

# NUMBERS

**A Population Decrease Proposal**

**Rob Ord, PhD, LLB**

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*Numbers: A Population Decrease Proposal*

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# Foreword

This book proposes that reducing the global population ten-fold is the only reasonable solution to a number of global crises. The result is predicted to be an improvement in the average human condition, regardless of race, colour, or creed, and notwithstanding the failure to resolve other conflicts endemic to humans such as territory, equality and freedom. The improvement rather provides the time and 'space' to allow such resolutions to evolve.

The United Nations, when it is allowed to do so, releases relevant population information which I hope is persuasive of the need to act<sup>1</sup> (URL <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2001/lobali/index.html>). I will show here that the existing global economic and ecological situation indicates that no other fair and reasonable course of action exists. This book will, like many before it, note evidence of an impending ecological disaster and ongoing widespread poverty. Unlike many however, this book:

1. Assumes the pundits are correct;
2. Argues for solutions adoptable either nationally or internationally; and
3. Provides a specific, ethical response.

A few flat-earth supporters will still argue that such a collapse is not imminent, despite numerous publications by the scientific community, and despite eloquent non-fiction

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<sup>1</sup> See for example *The State of the World Population* (New York: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2001).

books from Malthus<sup>2</sup> to Jared Diamond's *Collapse*<sup>3</sup>.

Others, including Diamond, argue that scarcity and collapse have always been with us – on a personal level for the unlucky. There is an American tradition that any 'rugged individual' can rise from rags to riches if (s)he so chooses.

But such 'choice' depends on the luck of birth or position as much as on the social skills<sup>4</sup> to choose and act. For every one who gets and acts on a lucky break in life, there is a second group which do not get the lucky break, a third group which do not act on the lucky break and a fourth group which gets the unlucky break. Such is the nature of opportunism and capitalism, and I address such issues herein.

Opportunism was also a thrust of Richard Dawkins' famous book *The Selfish Gene*<sup>5</sup>. Well, I am selfish too, and I do not fancy the idea of living in an automated, polluted, cell block world for the benefit of the few with money and power obtained through birth or serendipity. Chapter 4 of this book therefore insists opportunism *must* be tempered with ethics or we really are 'no better than animals'; certainly no improvement on the life around us. The reduction in overpopulation is a 'should' – a new ethic.

But neither do I, as a middle-class Westerner, wish to assume the guilt of the billions less lucky, or to continue to attract their anger over global over-development by 'Bretton-Woods' and international but largely Western instruments. At the time of writing, my two adopted

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<sup>2</sup> Malthus, Rev. Thomas *First Essay on Population* (1798 Ed).

<sup>3</sup> Diamond, J *Collapse: How Societies Choose or Fail to Survive*. (Victoria, Australia: Penguin Group, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Goleman D *Emotional Intelligence* (NY: Bantam,1995).

<sup>5</sup> Dawkins, R *The Selfish Gene* (2nd Edition 1989) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

countries Canada and New Zealand have not been at risk of concerted outside attack for 60 years, and given the new likelihood of ideologically created violence, long may that continue<sup>6</sup>.

Any argument that the 4 horsemen of the apocalypse are humanity's 'natural' regulators is to be resisted, again because the only species capable of ethical thought *should not* let them ride.

The book's title derives from a non-existent biblical pun, and from my own conservative political stance. The old testament of the Bible is of course central to Judaism, Islam and Christianity, while 'conservative' arguably includes an element of 'conservation'. Another word used today is 'custodianship', in the mold of a philanthropic landowner, or the 1960s Israelis as assessed by James Michener in his 1965 classic novel "The Source"<sup>7</sup>:

"The other custodians had allowed the once sweet land to deteriorate, the wells to fall in and the forests to vanish ..."

Corporatisation is one legal way of organising large numbers of humans to live efficiently, but it simply subsumes the individual into a larger legal 'body'. We improve efficiencies but lose the individual freedom so revered by the West. In suggesting this book's alternative to a corporate vision of our joint future, perforce I am strongly criticising corporate-style world views and policies. However, even if the ideas herein were accepted in their entirety I am quite sure that robust corporations would adapt.

