unidirectional transformation began to turn over in my mind long ago, as I witnessed the oil wells of the Ploesti field of both World Wars' fame becoming dry one by one, and as I grew aware of the Romanian peasants' struggle against the deterioration of their farming soil

<http://www.quora.com/Why-were-banks-nationalized-in-India>

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-28/greek-bank-investors-hammered-as-3-day-slump-wipes-12-billion>

<http://www.armstrongeconomics.com/archives/30531>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalization>

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/23/beppe-grillo-calls-for-nationalisation-of-italian-banks-and-exit-from-euro>

<http://dissidentvoice.org/2015/07/whats-wrong-with-our-monetary-system-and-how-to-fix-it/>



Figure 7.4: *Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen's pioneering contributions to economics included extremely important studies of the effects of entropy. These studies lead him to advocate ecological economics and limits to growth. Today his influence continues through the work of his student, Herman Daly.*

by continuous use and by rains as well. However it was the new representation of a process that enabled me to crystallize my thoughts in describing the economic process as the entropic transformation of valuable natural resources (low entropy) into valueless waste (high entropy)."

After making many technical contributions to economic theory, Georgescu-Roegen returned to this insight in his important 1971 book, "The Entropy Law and the Economic Process" (Harvard University Press), where he outlines his concept of bioeconomics. In a later book, "Energy and Economic Myths" (Pergamon Press, New York, 1976), he offered the following recommendations for moving towards a bioeconomic society:

1. The complete prohibition of weapons production, thereby releasing productive forces for more constructive purposes;
2. Immediate aid to underdeveloped countries;
3. Gradual decrease in population to a level that could be maintained only by organic agriculture;
4. Avoidance, and strict regulation if necessary, of wasteful energy use;
5. Abandon our attachment to "extravagant gadgetry";

6. "Get rid of fashion";
7. Make goods more durable and repairable; and
8. Cure ourselves of workaholic habits by re-balancing the time spent on work and leisure, a shift that will become incumbent as the effects of the other changes make themselves felt.

Georgescu-Roegen did not believe that his idealistic recommendations would be adopted, and he feared that human society is headed for a crash.

Limits to Growth: A steady-state economy

Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen's influence continues to be felt today, not only through his own books and papers but also through those of his students, the distinguished economists Herman E. Daly and Kozo Mayumi, who for many years have been advocating a steady-state economy. As they point out in their books and papers, it is becoming increasingly apparent that unlimited economic growth on a finite planet is a logical impossibility. However, it is important to distinguish between knowledge, wisdom and culture, which can and should continue to grow, and growth in the sense of an increase in the volume of material goods produced. It is growth in the latter sense that is reaching its limits.

Daly describes our current situation as follows: "The most important change in recent times has been the growth of one subsystem of the Earth, namely the economy, relative to the total system, the ecosphere. This huge shift from an 'empty' to a 'full' world is truly 'something new under the sun'... The closer the economy approaches the scale of the whole Earth, the more it will have to conform to the physical behavior mode of the Earth... The remaining natural world is no longer able to provide the sources and sinks for the metabolic throughput necessary to sustain the existing oversized economy, much less a growing one. Economists have focused too much on the economy's circulatory system and have neglected to study its digestive tract."⁷

In the future, the only way that we can avoid economic collapse is to build a steady-state economy. There exists much literature on how this can be achieved, and these writings ought to become a part of the education of all economists and politicians.

⁷<http://dalynews.org/learn/blog/>
<http://steadystate.org/category/herman-daly/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EN5esbvAt-w>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIR-VsXtM4Y>
<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2015/car031315a.htm>

7.4 The Club of Rome

In 1968 Aurelio Peccei, Thorkil Kristensen and others founded the Club of Rome, an organization of economists and scientists devoted to studying the predicament of human society. One of the first acts of the organization was to commission an MIT study of future trends using computer models. The result was a book entitled “Limits to Growth”, published in 1972. From the outset the book was controversial, but it became a best-seller. It was translated into many languages and sold 30 million copies. The book made use of an exponential index for resources, i.e. the number of years that a resource would last if used at an exponentially increasing rate.

Today the more accurate Hubbert Peak model is used instead to predict rate of use of a scarce resource as a function of time. Although the specific predictions of resource availability in “Limits to Growth” lacked accuracy, its basic thesis, that unlimited industrial growth on a finite planet is impossible, was indisputably correct. Nevertheless the book was greeted with anger and disbelief by the community of economists, and these emotions still surface when it is mentioned.

Economic activity is usually divided into two categories, 1) production of goods and 2) provision of services. It is the rate of production of goods that will be limited by the carrying capacity of the global environment. Services that have no environmental impact will not be constrained in this way. Thus a smooth transition to a sustainable economy will involve a shift of a large fraction the work force from the production of goods to the provision of services.

In his recent popular book “The Rise of the Creative Class” the economist Richard Florida points out that in a number of prosperous cities, for example Stockholm, a large fraction of the population is already engaged in what might be called creative work, a type of work that uses few resources, and produces few waste products, work which develops knowledge and culture rather than producing material goods. For example, producing computer software requires few resources and results in few waste products. Thus it is an activity with a very small ecological footprint.

Similarly, education, research, music, literature and art are all activities that do not weigh heavily on the carrying capacity of the global environment. Furthermore, cultural activities lead in a natural way to global cooperation and internationalism, since cultural achievements are shared by the people of the entire world. Indeed, the shared human inheritance of culture and knowledge is growing faster than ever before.

Florida sees this as a pattern for the future, and maintains that everyone is capable of creativity. He visualizes the transition to a sustainable future economy as one in which a large fraction of the work force moves from indus-



Figure 7.5: *Aurelio Peccei (1908-1984), main founder of the Club of Rome. Concerning our present economic system, he wrote: “The only way we have devised to meet the surging waves of our rampant militarism and consumerism is to draw increasingly on the natural environment and to exploit, indiscriminately, the most accessible mineral and fuel deposits and all living resources we can lay our hands on. Such actions irreversibly impoverish our unique, irreplaceable, world, whose bounty and generosity are not infinite. Even if all the other adverse situations we find ourselves in today were to be alleviated, in itself, our high-handed treatment of Nature can bring about our doom.” Photograph by Koen Suyk/Anefo (Nationaal Archief), CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikimedia Commons*

trial jobs to information-related work. Meanwhile, as Florida acknowledges, industrial workers feel uneasy and threatened by such trends.⁸

Biological Carrying capacity and Economics

Classical economists pictured the world as largely empty of human activities. According to the empty-world picture of economics, the limiting factors in the production of food and goods are shortages of human capital and labor. The land, forests, fossil fuels, minerals, oceans filled with fish, and other natural resources upon which human labor and capital operate, are assumed to be present in such large quantities that they are not limiting factors. In this picture, there is no naturally-determined upper limit to the total size of the human economy. It can continue to grow as long as new capital is accumulated, as long as new labor is provided by population growth, and as long as new technology replaces labor by automation.

Biology, on the other hand, presents us with a very different picture. Biologists remind us that if any species, including our own, makes demands on its environment which exceed the environment's carrying capacity, the result is a catastrophic collapse both of the environment and of the population which it supports. Only demands which are within the carrying capacity are sustainable. For example, there is a limit to regenerative powers of a forest.

It is possible to continue to cut trees in excess of this limit, but only at the cost of a loss of forest size, and ultimately the collapse and degradation of the forest. Similarly, cattle populations may for some time exceed the carrying capacity of grasslands, but the ultimate penalty for overgrazing will be degradation or desertification of the land. Thus, in biology, the concept of the carrying capacity of an environment is extremely important; but in economic theory this concept has not yet been given the weight which it deserves.

Exponential growth of human population and economic activity have brought us, in a surprisingly short time, from the empty-world situation to a full-world situation. In today's world, we are pressing against the absolute limits of the earth's carrying capacity, and further growth carries with it the danger of future collapse.

