

OVERPOPULATION IS A CRUCIAL FACTOR IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS A CRITIQUE BY WALTER L. WILLIAMS

Aaron Timms, "Making Life Cheap: Population Control, Herd Immunity, and Other Anti-Humanist Fables," *The New Republic* June 2020 pp.39-45.

Reviewed by Walter L. Williams, Ph.D.

This article is but one more attempt to discredit population control, with the evident wish that by seeing population activism as "anti-humanist," it will be so. Aaron Timms dismisses Professor Paul Ehrlich's book *The Population Bomb* in a single sentence, as well as the Sierra Club and Population Connection. He sets up a false dichotomy, bemoaning those who see too large numbers of "humans, rather than resource use or consumer capitalism, are the problem." [p.40] He unfairly quotes primatologist Jane Goodall as saying that overpopulation underlies so many other environmental problems, when in fact Goodall has been very clear in stating that "the problem" is due to all of these factors in combination. It is not either/or but both subjects that need to be addressed.

Timms will have none of this, and he insists it is all one and not the other. He writes: "Climate change is a problem of collective action, not individual will.... What matters is how we all use resources, not how many people use them." [p.42] Environmental change must enlist the help of the general population as well as corporations and governments. But then, inexplicably, Timms contradicts himself in conceding, "It's obviously true that a planet with far fewer people on it than our present 7.6 billion would emit far less carbon. But there's no nonviolent way to reduce the world's population with anything like the urgency required to make a meaningful contribution to stabilizing the climate." [p.42]

Herein lies the problem facing Timms and other critics of population control. Fossil fuels must be kept in the ground, humans must switch to a plant-based diet, pollution of the oceans must cease, and reforestation of the continents must be done, with the same degree of dedication as population reduction. All these changes must be enacted quickly, and in tandem.

Moreover, Timms' assertion that there is "no nonviolent way" to reduce population betrays a lack of imagination. Here are a few suggestions. First, access to birth control, abortion, and sterilization must be made legal and free for all people over the age of puberty in every country of the world. Controlling one's reproductivity should be seen as a basic human right, and no person should be made to marry, to give birth, or to engage in sex against their will.

Second, instead of wasting billions of dollars on military spending, or giving foreign aid to corrupt government leaders, educational scholarships or other significant financial incentives should be granted to females between ages 12 to 40 who agree to be sterilized. This should be done for girls and women in all nations. Population reduction needs to be done in countries even with low birthrates, because people in those nations typically use many more resources. This plan has the advantage of putting more resources into girls' education, and raising women's income and skills levels in nations across the globe. Funds should not be controlled by husbands or fathers, but should benefit the women themselves. If enough funds are available, sterilization for males should also be established. However, females who undergo sterilization should be paid more than males, and the lion's share of funds should go to girls and women.

Another advantage of this idea is that, since almost half of all pregnancies are unplanned, programs for sterilization will greatly reduce the need for abortion and birth control.

A third way to reduce population growth has to do with medical treatment of infants. For all of human history up until a century ago, a large portion of infants died before reaching their first birthday. This is typical of all species of animals, and is part of the natural cycle that weak infants die. High infant mortality is nature's way of controlling overpopulation of any species. Within the last century, though, a medical ethic has taken hold that attempts to save every infant, no matter how premature or incapacitated the child would be. Many babies that are saved grow up suffering intensely. It is not "anti-humanist" to put medical resources into vaccinations and other health benefits for the majority of children who were strong enough to survive the rigors of the first year of life. The large chunk of healthcare budgets that are spent on infants that would die if not for intensive medical intervention would be better used to improve the health of older children.

Fourth, births can be curbed using the model from China with its "One Child Policy," a rational plan that saved China from famine and allowed it to advance economically. However, China came under intense criticism from the United States government for this policy, so much so that China abandoned it after a few years. The idea is to reward families with no children or one child, while imposing heavier taxes on families with more than one child. What is needed is to reward all adults who do not reproduce, and impose heavier taxes on those who begat even one child. Then keep raising the tax rate for each additional child who is birthed. If people around the world are given these kinds of incentives and disincentives, births will reduce.

Fifth, governments need to remove restrictions on adoption of older children, both domestically and internationally, and make adoption much easier and less expensive. Rather than giving birth, adults who wish to rear children should be encouraged to adopt some of the world's millions of unwanted children who are currently languishing in unloving institutions or on the streets. Bureaucratic restrictions on adoption which claim to be "protecting children" by making adoption so complicated and expensive, actually harm children by denying many the opportunity to be adopted by a caring adult.

