

WHY WORRY

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One great bogeyman conjured up by our intellectual Cassandras in the last decade is the haunting threat of population gone wild. According to the doom-criers, we are in imminent danger of crowding ourselves off the planet; we are proliferating so rapidly that we must soon outstrip our food supply and experience not only the pressures of overcrowding but starvation as well.

Trying to make sense out of the confusion of fact, fancy and fabrication concerning population is like attempting to interpret the line tracings on a dozen different weather maps simultaneously. One suspects also that predicting what the world's population will or will not be at some indefinite year in the future is subject to the same inaccuracies and inconsistencies as long-range weather forecasting.

Past performance records of earlier demographic prophets show that they've been wrong just as often as right. One chronic and constant error of most general prophecy in this field has been that of constriction, i.e. prophecy made from the bias of particular locale, circumstance and popular concern. The other, and possibly most serious error, has been discounting the inevitable and periodic, elemental and self-inflicted calamities that befall humanity. Wars, mass purges, droughts, famines, plagues, typhoons and earthquakes are no respecters of population trends.

Worry about overpopulation became fashionable in this country in the late 50s when faced with the reality of the post-World War II baby boom and a constantly rising birth rate. Experts began projecting population statistics based on the then-existing upward curve. They did not mention that in 1936, when our fertility rate was at its all-time low (about 1/3 of what it was in 1800), they were just as concerned about the falling curve. Nor do they mention now that from a high of 24.5 per 1000 in 1957 the birth rate here has dropped to 17 per 1000 today.

Illustrative of the local flavor of sociologic concern about population is the case of Japan, at present; Japan has 102 million people, half our number, all crammed into a group of islands whose total area is smaller than that of our one state, Montana. Further, because 85% of its territory is mountainous, nearly all of its population is crowded into the other livable 15%. In regard to population density, Japan, in 1968, had 1333 inhabitants per square kilometer of arable land as compared to Holland, the next most densely inhabited nation, with 565.

Twenty-five years ago Japan was also worried about overpopulation. In 1947 the

Japanese birth rate was 34.3 per 1000, One year later they passed a Eugenic Protection Law, which removed obstacles to birth control, abortion and sterilization. By 1960 their birth rate had fallen to 14.2 per 1000.

For the last few years, alarmed by the low birth rate and the increasing shortage of young labor, which is upsetting their economic growth, the government has been urging people to have more children.

We suspect that population, our own and that of the world in general, will do what it's going to do in spite of the wails of the Cassandras, the theories of the demographers and the simplistic plans of the dreamers. If it is Man's destiny eventually to claw for food and crowd himself into oblivion, Nature will at least have rid the earth of its most troublesome creature.

Don't worry about it any longer.

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