Full-world economics, the economics of the future, will no longer be able to rely on industrial growth to give profits to stockbrokers or to solve problems of unemployment or to alleviate poverty. In the long run, neither the growth of industry nor that of population is sustainable; and we have now reached or

⁸<http://www.clubofrome.org/?p=326>
<http://www.donellameadows.org/wp-content/userfiles/Limits-to-Growth-digital-scan-version.pdf>
<http://www.donellameadows.org/archives/a-synopsis-limits-to-growth-the-30-year-update/>

exceeded the sustainable limits.

The limiting factors in economics are no longer the supply of capital or human labor or even technology. The limiting factors are the rapidly vanishing supplies of petroleum and metal ores, the forests damaged by acid rain, the diminishing catches from over-fished oceans, and the cropland degraded by erosion or salination, or lost to agriculture under a cover of asphalt.

Neoclassical economists have maintained that it is generally possible to substitute man-made capital for natural resources; but a closer examination shows that there are only very few cases where this is really practical. (See G.E. Tverberg, "Thoughts on why energy use and CO₂ emissions are rising as fast as GDP", www.ourfiniteworld.com, November 30, 2011.)

The size of the human economy is, of course, the product of two factors the total number of humans, and the consumption per capita. If we are to achieve a sustainable global society in the future, a society whose demands are within the carrying capacity of the global environment, then both these factors must be reduced.

The responsibility for achieving sustainability is thus evenly divided between the North and the South: Where there is excessively high consumption per capita, it must be reduced; and this is primarily the responsibility of the industrialized countries. High birth rates must also be reduced; and this is primarily the responsibility of the developing countries. Both of these somewhat painful changes are necessary for sustainability; but both will be extremely difficult to achieve because of the inertia of institutions, customs and ways of thought which are deeply embedded in society, in both the North and the South.

7.5 Fractional reserve banking and perpetual growth

Economists (with a few notable exceptions) have long behaved as though growth were synonymous with economic health. If the gross national product of a country increases steadily by 4 percent per year, most economists express approval and say that the economy is healthy. If the economy could be made to grow still faster (they maintain), it would be still more healthy. If the growth rate should fall, economic illness would be diagnosed. However, it is obvious that on a finite Earth, neither population growth nor economic growth can continue indefinitely.

A "healthy" economic growth rate of 4 percent per year corresponds to an increase by a factor of 50 in a century, by a factor of 2500 in two centuries, and by a factor of 125,000 in three centuries. No one can maintain that this type

of growth is sustainable except by refusing to look more than a short distance into the future.

Of course, it is necessary to distinguish between industrial growth, and growth of culture and knowledge, which can and should continue to grow. Qualitative improvements in human society are possible and desirable, but resource-using and pollution-producing industrial growth is reaching its limits, both because of ecological constraints and because of the exhaustion of petroleum, natural gas and other non-renewable resources, such as metals.

Today, as economic growth falters, the defects and injustices of our banking system have come sharply into focus, and light has also been thrown onto the much-too-cozy relationship between banking and government. The collapse of banks during the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008 and their subsequent bailout by means of the taxpayer's money can give us an insight into both phenomena - the faults of our banking system and its infiltration into the halls of government. The same can be said of the present national debt crisis in the Euro zone and elsewhere.

One feature of banking that cries out for reform is "fractional reserve banking", i.e. the practice whereby private banks keep only a tiny fraction of the money entrusted to them by their depositors, and lend out all the remaining amount. By doing so, the banks are in effect coining their own money and putting it into circulation, a prerogative that ought to be reserved for governments. Under the system of fractional reserve banking, profits from any expansion of the money supply go to private banks rather than being used by the government to provide social services. This is basically fraudulent and unjust; the banks are in effect issuing their own counterfeit money.

When the economy contracts instead of expanding, the effect of fractional reserve banking is still worse. In that case the depositors ask the banks for their money, which it is their right to do. But the banks do not have the money - they have lent it out, and thus they fail. However, the bankers have insured themselves against this eventuality by buying the votes of government officials. Thus the banks are bailed out and the taxpayers are left with the bill, as in the recent example in which the US Federal Reserve secretly gave 7.7 trillion of the taxpayers' dollars to bail out various banks.

We live in special times: Like a speeding bus headed for a brick wall, the earth's rapidly-growing population of humans and its rapidly-growing economic activity are headed for a collision with a very solid barrier - the carrying capacity of the global environment. As in the case of the bus and the wall, the correct response to the situation is to apply the brakes in good time, but fear prevents us from doing this. What will happen if we slow down very suddenly?

The memory of the great depression of 1929 makes us fear the consequences of an economic slowdown, especially since unemployment is already a serious

problem. Although the history of the 1929 depression is frightening, it may nevertheless be useful to look at the measures which were used then to bring the global economy back to its feet. A similar level of governmental responsibility may help us during the next few decades to avoid some of the more painful consequences of the necessary transition from the economics of growth to the economics of equilibrium.

In much the same way that Keynes urged Roosevelt to use governmental fiscal and financial policy to achieve social goals, we can now urge our governments to use their control of taxation to promote sustainability. For example, a slight increase in the taxes on fossil fuels could make a number of renewable energy technologies economically competitive; and higher taxes on motor fuels would be especially useful in promoting the necessary transition from private automobiles to bicycles and public transport.

The economic recession that began with the US subprime mortgage crisis of 2008 can be seen as an opportunity. It is thought to be temporary, but it is a valuable warning of irreversible long-term changes that will come later, when the absolute limits of industrial growth are reached. Already today we are faced with the problems of preventing unemployment and simultaneously building the infrastructure of an ecologically sustainable society. What is needed today is not the deregulation called for by the 1 percent. Instead we need truly democratic governments that accept their social and ecological responsibilities. One of the most important responsibilities of reformed governments and reformed economics must be to ensure full employment.

The Worldwatch Institute, Washington D.C., lists the following steps as necessary for the transition to sustainability: 1) Stabilizing population; 2) Shifting to renewable energy; 3) Increasing energy efficiency; 4) Recycling resources; 5) Reforestation and 6) Soil Conservation. All of these steps are labor-intensive; and thus, wholehearted governmental commitment to the transition to sustainability can help to solve the problem of unemployment.

We are approaching the moment in history where industrial growth will no longer be possible. If no changes have been made in our economic system when this happens, we will be faced with massive unemployment. Three changes are needed to prevent this:

1. Labor must be moved to tasks related to ecological sustainability. These include development of renewable energy, reforestation, soil and water conservation, replacement of private transportation by public transport, and agricultural development. Health and family planning services must also be made available to all.

2. Opportunities for employment must be shared among those in need of work, even if this means reducing the number of hours that each person works each week and simultaneously reducing the use of luxury goods, unnecessary

travel, and all forms of conspicuous consumption. It will be necessary for governments to introduce laws reducing the length of the working week, thus ensuring that opportunities for employment are shared equally.

3. The world's fractional reserve banking system urgently needs to be reformed. An index system could be introduced to regulate the amount of money in circulation in such a way as to stabilize the average price of a list of necessary household items, such as flour, milk and eggs. National banks would either print more money or else re-absorb it according to the value of the index.

To carry out these reforms will require the dedicated and courageous efforts of civil society - the 99 percent. If we leave things in the hands of the politicians, bankers and corporations, we will continue on the road to ruin, following in the footsteps of Greece. Perhaps we should remember the words that Shelly wrote in response to the Peterloo Massacre:

“Rise like lions after slumbers
In unvanquishable numbers.
Shake your chains to Earth like dew,
Which in sleep had fallen on you.
You are many; they are few.”