A sixth idea is for the United Nations to sanction any government that criminalizes same-sex relationships, or that upholds legal discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex persons. Far from being stigmatized, same-sex relationships should be valued, encouraged, and even glamorized for being non-reproductive in nature. Old moral values which claim that the only legitimate form of sex is penile-vaginal intercourse need to be turned on their head, and the new morality should see masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, birth control, abortion, and any other behavior that inhibits reproduction as superior and more moral. Sexual morality must be revolutionized to benefit a world in which a prime need is to reduce the number of births.

These ideas, plus the education of young people to the problems of overpopulation, and an ethic of non-reproductability, need to be encouraged in every nation on earth. Together, they can result in significant reductions in birthrates in all nations rich and poor. No country is exempt; it is the collective responsibility of all human societies to sharply reduce birth rates. If these four ideas are instituted globally, quickly and thoroughly, a significant reduction of population will occur, without violence.

Having asserted that there is no effective way to reduce overpopulation, Timms performs a sleight of hand maneuver to claim that population issues will soon be “moot anyway. As countries get richer, their fertility rates tend to drop.... The world is creating new humans at a slower and slower pace.” [p.42] This argument assumes that all nations will get richer in the future, a highly dubious prediction for the coming years of environmental catastrophes. But to address Timms’ claim, while the rate of births have declined, the total numbers of humans keep going up. The alarming figures cannot be denied: it took all of human history until the year 1930 for human numbers to reach 2 billion, but now (only ninety years later, one person’s lifetime) we are approaching 8 billion. Within two decades, humans are projected to reach 10 billion or more. The **rate** of births means nothing to wildlife going extinct, and forests being cut down, when the absolute numbers of people keep rising.

Timms next tackles the issue of low birthrates in Japan and Europe, and says they lead to “crises.... The real problem is not that rich countries have too many people but too few; specifically of the young.” [p.42] He paints an alarming picture, claiming that “the aging of populations in the West is a slow-motion economic catastrophe.” [p.42] The solution to this problem, he stresses, is immigration. It is at this point, in the last two pages of this article, that Timms makes a valuable contribution. Immigration is a “win-win” solution, because it contributes new young vibrancy to aging Western economies, while immigrants help their natal nation by sending money back to help support their families. However, he criticizes Canada and Australia for instituting an immigration system that seeks those workers who can contribute most to their economy.

Here is another idea that can contribute to population control. Give preference to young immigrants, in their teens and twenties, at the beginning of their productive years, who will agree to be sterilized when they migrate. Currently in the United States immigration system, preference is given to “family reunification” that privileges heterosexual nuclear families and discriminates against single people. Once those immigrants migrate, they settle down in nuclear families and procreate. Instead of promoting family formation, which leads to childbearing, immigration policy should promote non-reproductability. Those who wish to immigrate have a choice; no one is forcing them to become sterilized. However, those who do so will have preference in gaining admission.

Those who are concerned about immigrant rights should fight for all workers to have a living wage, and adequate pensions. Those who migrate can continue to send money back to help their elderly parents in their home country, while also having security in their old age. With adequate pensions, workers do not need to have children so they will have someone to care for them when they are old.

This type of immigration system will be needed during the era of climate change. Elderly Europeans can be taken care of by sterilized young women from the tropical areas of Africa and the Middle East that will be increasingly unlivable due to global warming. Elderly Canadians and Americans can be taken care of by sterilized young women from the tropics of Central America, Venezuela, Colombia, Caribbean Islands, and the Philippines, which should be given favoritism because it was exploited as an American colony from 1898 to 1947. Elderly Japanese, Chinese, Russians, and Koreans can be taken care of by sterilized young women from South and Southeast Asia.

With so many young women leaving those tropical areas, their populations will not be reproducing, and those areas will decline in numbers as they become hotter and more unlivable. Giving good wages and pensions to these workers will give them incentive to migrate and send money back to their family. This voluntary non-violent system of immigration is much superior to other means of reducing global population, and it gives a role for every nation to contribute to population reduction. Their labor rights should be protected, and they should be welcomed as essential workers in the aging societies of North America, Europe, and East Asia.

Done along with the abandonment of fossil fuel use, the development of plant-based diets, and the return to nature of about half of all land areas and about half of all oceans and waterways, population reduction can help humans to adapt to living sustainably and in harmony with nature. If we truly wish to live in a world where nature is not destroyed, we must make all of these changes. Not one or the other, but all of them together. The future of the planet will depend on these substantial changes and revolutions in conceptions of morality.