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<sup>6</sup> The risk of terrorist attack is much less than the risk of the scenarios described by Jared Diamond, *supra* n. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Michener, J. *The Source* (1965) (London: Secker & Norberg, 1986 Edn), p 868.

This book, then, is a non-violent alternative to obvious socio-political issues leading to pollution, resource depletion, conflict, and even terrorism, in today's world. It is a *normative* book. It therefore 'prescribes' or lays down 'a principle of right action binding on the members of a group and serving to guide control or regulate proper and acceptable behaviour'<sup>8</sup>. It is an attempt to apply a social standard to an accepted fact<sup>9</sup>: overpopulation.

The other approach to such an issue would have been 'ontological': to simply posit the existence of overpopulation and its solution with some empirical support and leave the reader to his or her own moral response. But in my social experience he or she will not make the connection to his or her own existence. Even one's partner may not accept that having 4 children is part of the problem. I therefore choose a 'deontological' approach – one which hopefully leads readers to a moral obligation to ask themselves hard questions.

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<sup>8</sup> *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (1976) (Toronto: Thomas Allen & Son Ltd, 1976 Edn): normative; norm.

<sup>9</sup> Farrar, J & Dugdale, A *Introduction to Legal Method* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edn 1990), p 10.

# Introduction

There are ten times too many humans for the earth's environment. I will argue that the solution is roughly 100 years of stringent birth control by all humans on earth. The self-imposed birthrate would ideally be one child per couple per generation over the 100 year period. The concept of low birthrate to check population growth is not new<sup>10</sup>. What was less obvious was that in this way a geometric *decrease* in human numbers would occur, as:

$$16 \rightarrow 8 \rightarrow 4 \rightarrow 2 \rightarrow 1$$

Assuming a human generation time of roughly 25 years, and taking accidents of birth and death into account, humans could in theory reduce their numbers ten-fold in 100 years using birth control alone, from:

$$8 \text{ billion} \rightarrow 4 \text{ billion} \rightarrow 2 \text{ billion} \rightarrow 1 \text{ billion} \rightarrow 500 \text{ million}$$

The rest of this book is devoted to persuasion.

The wrongness of current thought is argued. The morality of the consequential economic and ecological well-being is argued to outweigh the immorality of the temporary restraint. Following from this, the community

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<sup>10</sup> The "1-child world" concept itself emerged independently. See Maurice King's 1997 URL article entitled 'Demographic Entrapment: A Choice of Uproar' which appeared in CCN's Focus, 1997, Vol. 7, No. 1, page 37.

which seeks to balance its population may be *justified* in rejecting immigration, even by refugees, unless immigrants agree to adhere to the local rate of reproduction.

The upshot of the stringent birth control would be that the *per capita* wealth of every human would increase on average, because resources and accommodation would remain constant. Surpluses would then exist for the redistribution of that wealth. But acceptance of this obviousness must overcome practically *all* economic theory.

Of course markets would shrink and the concept of 'growth' as we have known it would have to change. Economic growth always implied a growing population. This book argues that such a correlation is fictitious – an artifact of narrow thinking and not thinking on a per-capita basis.

The above proposal also runs counter to the concept of 'free trade' in vogue for 75 years with the World Trade Organisation ('WTO'). Free trade is impossible unless the earth had homogeneous culture and homogeneous ecology. Even so, the 'decrease proposal' does not threaten non-biological and non-cultural freer trade – the subject of another book!

My participation is inspired by the culture shock of high technologies, by global warming, by crises in natural products, and by the ongoing territorial disputes for less and less territory. The beliefs expressed here have been criticised and debated among friends since the early 1970s. That was a time of questioning of numerous social and biological preconceptions. My own chosen path was genetics; from a genetics perspective I and others questioned the belief that aging was inevitable. At some point the *ecological* objection to such an idealistic thought was raised:

"So what happens to the world if everyone's lifespan increases?"

Decades later Professor C. Harley and others finally discovered the telomerase deletions at the ends of chromosomes in aging cells in culture. The discovery supported predictions by Professor R. Holliday in the early 1970s that aging of human cells must be due to deletions of chromosomal material. As with such discoveries, technology followed in the form of Harley's Geron Corporation, aiming to study and ultimately to prevent the effects of those deletions. Our perception of ourselves as humans may be set to change yet again, but in terms of the above ecological objection, we aren't ready.