7.6 The transition to a sustainable economy

The Worldwatch Institute, Washington D.C., lists the following steps as necessary for the transition to sustainability⁹:

1. Stabilizing population
2. Shifting to renewable energy
3. Increasing energy efficiency
4. Recycling resources
5. Reforestation
6. Soil Conservation

All of these steps are labor-intensive; and thus, wholehearted governmental commitment to the transition to sustainability can help to solve the problem of unemployment.

⁹L.R. Brown and P. Shaw, 1982.



Figure 7.6: *Reforestation projects can help the world to achieve sustainability, while simultaneously helping to solve problems of unemployment.*

In much the same spirit that Roosevelt (with Keynes' approval) used governmental powers to end the great depression, we must now urge our governments to use their powers to promote sustainability and to reduce the trauma of the transition to a steady-state economy. For example, an increase in the taxes on fossil fuels could make a number of renewable energy technologies economically competitive; and higher taxes on motor fuels would be especially useful in promoting the necessary transition from private automobiles to bicycles and public transportation. Tax changes could also be helpful in motivating smaller families.

Governments already recognize their responsibility for education. In the future, they must also recognize their responsibility for helping young people to make a smooth transition from education to secure jobs. If jobs are scarce, work must be shared, in a spirit of solidarity, among those seeking employment; hours of work (and if necessary, living standards) must be reduced to insure a fair distribution of jobs. Market forces alone cannot achieve this. The powers of government are needed.

Economic activity is usually divided into two categories, 1) production of goods and 2) provision of services. It is the rate of production of goods that will be limited by the carrying capacity of the global environment. Services that have no environmental impact will not be constrained in this way. Thus a smooth transition to a sustainable economy will involve a shift of a large frac-

tion the work force from the production of goods to the provision of services.

In his recent popular book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, the economist Richard Florida points out that in a number of prosperous cities - for example Stockholm - a large fraction of the population is already engaged in what might be called creative work - a type of work that uses few resources, and produces few waste products - work which develops knowledge and culture rather than producing material goods. For example, producing computer software requires few resources and results in few waste products. Thus it is an activity with a very small ecological footprint. Similarly, education, research, music, literature and art are all activities that do not weigh heavily on the carrying capacity of the global environment. Florida sees this as a pattern for the future, and maintains that everyone is capable of creativity. He visualizes the transition to a sustainable future economy as one in which a large fraction of the work force moves from industrial jobs to information-related work. Meanwhile, as Florida acknowledges, industrial workers feel uneasy and threatened by such trends.

7.7 Population and goods per capita

In the distant future, the finite carrying capacity of the global environment will impose limits on the amount of resource-using and waste-generating economic activity that it will be possible for the world to sustain. The consumption of goods per capita will be equal to this limited total economic activity divided by the number of people alive at that time. Thus, our descendants will have to choose whether they want to be very numerous and very poor, or less numerous and more comfortable, or very few and very rich. Perhaps the middle way will prove to be the best.

Given the fact that environmental carrying capacity will limit the sustainable level of resource-using economic activity to a fixed amount, average wealth in the distant future will be approximately inversely proportional to population over a certain range of population values.¹⁰

Suggestions for further reading

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¹⁰Obviously, if the number of people is reduced to such an extent that it approaches zero, the average wealth will not approach infinity, since a certain level of population is needed to maintain a modern economy. However, if the global population becomes extremely large, the average wealth will indeed approach zero.

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Chapter 8

ETHICS FOR THE FUTURE

8.1 The Encyclical of Pope Francis

Despite the worrying nature of the threats that we are facing, there are reasons for hope. One of the greatest of these is the beautiful, profound and powerful encyclical that has just been released by Pope Francis.

When he accepted the responsibility for leading the world's 1.2-billion-strong Catholic Church, Cardinal Bergoglio of Argentina adopted the name Francis, after the universally loved Saint Francis of Assisi, whose life of simplicity, love for the poor, and love of nature he chose as the model for his Papacy. The Pope's inspiring encyclical letter "Laudato Si' " takes its name from a canticle of Saint Francis, that begins with the words "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our sister, mother Earth, who sustains and governs us..."

We can remember that Saint Francis regarded birds and animals as his brothers and sisters. He even thought of the sun, moon, clouds, rain and water as brothers and sisters. Like his chosen namesake, Pope Francis stresses the unity of all of nature, and our kinship with all of creation. Francis appeals to love. We can be saved through love.

His encyclical is addressed not only to Catholics, but also to all men and women of good will, and almost all of its 102 pages appeal to moral sensibilities and rational arguments that can be shared by all of us. Pope Francis stresses that the natural world that sustains us is in grave danger from our ruthless exploitation and greed-driven destruction of all the beauty and life that it contains: animals, forests, soil, and air.

Pope Francis tells us that the dictates of today's economists are not sacred: In the future, if we are to survive, economics must be given both a social conscience and an ecological conscience. Nor are private property and profits sacred. They must be subordinated to the common good, and the preservation of our global commons.

Less focus on material goods need not make us less happy. The quality of our lives can be increased, not decreased, if we give up our restless chase after power and wealth, and derive more of our pleasures from art, music and literature, and from conversations with our families and friends. Please read this great encyclical in its entirety. It can give us hope and courage as we strive to make the changes that are needed to avert an ecological mega-catastrophe.

Don Joao Mamede Filho is the Bishop of the Diocese of Umuarama, commented: “ ‘Laudato Si’, considered by environmentalists all around the world as the Green Encyclical, has become a work read by Christians and non-Christians alike in all corners of the world. In it, Pope Francis calls on us all to take care of our ‘Common Home’ and all that exists in it.

“In his call, the Pope reaffirms that the planet is a common good that must be preserved and guarded. Therefore, it is our duty to refrain from any human activity that may degrade, pollute or pose any kind of threat or risk to our planet and those who inhabit it.

“‘Laudato Si’ also presents a strong and persisting plea for a shift towards a new energy and development model, leaving fossil fuels behind. Since these energy sources are responsible for the highest emissions of greenhouse gases, they pollute, render climate changes more intense, bring on diseases, and kill.

“It is important to remember that, at the beginning of Creation, an organic relationship between all living beings was established. All that exists is connected and coexists in a sustainable and wholesome manner. However, by choosing dirty energy sources such as fossil fuels, which leave trails of destruction behind them, we disconnect ourselves from our surroundings and ignore the harm they may cause us and to our fellow creatures.”

8.2 The message of Henry David Thoreau

In the distant future (and perhaps even in the not-so-distant future) industrial civilization will need to abandon its relentless pursuit of unnecessary material goods and economic growth. Modern society will need to re-establish a balanced and harmonious relationship with nature. In preindustrial societies harmony with nature is usually a part of the cultural tradition. In our own time, the same principle has become central to the ecological counter-culture while the main-stream culture thunders blindly ahead, addicted to wealth, power and growth.

In the 19th century the American writer, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), pioneered the concept of a simple life, in harmony with nature. Today, his classic book, *Walden*, has become a symbol for the principles of ecology, simplicity, and respect for nature.

Thoreau was born in Concord Massachusetts, and he attended Harvard from 1833 to 1837. After graduation, he returned home, worked in his family's pencil factory, did odd jobs, and for three years taught in a progressive school founded by himself and his older brother, John. When John died of lockjaw in 1842, Henry David was so saddened that he felt unable to continue the school alone.

Nonviolent civil disobedience

Thoreau refused to pay his poll tax because of his opposition to the Mexican War and to the institution of slavery. Because of his refusal to pay the tax (which was in fact a very small amount) he spent a night in prison. To Thoreau's irritation, his family paid the poll tax for him and he was released. He then wrote down his ideas on the subject in an essay entitled *The Duty of Civil Disobedience*, where he maintains that each person has a duty to follow his own individual conscience even when it conflicts with the orders of his government.

In his essay, Thoreau said: "A common and natural result of an undue respect for law is that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys, and all marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills, ay, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart. They have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably inclined. Now, what are they? Men at all? or small movable forts and magazines, at the service of some unscrupulous man in power?"

"Under a government that which imprisons any unjustly", Thoreau wrote, "the true place for a just man is in prison." Civil Disobedience influenced Tolstoy, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and it anticipated the Nuremberg Principles.

Harmony with nature

Thoreau became the friend and companion of the transcendentalist writer Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), who introduced him to a circle of New England writers and thinkers that included Ellery Channing, Margaret Fuller and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Nathaniel Hawthorne described Thoreau in the following words: "Mr. Thorow [sic] is a keen and delicate observer of nature, a genuine observer, which, I suspect, is almost as rare a character as even an original poet; and Nature, in return for his love, seems to adopt him as her especial child, and



Figure 8.1: *Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). Public domain, Wikimedia Commons*

shows him secrets which few others are allowed to witness. He is familiar with beast, fish, fowl, and reptile, and has strange stories to tell of adventures, and friendly passages with these lower brethren of mortality. Herb and flower, likewise, wherever they grow, whether in garden, or wild wood, are his familiar friends. He is also on intimate terms with the clouds and can tell the portents of storms. It is a characteristic trait, that he has a great regard for the memory of the Indian tribes, whose wild life would have suited him so well; and strange to say, he seldom walks over a plowed field without picking up an arrow-point, a spear-head, or other relic of the red men, as if their spirits willed him to be the inheritor of their simple wealth."

Walden, an experiment in simple living

At Emerson's suggestion, Thoreau opened a journal, in which he recorded his observations concerning nature and his other thoughts. Ultimately the journal contained more than 2 million words. Thoreau drew on his journal when writing his books and essays, and in recent years, many previously unpublished parts of his journal have been printed.

From 1845 until 1847, Thoreau lived in a tiny cabin that he built with his own hands. The cabin was in a second-growth forest beside Walden Pond in Concord, on land that belonged to Emerson. Thoreau regarded his life there as an experiment in simple living. He described his life in the forest and his reasons for being there in his book *Walden*,

"Most of the luxuries", Thoreau wrote, "and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meager life than the poor. The ancient philosophers, Chinese, Hindoo, Persian, and Greek, were a class than which none has been poorer in outward riches, none so rich in inward."

Elsewhere in *Walden*, Thoreau remarks, "It is never too late to give up your prejudices", and he also says, "Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer." Other favorite quotations from Thoreau include "Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth", "Beware of all enterprises that require new clothes", "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation" and "Men have become tools of their tools."

Thoreau's closeness to nature can be seen from the following passage, written by his friend Frederick Willis, who visited him at Walden Pond in 1847, together with the Alcott family: "He was talking to Mr. Alcott of the wild flowers in Walden woods when, suddenly stopping, he said: 'Keep very still

and I will show you my family.’ Stepping quickly outside the cabin door, he gave a low and curious whistle; immediately a woodchuck came running towards him from a nearby burrow. With varying note, yet still low and strange, a pair of gray squirrels were summoned and approached him fearlessly. With still another note several birds, including two crows flew towards him, one of the crows nestling upon his shoulder. I remember that it was the crow resting close to his head that made the most vivid impression on me, knowing how fearful of man this bird is. He fed them all from his hand, taking food from his pocket, and petted them gently before our delighted gaze; and then dismissed them by different whistling, always strange and low and short, each wild thing departing instantly at hearing his special signal.”

Thoreau’s views on religion

Towards the end of his life, when he was very ill, someone asked Thoreau whether he had made his peace with God. “We never quarreled”, he answered.

In an essay published by the Atlantic Monthly in 1853, Thoreau described a pine tree in Maine with the words: “It is as immortal as I am, and perchance will go to as high a heaven, there to tower above me still.” However, the editor (James Russell Lowell) considered the sentence to be blasphemous, and removed it from Thoreau’s essay.

In one of his essays, Thoreau wrote: “If a man walk in the woods for love of them half of each day, he is in danger of being regarded as a loafer; but if he spends his whole day as a speculator, shearing off those woods and making the earth bald before her time, he is esteemed an industrious and enterprising citizen.”

A few more things that Thoreau said

It is the beauty within us that makes it possible for us to recognize the beauty around us. The question is not what you look at, but what you see.

Simplify your life. Don’t waste the years struggling for things that are unimportant. Don’t burden yourself with possessions. Keep your needs and wants simple and enjoy what you have. Don’t destroy your peace of mind by looking back, worrying about the past. Live in the present. Simplify!

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you’ve imagined.

Happiness is like a butterfly; the more you chase it, the more it will elude you, but if you turn your attention to other things, it will come and sit softly on your shoulder.

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.

You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment. Fools stand on their island of opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land; there is no other life but this

Be not simply good, be good for something,

Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations.

If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, however measured or far away.

The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when one asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer.

We need the tonic of wildness...At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be indefinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature.

8.3 Gandhian economics

In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi says: “Three moderns have left a deep impression on my life and captivated me: Raychandbhai (the Indian philosopher and poet) by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’; and Ruskin by his book ‘Unto This Last’.” Ruskin’s book, “Unto This Last”, which Gandhi read in 1904, is a criticism of modern

industrial society. Ruskin believed that friendships and warm interpersonal relationships are a form of wealth that economists have failed to consider. He felt that warm human contacts are most easily achieved in small agricultural communities, and that therefore the modern tendency towards centralization and industrialization may be a step backward in terms of human happiness. While still in South Africa, Gandhi founded two religious Utopian communities based on the ideas of Tolstoy and Ruskin, Phoenix Farm (1904) and Tolstoy Farm (1910).

Because of his growing fame as the leader of the Indian civil rights movement in South Africa, Gandhi was persuaded to return to India in 1914 and to take up the cause of Indian home rule. In order to reacquaint himself with conditions in India, he travelled tirelessly, now always going third class as a matter of principle.

During the next few years, Gandhi worked to reshape the Congress Party into an organization which represented not only India's Anglicized upper middle class but also the millions of uneducated villagers who were suffering under an almost intolerable burden of poverty and disease. In order to identify himself with the poorest of India's people, Gandhi began to wear only a white loincloth made of rough homespun cotton. He traveled to the remotest villages, recruiting new members for the Congress Party, preaching non-violence and "firmness in the truth", and becoming known for his voluntary poverty and humility. The villagers who flocked to see him began to call him "Mahatma" (Great Soul).

Disturbed by the spectacle of unemployment and poverty in the villages, Gandhi urged the people of India to stop buying imported goods, especially cloth, and to make their own. He advocated the reintroduction of the spinning wheel into village life, and he often spent some hours spinning himself. The spinning wheel became a symbol of the Indian independence movement, and was later incorporated into the Indian flag.

The movement for boycotting British goods was called the "Swadeshi movement". The word Swadeshi derives from two Sanskrit roots: Swa, meaning self, and Desh, meaning country. Gandhi described Swadeshi as "a call to the consumer to be aware of the violence he is causing by supporting those industries that result in poverty, harm to the workers and to humans or other creatures."