While scientists worked towards understanding aging and the related grails of cancer and eugenics, outside the lab the Western socio-political environment had also transformed itself, from the questions of the sixties to the excesses of the seventies to the reaction of the eighties to the retreat of the nineties to the bunker mentality of 2001.

Given the changes and the avoidance of big picture issues in the 'externalities' of the consequent material world, it is not hard to understand why the related social and biological questions were not asked. When we weren't working we became 'consumers', intuitively cautious in the face of the quite amazing technology. The world may not see such a compressed burst of creativity as the last 40 years for long time.

Science itself was influenced by these changes, as the funding attitude scientists had relied on in the 1970s was replaced with targeted funding for profit. This change came from a new focus on free markets by England and the UK in the 1970s, as governments there were influenced by free market ideologists, called variously market liberals, 'neoliberals', or the 'New Right'. I define the term neoliberalism in more detail in Chapter 1.

Outside the lab neoliberalism and 'profit' motivations

replaced professed 'public good' motivations. The rainforests, the oil, the fish stocks of the world became depleted. Glaciers melted. Territories were plundered and increasingly fought over. My generation of Westerners – including myself – for the most part found jobs and turned inwards to the one universal good remaining: 'the family'.

However it is difficult to believe that as pollution and resource depletion became obvious, the simplest response – non-violent population reduction – was never seriously considered by decision makers.

In the 1970's the obvious birth control approach to stabilising human populations *was* widely mooted, but then dropped as the 'political correctness' of human rights amazingly meshed with neoliberal policies and the decline of communism. All modern thinkers with influence – Feminist, socialist, neoliberal, Foucault – addressed not ecology but narrower social issues. This abandonment temporarily benefited corporations positioned by their naturally opportunistic philosophy and global opportunities. Such 'multinationals' exploited the lack of any coherent opposing ethic to consumer mentality, while lobbying for the removal of many regulatory mechanisms which might have slowed down local environmental deterioration. Indeed, ecological and behavioural aspects of biology and sociology which might have emphasised both the problem and the solution were set back thirty years by these events. *Silent Spring*, written by a woman, and *The Territorial Imperative* written by a man, were equally eclipsed.

I argue in this book that even today economists choose to ignore ecology as – for the most part – beyond the 'externality' limits of neoliberal economic philosophy. I further argue that the regulation neoliberals deplored was in fact part and parcel of their own philosophy. The regulators

simply represent a *democratic* corporation – of us who do not wish to be ripped off by those unwilling to look beyond the next bill, the next child, the next deal, or the next product.

If my understanding of economics and of ecology is correct (and nothing in the last 30 years suggests it is not) then the pollution and resource depletion of today has its origin in the mindset of ‘growth’: of economies and of numbers of people.

Yet returning to my own path, understanding of the aging mechanism coincided with the changing nature of the relationship between young and old, of succession and to how society operates. I left science and turned to the law. Law derives from ethics (see Chapter 5). Many Western countries project inconsistent population ethics which are reflected in their laws. Compare the so-called rights of the unborn with the right to a safe environment. Ethics for fetuses may be politically correct, but the large upsurge in violence and even terror since the 1960s means that we are ignoring ethics for the streets. Again, I ask: could numbers play a part in this? Again, this book does not seek to provide answers to conflicts, merely to allow the earth to continue to survive in a recognisable form while the human condition continues to seek answers to its problems. My primary thesis is however, that a large reduction in population will, by reducing economic and ecological stresses, lead to reduced social and territorial stress as well.

I have divided the book into two parts: practical and legal aspects of the ‘decrease proposal’. Part I A. examines ‘macro’ economic and ecological paradigms. Part I B examines social and religious paradigms which might contribute to why there are ten times too many of us and why no social or religious institution is raising the ‘population card’. Of course without these, in the Democratic west no legal institutions are likely to act either.

It does not help that the 4<sup>th</sup> estate is obsessed with a successor to Saladin instead of with our impending common fate.