Gandhi tried to reconstruct the crafts and self-reliance of village life that he felt had been destroyed by the colonial system. "I would say that if the village perishes, India will perish too", he wrote, "India will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost. The revival of the village is only possible when it is no more exploited. Industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers as problems of competition and marketing come in. Therefore we have to concentrate on

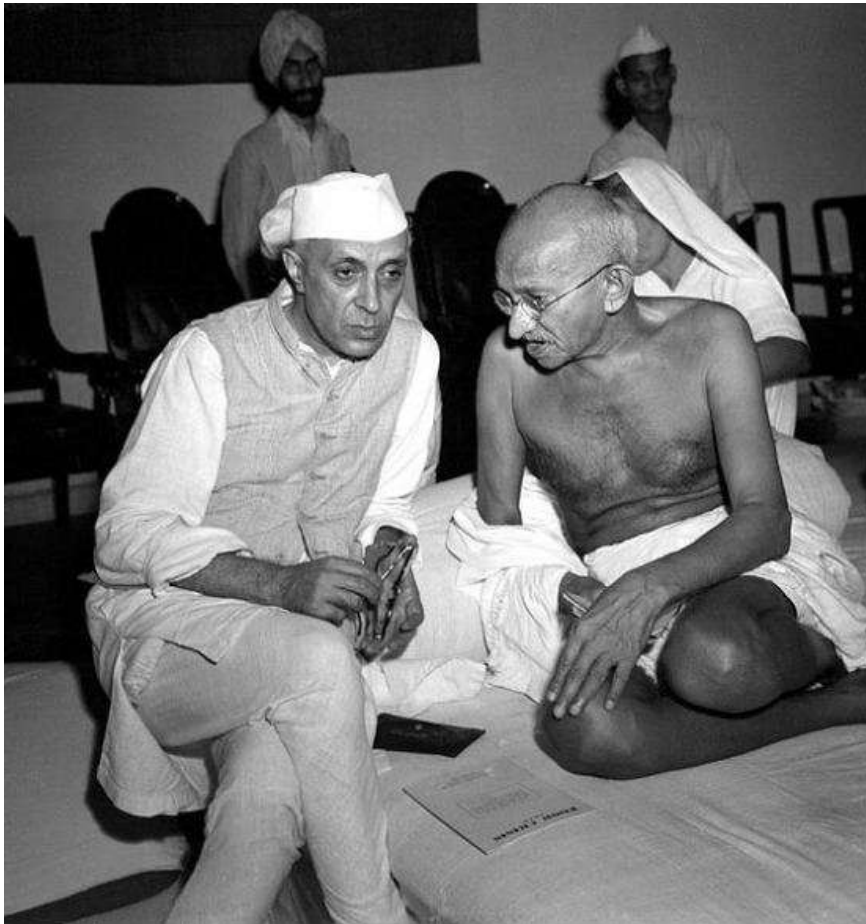


Figure 8.2: *Gandhi with Rashtrapati Jawaharlal Nehru, during a meeting of the All India Congress, Bombay, India. Today, it is Nehru's economic policy of industrialization and urbanization rather than Gandhi's that dominates India, but it is Gandhi's model that is sustainable. Author: Credited to Dave Davis, Acme Newspictures Inc., correspondent. Photo taken by Max Desfor, who gave it to Dave Davis. Wikimedia Commons*

the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use. Provided this character of the village industry is maintained, there would be no objection to villagers using even the modern machines that they can make and can afford to use. Only they should not be used as a means of exploitation by others.”

“You cannot build nonviolence on a factory civilization, but it can be built on self-contained villages... Rural economy as I have conceived it, eschews exploitation altogether, and exploitation is the essence of violence... We have to make a choice between India of the villages that are as ancient as herself and India of the cities which are a creation of foreign domination...”

“Machinery has its place; it has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace necessary human labour. An improved plow is a good thing. But if by some chances, one man could plow up, by some mechanical invention of his, the whole of the land of India, and control all the agricultural produce, and if the millions had no other occupation, they would starve, and being idle, they would become dunces, as many have already become. There is hourly danger of many being reduced to that unenviable state.”

In these passages we see Gandhi not merely as a pioneer of nonviolence; we see him also as an economist. Faced with misery and unemployment produced by machines, Gandhi tells us that social goals must take precedence over blind market mechanisms. If machines are causing unemployment, we can, if we wish, and use labor-intensive methods instead. With Gandhi, the free market is not sacred; we can do as we wish, and maximize human happiness, rather than maximizing production and profits.

Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu extremist on January 30, 1948. After his death, someone collected and photographed all his worldly goods. These consisted of a pair of glasses, a pair of sandals, a pocket watch and a white homespun loincloth. Here, as in the Swadeshi movement, we see Gandhi as a pioneer of economics. He deliberately reduced his possessions to an absolute minimum in order to demonstrate that there is no connection between personal merit and material goods. Like Veblen, Mahatma Gandhi told us that we must stop using material goods as a means of social competition. We must start to judge people not by what they have, but by what they are.¹

Gandhi’s vision of an “India of villages” rather than an “India of cities” has much in common with the Transition Town movement, which we will discuss next.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gandhian_economics
<http://bollier.org/blog/gandhian-economics-and-commons>
<http://caravan.squat.net/ICC-en/Krrs-en/ghandi-econ-en.htm>
<http://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/untothislast.pdf>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unto_This_Last
<http://www.efm.bris.ac.uk/het/ruskin/ruskin>



Figure 8.3: *Totnes, Devon, England: a transition town.* Author: Manfred Heyde, Wikimedia Commons

Transition Towns

The Transition Town Movement of today is a response to the end of the fossil fuel era and the threat of economic collapse. It can be thought of as a modern branch of the Cooperative Movement. In 2006, the Transition Town of Totnes in Devon, England was the first to use this name, which implied a transition from globalism, consumerism and growth to a sustainable, local and self-sufficient economy. The ideal was to produce locally all the necessary food for the town, and as much of other necessities as possible. In this way, the energy expenditures involved in transportation could be avoided.

Today there are more than a thousand Transition Towns and they are located in 43 countries. Many of them have local currencies which are legal tender within the town. If the pioneers of this movement are right in saying that this is the only sustainable model for the future, we may wonder whether mega-cities will be able to survive in the long-term future.²

²<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Degrowth>
<http://commondreams.org/views/2015/07/31/we-are-all-greece>
<http://www.localfutures.org/>
<http://www.powells.com/biblio/7-9780871566430-2>

8.4 We must not use possessions for social competition!

There is something ethically wrong with using material goods for the purpose of social competition at a time when excessive consumption is destroying our planet. Also, in our century, the world's resources are nearing exhaustion, and roughly 40,000 children die every day from starvation or from poverty-related diseases..

The whole structure of western society seems designed to push its citizens towards ever-increasing levels of consumption. The mass media hold before us continually the ideal of a personal utopia filled with material goods. Every young man in a modern industrial society feels that he is a failure unless he fights his way to the "top"; and in recent years, women too have been drawn into this competition.

Of course not everyone can reach the top; there would not be room for everyone; but society urges all us to try, and we feel a sense of failure if we do not reach the goal. Thus, modern life has become a struggle of all against all for power and possessions.

One of the central problems in reducing consumption is that in our present economic and social theory, consumption has no upper bound; there is no definition of what is enough; there is no concept of a state where all of the real needs of a person have been satisfied. In our growth-oriented present-day economics, it is assumed that, no matter how much a person earns, he or she is always driven by a desire for more.

The phrase "conspicuous consumption" was invented by the Norwegian-American economist Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) in order to describe the way in which our society uses economic waste as a symbol of social status. In "The Theory of the Leisure Class", first published in 1899, Veblen pointed out that it wrong to believe that human economic behavior is rational, or that it can be understood in terms of classical economic theory. To understand it, Veblen maintained, one might better make use of insights gained from anthropology, psychology, sociology, and history.

The sensation caused by the publication of Veblen's book, and the fact that his phrase, "conspicuous consumption", has become part of our language, indicate that his theory did not completely miss its mark. In fact, modern advertisers seem to be following Veblen's advice: Realizing that much of the output of our economy will be used for the purpose of establishing the social status of consumers, advertising agencies hire psychologists to appeal to the consumer's longing for a higher social position.

When possessions are used for the purpose of social competition, demand has no natural upper limit; it is then limited only by the size of the human ego,

which, as we know, is boundless. This would be all to the good if unlimited economic growth were desirable. But today, when further industrial growth implies future collapse, western society urgently needs to find new values to replace our worship of power, our restless chase after excitement, and our admiration of excessive consumption.

The voice of Henry David Thoreau is also a useful and wise one. “Most of the luxuries”, Thoreau wrote, “and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meager life than the poor. The ancient philosophers, Chinese, Hindoo, Persian, and Greek, were a class than which none has been poorer in outward riches, none so rich in inward.”

8.5 Benefits of equality

The Industrial Revolution opened up an enormous gap in military strength between the industrialized nations and the rest of the world. Taking advantage of their superior weaponry, Europe, the United States and Japan rapidly carved up the remainder of the world into colonies, which acted as sources of raw materials and food, and as markets for manufactured goods. Between 1800 and 1914, the percentage of the earth under the domination of colonial powers increased to 85 percent, if former colonies are included.

The English economist and Fabian, John Atkinson Hobson (1858-1940), offered a famous explanation of the colonial era in his book “Imperialism: A Study” (1902). According to Hobson, the basic problem that led to colonial expansion was an excessively unequal distribution of incomes in the industrialized countries. The result of this unequal distribution was that neither the rich nor the poor could buy back the total output of their society. The incomes of the poor were insufficient, and rich were too few in number. The rich had finite needs, and tended to reinvest their money. As Hobson pointed out, reinvestment in new factories only made the situation worse by increasing output.

Hobson had been sent as a reporter by the Manchester Guardian to cover the Second Boer War. His experiences had convinced him that colonial wars have an economic motive. Such wars are fought, he believed, to facilitate investment of the excess money of the rich in African or Asian plantations and mines, and to make possible the overseas sale of excess manufactured goods. Hobson believed imperialism to be immoral, since it entails suffering both among colonial peoples and among the poor of the industrial nations. The cure that he recommended was a more equal distribution of incomes in

the manufacturing countries.

Interestingly, TED Talks (ideas worth spreading) was recently under fire from many progressive groups for censoring a short talk by the adventure capitalist, Nick Hanauer, entitled “Income Inequality”. In this talk, Hanauer says exactly the same thing as John Hobson, but he applies the ideas, not to colonialism, but to current unemployment in the United States. Hanauer says that the rich are unable to consume the products of society because they are too few in number. To make an economy work, demand must be increased, and for this to happen, the distribution of incomes must become much more equal than it is today in the United States.

TED has now posted Hanauer’s talk, and the interested reader can find another wonderful TED talk dealing with the same issues from the standpoint of health and social problems. In a splendid lecture entitled “How economic inequality harms societies”, Richard Wilkinson demonstrates that there is almost no correlation between gross national product and a number of indicators of the quality of life, such as physical health, mental health, drug abuse, education, imprisonment, obesity, social mobility, trust, violence, teenage pregnancies and child well-being. On the other hand he offers comprehensive statistical evidence that these indicators are strongly correlated with the degree of inequality within countries, the outcomes being uniformly much better in nations where income is more equally distributed.

Warren Buffet famously remarked, “There’s class warfare, all right. But it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning.” However, the evidence presented by Hobson, Hanauer and Wilkinson shows conclusively that no one wins in a society where inequality is too great, and everyone wins when incomes are more evenly distributed.

We must decrease economic inequality

In his Apostolic Exhortation, “*Evangelii Gaudium*”, Pope Francis said:

“In our time humanity is experiencing a turning-point in its history, as we can see from the advances being made in so many fields. We can only praise the steps being taken to improve people’s welfare in areas such as health care, education and communications. At the same time we have to remember that the majority of our contemporaries are barely living from day to day, with dire consequences. A number of diseases are spreading. The hearts of many people are gripped by fear and desperation, even in the so-called rich countries. The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident. It is a struggle to live and, often, to live with precious little dignity.”

“This epochal change has been set in motion by the enormous qualitative,

quantitative, rapid and cumulative advances occurring in the sciences and in technology, and by their instant application in different areas of nature and of life. We are in an age of knowledge and information, which has led to new and often anonymous kinds of power.”

“Just as the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.”

“In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naive trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting.”

In a recent speech, Senator Bernie Sanders quoted Pope Francis extensively and added: “We have a situation today, Mr. President, incredible as it may sound, where the wealthiest 85 people in the world own more wealth than the bottom half of the world’s population.”³

The social epidemiologist Prof. Richard Wilkinson, has documented the ways in which societies with less economic inequality do better than more unequal societies in a number of areas, including increased rates of life expectancy, mathematical performance, literacy, trust, social mobility, together with decreased rates of infant mortality, homicides, imprisonment, teenage births, obesity and mental illness, including drug and alcohol addiction.⁴ We must also remember that according to the economist John A. Hobson, the basic problem that led to imperialism was an excessively unequal distribution of incomes in the industrialized countries. The result of this unequal distribution

³https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_LJpN893Vg
<https://www.oxfam.org/en/tags/inequality>
https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/cr-even-it-up-extreme-inequality-291014-en.pdf

⁴<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZ7LzE3u7Bw>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_G._Wilkinson

was that neither the rich nor the poor could buy back the total output of their society. The incomes of the poor were insufficient, and rich were too few in number.

8.6 Culture and internationalism

Cultural and educational activities have a small ecological footprint, and therefore are more sustainable than pollution-producing, fossil-fuel-using jobs in industry. Furthermore, since culture and knowledge are shared among all nations, work in culture and education leads societies naturally towards internationalism and peace.

Economies based on a high level of consumption of material goods are unsustainable and will have to be abandoned by a future world that renounces the use of fossil fuels in order to avoid catastrophic climate change, a world where non-renewable resources such as metals will become increasingly rare and expensive. How then can full employment be maintained?

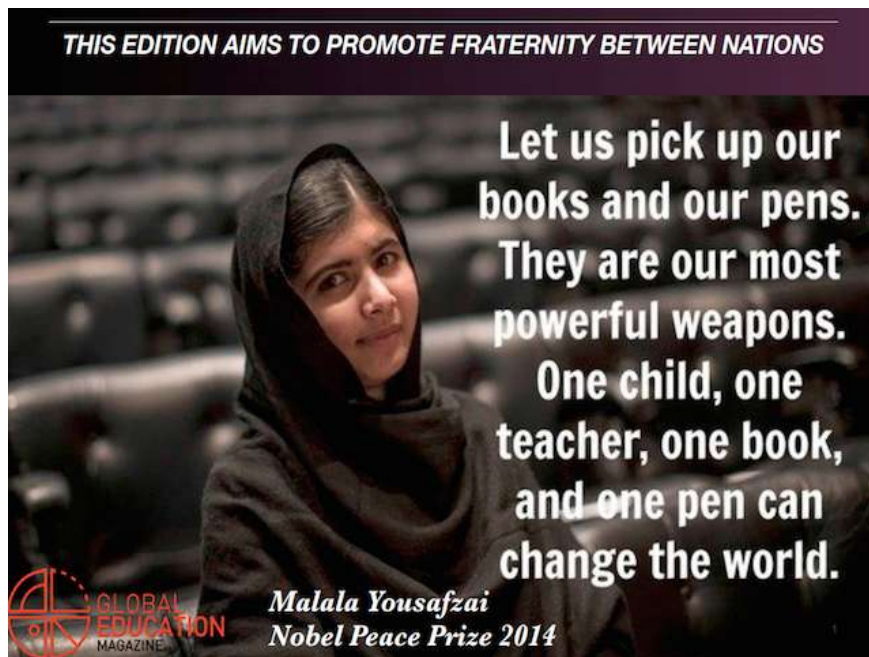
The creation of renewable energy infrastructure will provide work for a large number of people; but in addition, sustainable economies of the future will need to shift many workers from jobs in industry to jobs in the service sector. Within the service sector, jobs in culture and education are particularly valuable because they will help to avoid the disastrous wars that are currently producing enormous human suffering and millions of refugees, wars that threaten to escalate into an all-destroying global thermonuclear war.⁵