Part II examines mechanisms by which the decrease proposal could be implemented, while criticising current norms and laws. It outlines the author's proposals for the necessary national and international law changes required to achieve any initial global consensus, monitoring and enforcement for such a programme. Although dialecticians from Hegel to Sartre<sup>11</sup> indicate it will be impossible to predict the outcome, it may be that the territory men tend to seek and hold will continue to change from spatial to conceptual. Whether a twentieth century human would call this 'progress' in terms of tools and luxuries is unclear, and like all authors of change I hope my good intentions do not pave a road to Hell.

I have tried to cite sources when possible, however some statements derive from well known news sources which I leave the reader to confirm. My writing style is not kind. In particular there are footnotes which the reader ventures into at his peril, because they represent the authors lateral thoughts and not the 'flow' of the text, such as it is.

Many readers may be women or couples for whom having 'only' children will be contentious. I do not know many women who would voluntarily restrict themselves to one child. Similarly parents hoping for a particular gender of child may view this book with alarm. But you and yours

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<sup>11</sup> Sartre, J.P. *Search for a Method*, Translated by H. Barnes (Vintage Books Edn, 1968) (New York: Random House, 1963), p 34. Hegel's 'dialectic' consisted of the 'thesis' of a man, opposed by its 'antithesis', resulting in the transformation of both in a 'synthesis'. For Hegel the synthesis had spiritual essence, for Sartre the transformation caused by the synthesis of materialism versus need to freedom was then inconceivable.

are using my resources, too.

I hope many of my readers will be feminists. Feminism distracted half the population and the gender historically most willing to effect non-violent change in matters ecological. I accept male territoriality and aggression are critical to use of space and resources. It is inappropriate to address female territorial issues here because there are so few studies of human female territoriality, but it would affect resource use in the West from the family home to the multinational corporation.

However the ecology is collapsing whether there is gender equality or not. This book serves notice that each of us can influence our collective fate simply because we almost all choose to have children. Even for the rich, the assignment of the family cottage or 'bach' becomes an issue with more than one child, as attractive areas for vacationing skyrocket in value and retaining them becomes fraught. Of course the value increases – because of the numbers of buyers.

I write from the perspective of a very lucky man. I draw on my life in not one but *two* underpopulated countries: Canada and New Zealand. I draw on my experiences in not one but *two* careers: molecular geneticist and lawyer. It has been a good life, and in a way I seek to increase the opportunities I had for the children of others, so that perhaps someday "there will exist for everyone a margin of *real* freedom beyond the production of life"<sup>12</sup>.

As discussed in Chapter 4 it is only human to act on such opportunities, including bringing this issue to the reader's attention.

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<sup>12</sup> Sartre, J.P. *Search for a Method*, Translated by H. Barnes (Vintage Books Edn, 1968) (New York: Random House, 1963), p 34.

This book is written for the long-term strategist, for the forestry company executive, the ecologist, the patriot and the true conservative. I try to visualize the future in terms of uncrowded vistas, in terms of safe territories with work, play, in terms of enough capital for all, and in terms of trying to hold those wild things we love for our children's grandchildren, who hopefully will be able to have more than one child again.

This book also serves notice to the opportunist and those who have no feeling or care for the future of others. I hope that such notice may lead to more ethical entrepreneurialism than the last 25 years has witnessed. As noted above for corporations there will always be traditional capitalistic opportunities, and population reduction does not threaten them.

**Part I**  
**Practical Aspects of the**  
**Decrease Proposal**

***Section A***  
***The Current Paradigms:***  
***Why We Are Too Many***



# Chapter 1

## Overpopulation is External to Existing Economic Perspectives

### 1.1 Introduction

There are too many of us because of an instinct or two. We all want to ensure our children ‘carry on’. Economists have trouble with instinct. In this chapter I argue Population-as-detriment, that is any deleterious effect of large concentrations of humans, has been ‘external’ to all economic perspectives, and that this must change.

Why reduce world population when most western economists<sup>13</sup> insist that in general societies need to *increase* their numbers? Economists thinking in economic terms generally follow tried and true capitalist thought:

- “The first [property of capitalism] is its continuous effort to expand wealth”<sup>14</sup>; and

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<sup>13</sup> This study does not address non-Westernised economies or societies which have avoided WTO/World Bank/IMF restructuring.

<sup>14</sup> New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 103: ‘capitalism’ (‘wealth’ is undefined in *Fontana*,