Human nature has two sides: It has a dark side, to which nationalism and militarism appeal; but our species also has a genius for cooperation, which we can see in the growth of culture. Our modern civilization has been built up by means of a worldwide exchange of ideas and inventions. It is built on the achievements of many ancient cultures. China, Japan, India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, the Islamic world, Christian Europe, and the Jewish intellectual traditions all have contributed. Potatoes, corn, squash, vanilla, chocolate, chilli peppers, and quinine are gifts from the American Indians.⁶

We need to reform our educational systems, particularly the teaching of history. As it is taught today, history is a chronicle of power struggles and war, told from a biased national standpoint. We are taught that our own country is always heroic and in the right. We urgently need to replace this indoctrination in chauvinism by a reformed view of history, where the slow development of human culture is described, giving credit to all who have contributed. When

⁵<http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/need.pdf>
<http://eruditio.worldacademy.org/issue-5/article/urgent-need-renewable-energy>

⁶<http://eruditio.worldacademy.org/article/evolution-cooperation>



we teach history, it should not be about power struggles. It should be about how human culture was gradually built up over thousands of years by the patient work of millions of hands and minds. Our common global culture, the music, science, literature and art that all of us share, should be presented as a precious heritage - far too precious to be risked in a thermonuclear war.

We have to extend our loyalty to the whole of the human race, and to work for a world not only free from nuclear weapons, but free from war. A war-free world is not utopian but very practical, and not only practical but necessary.



It is something that we can achieve and must achieve. Today there are large regions, such as the European Union, where war would be inconceivable. What is needed is to extend these.

Nor is a truly sustainable economic system utopian or impossible. To achieve it, we should begin by shifting jobs to the creation of renewable energy infrastructure, and to the fields of culture and education. By so doing we will support human solidarity and avoid the twin disasters of catastrophic war and climate change.

8.7 Caring for our children

We give our children loving care, but it makes no sense to do so and at the same time to neglect to do all that is within our power to ensure that they and their descendants will inherit an earth in which they can survive. We also have a responsibility to all the other living organisms with which we share the gift of life.

Inaction is not an option. We have to act with courage and dedication, even if the odds are against success, because the stakes are so high. The mass media could mobilize us to action, but they have failed in their duty. Our educational system could also wake us up and make us act, but it too has failed us. The battle to save the earth from human greed and folly has to be fought in the alternative media. Hence this book, printed by a small peace-oriented Swedish publisher, and hence urgent the tone of this final chapter.

We need a new economic system, a new society, a new social contract, a new way of life. Here are the great tasks that history has given to our generation: We must achieve a steady-state economic system. We must restore democracy. We must decrease economic inequality. We must break the power of corporate greed. We must leave fossil fuels in the ground. We must stabilize and ultimately reduce the global population. We must eliminate the institution of war. And finally, we must develop a more mature ethical system to match our new technology.

8.8 Our duty to the biosphere

We need to learn from long-established cultures

The era of colonialism has left the industrialized countries with a rather arrogant attitude towards other cultures. Although formal political colonialism

has almost entirely vanished, many of the assumptions of the colonial era persist and are strongly supported by the mainstream mass media. It is assumed by many people in the industrialized North that if the developing countries would only learn mass production, modern farming techniques and a modern lifestyle, all would be well. However, a sustainable global future may require a transfer of knowledge, techniques and attitudes in precisely the opposite direction - from pre-industrial societies to highly industrialized ones. The reason for this is that the older societies have cultures that allow them to live in harmony with nature, and this is exactly what the highly industrial North must learn to do.

Industrialism and the rapid development of science and technology have given some parts of the world a 200-year period of unbroken expansion and growth, but today this growth is headed for a collision with a wall-like barrier - limits set by the carrying capacity of the global environment and by the exhaustion of non-renewable resources. Encountering these limits is a new experience for the the industrialized countries. By contrast, pre-industrial societies have always experienced limits. The industrialized world must soon replace the economics of growth with equilibrium economics. Pre-industrial societies have already learned to live in equilibrium - in harmony with nature.

Like biodiversity, cultural diversity is an extremely valuable resource, and for similar reasons. A large genetic pool gives living organisms the flexibility needed to adapt to changes in the environment. Similarly, cultural diversity can give humans the flexibility needed to cope with change. In the changed world of today (changed by the invention of thermonuclear weapons and by the extraordinary growth of global population and commerce) we urgently need to learn to live in harmony, in harmony with ourselves, in harmony with nature, and in harmony with other members of our species. We can do this if we draw on the full human heritage of cultural diversity. We can draw not only on the knowledge and wisdom of presently existing societies, but also on the experiences and ideas of societies of the past.

- **The Pythagorean concept of harmony:** In the ancient world, the concept of harmony was developed to a high level by the Pythagoreans. The Pythagoreans used the idea of harmony to understand medicine, music, mathematics and ethics. A description of Pythagorean ideals can be found on this website in Chapter 2 of *Science and Society*.
- **The concept of harmony in Chinese civilization:** Chinese civilization is very ancient, and it has made many extremely important contributions to the cultural heritage of the world - for example, the invention of paper, ink, printing and the magnetic compass. Agriculture began in

China as early as 6,000 B.C. The art of working in bronze was developed in China during the Shang dynasty (1,500 B.C. - 1,100 B.C.) and it reached a high pitch of excellence in the Chou dynasty (1,100 B.C. - 250 B.C.).

In the Chou period, many of the cultural characteristics which we recognize as particularly Chinese were developed. During this period, the Chinese evolved a code of behavior based on politeness and ethics. Much of this code of behavior is derived from the teachings of K'ung Fu-tzu (Confucius), a philosopher and government official who lived between 551 B.C. and 479 B.C.. The "Golden Rule" was known to K'ung Fu-tzu, but was formulated in a negative way: "Do not do to others anything that you would not like them do to you".

The rational teachings of K'ung Fu-tzu were complemented by the more mystical and intuitive doctrines of Lao-tzu and his followers. Lao-tzu lived at about the same time as K'ung Fu-tzu, and he founded the Taoist religion. The Taoists believed that unity with nature could be achieved by passively blending oneself with the forces of nature.

On the whole, politicians and scholars followed the practical teachings of K'ung Fu-tzu, while poets and artists became Taoists. The intuitive sensitivity to nature inspired by Taoist beliefs allowed these artists and poets to achieve literature and art of unusual vividness and force with great economy of means. The Taoist religion has much in common with Buddhism, and its existence in China paved the way for the spread of Buddhism from India to China and Japan.

Taoist and Confucian teachings each emphasized a particular aspect of harmony. Taoism emphasized harmony with nature, while Confucianism taught harmonious relationships between humans. Thus in China, harmony became an ideal advocated by both traditions. The Chinese respect for harmony as an ideal can be seen, for example, in the beautiful Temple of Divine Harmony in Beijing.

- **India:** Evidence of a very early river-valley civilization in India has been found at a site called Mohenjo-Daro. However, in about 2,500 B.C., this early civilization was destroyed by some great disaster, perhaps a series of floods; and for the next thousand years, little is known about the history of India. During this dark period between 2,500 B.C. and 1,500 B.C., India was invaded by the Indo-Aryans, who spoke Sanskrit, a language related to Greek. The Indo-Aryans partly drove out and partly enslaved the native Dravidians. However, there was much intermarriage between

the groups, and to prevent further intermarriage, the Indo-Aryans introduced a caste system sanctioned by religion.

According to Hindu religious belief, the soul of a person who has died is reborn in another body. If, throughout his life, the person has faithfully performed the duties of his caste, then his or her soul may be reborn into a higher caste. Finally, after existing as a Brahman, the soul may be so purified that it can be released from the cycle of death and rebirth.

In the 6th century B.C., Gautama Buddha founded a new religion in India. Gautama Buddha was convinced that all the troubles of humankind spring from an excessive attachment to earthly things. He felt that the only escape from sorrow is through the renunciation of earthly desires. He also urged his disciples to follow a high ethical code, the Eightfold Way. Among the sayings of Buddha are the following:

“Hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love.”

“Let a man overcome anger by love; let him overcome evil by good.”

“All men tremble at punishment. All men love life. Remember that you are like them, and do not cause slaughter.”

Both Hindu and Buddhist traditions emphasize the unity of all life on earth. Hindus regard killing an animal as a sin, and many try to avoid accidentally stepping on insects as they walk. (The Hindu and Buddhist picture of the relatedness of all life on earth has been confirmed by modern biological science. We now know that all living organisms have the same fundamental biochemistry, based on DNA, RNA, proteins and polysaccharides, and we know that our own human genomes are more similar to than different from the genomes of our close relations in the animal world.)

The peoples of the industrialized nations urgently need to acquire a non-anthropocentric element in their ethics, similar to reverence for all life found in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, as well as in the teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi and Albert Schweitzer. We need to learn to value other species for their own sakes, and not because we expect to use them for our own economic goals.

The Buddhist concept of karma has great value in human relations. The word “karma” means simply “action”. In Buddhism, one believes that actions return to the actor. Good actions will be returned, and bad actions will also be returned. This is obviously true in social relationships. If we behave with kindness and generosity to our neighbors, they will return our kindness. Conversely, a harmful act may lead to a vicious circle

of revenge and counter-revenge which can only be broken by returning good for evil. However the concept of karma has a broader and more abstract validity beyond the direct return of actions to the actor.

When we perform a good action, we increase the total amount of good karma in the world. If all people similarly behave well, the world as a whole will become more pleasant and more safe. Human nature seems to have a built-in recognition of this fact, and we are rewarded by inner happiness when we perform good and kind actions. In his wonderful book, “Ancient Wisdom, Modern World”, the Dalai Lama says that good actions lead to happiness and bad actions to unhappiness even if our neighbors do not return these actions. Inner peace, he tells us, is incompatible with bad karma and can be achieved only through good karma, i.e. good actions.

There is a great deal of similarity between the Buddhist concept of karma and some of the ethical principles of Christianity, particularly principles that appear in the Sermon on the Mount. Also Buddha’s saying “Hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love” echoes the Christian principle of returning good for evil. Both are aimed at stopping vicious circles of revenge and counter-revenge, such as those that can now be observed in the Middle East.

More details about the Chinese and Indian civilizations can be found in Chapter 4 of *Science and Society*

- **Bhutan** Before the doors of Bhutan were cautiously opened to visitors in 1974, the country remained aloof from the modern world. One of the most striking characteristics of the ancient Bhutanese culture was that most of the actions of its citizens were done from a sense of duty and tradition, rather than for economic reasons. The citizens of Bhutan derived great happiness from these actions. For example, caring for the elderly was to them not only a duty but also a great source of pleasure. It is doubtful whether modernization will increase the happiness of the Bhutanese.
- **Harmony with nature in the Native American culture:** The attitude towards nature of the Sioux can be seen from the following quotations from *Land of the Spotted Eagle* by the Lakota (Western Sioux) chief, Standing Bear (ca. 1834 - 1908):

“The Lakota was a true lover of Nature. He loved the earth and all things of the earth... From Waken Tanka (the Great Spirit) there came a great unifying life force that flowered in and through all things – the flowers

of the plains, blowing winds, rocks, trees, birds, animals – and was the same force that had been breathed into the first man. Thus all things were kindred and were brought together by the same Great Mystery.”

“Kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky, and water was a real and active principle. For the animal and bird world there existed a brotherly feeling that kept the Lakota safe among them. And so close did some of the Lakota come to their feathered and furred friends that in true brotherhood they spoke a common tongue.”

“The animal had rights – the right of man’s protection, the right to live, the right to multiply, the right to freedom, and the right to man’s indebtedness – and in recognition of these rights the Lakota never enslaved the animal, and spared all life that was not needed for food and clothing.”

“This concept of life was humanizing and gave to the Lakota an abiding love. It filled his being with the joy and mystery of things; it gave him reverence for all life; it made a place for all things in the scheme of existence with equal importance to all. The Lakota could despise no creature, for all were one blood, made by the same hand, and filled with the essence of the Great Mystery.”

A similar attitude towards nature can be found in traditional Inuit cultures.

- **St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948):** There are similarities between the doctrines of these two great ethical teachers. Both came from wealthy families, but during the course of their lives they acquired strong sympathy with the poor and rejected excessive attachment to worldly goods. Both dressed in the simplest possible rough homespun clothes. (Gandhi said, “Live simply that others may simply live.”) Both taught peace between humans and kindness to all life. St. Francis is said to have preached sermons to the birds; Gandhi personally took care of sick animals in his ashram.
- **Respect for nature in African cultures:** In some parts of Africa, a man who plans to cut down a tree offers a prayer of apology, telling the tree why necessity has forced him to harm it. This pre-industrial attitude is something from which the industrialized North could learn. In industrial societies, land “belongs” to some one, and the owner has the “right” to ruin the land or to kill the communities of creatures living on it if this happens to give some economic advantage, in much the same way that a Roman slaveowner was thought to have the “right” to kill his slaves. Pre-industrial societies have a much less rapacious and much

more custodial attitude towards the land and towards its non-human inhabitants.

- **Preservation of the land for future generations:** Many traditional agricultural societies have an ethical code that requires them to preserve the fertility of the land for future generations. This recognition of a duty towards the distant future is in strong contrast to the shortsightedness of modern economists. For example, John Maynard Keynes has been quoted as saying “In the long run, we will all be dead”, meaning that we need not look that far ahead. By contrast, members of traditional agricultural societies recognize that their duties extend far into the distant future, since their descendants will still be alive.

The pre-industrial societies and ethical teachers mentioned above have much to tell us about how to achieve harmony with ourselves, harmony with nature, and harmony with other members of our own species. Of course it is necessary to learn from the best aspects of each culture and not the worst. Also we must remember that the population of the world is now so large that a complete return to a pre-industrial way of life would not be possible. However, some of the values and attitudes of pre-industrial cultures can help us to an awareness of what it will take to achieve a truly sustainable global society.

The advertising-driven orgies of consumerism that characterize modern market economies cannot be extended into the distant future because of limitations that will be imposed by exhaustion of non-renewable resources and by the limited carrying capacity of the global environment. Therefore we need to stop using material goods as a measure of merit. Gandhi deliberately reduced his possessions to a minimum in order to demonstrate that merit and goods are not synonymous. St. Francis did the same. We can learn from them, and from the values of pre-industrial societies, to stop worshipping the false ideals, *Power*, *Dominance*, *Growth*, and *Profit*. Instead we must learn to live in *Harmony*.

Education for a harmonious future

Our educational system must reflect the kind of world that we want for the future. What kind of world do we want? We want a world where war is abolished as an institution, and where the enormous resources now wasted on war are used constructively. We want a world where a stable population of moderate size lives in comfort and security, free from fear of hunger or unemployment. We want a world where peoples of all countries have equal access to resources, and an equal quality of life. We want a world with a new economic system, not designed to produce unlimited growth, but aiming instead at meeting the

real needs of the human community in equilibrium with the global environment. We want a world of changed values, where extravagance and waste are regarded as morally wrong; where kindness, wisdom and beauty are admired; and where the survival of other species than our own is regarded as an end in itself, not just a means to our own ends.

In our reverence for the intricate beauty and majesty of nature, and our respect for the dignity and rights of other humans, we can feel united with the great religious and philosophical traditions of mankind, and with the traditional wisdom of our ancestors.

Pictures sent back by the astronauts show the earth as it really is - a small, fragile, beautiful planet, drifting on through the dark immensity of space - our home, where we must learn to live in harmony with nature and with each other.

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