

Population Explosion and Ecological Imbalance

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Gertrude: Dr. Franklin Wolff will discuss some communications on the subject of the population explosion and its ecological problem.

Recently I received a communication by one of our associates relative to what may well be the most serious problem facing the world today, namely, the problem of the population explosion combined with the problem of pollution and the problem of a threatened ecological balance. I shall read the principle part of the letter received this month:

Last night on one of the most popular television features, NBC's *First Tuesday*, considerable time was given to a verbal review entitled, "The Year 2000." Several prominent scientists occupied the entire segment with giving their views on what life will probably be like then, or before then. This was well done, impressive, patently sincere, and entirely frightening. I've determined to take a bit of your time with certain questions arising in my mind in connection with the views of these scientists. The three deadly enemies these scientists see is foredooming this country in particular and perhaps the general level of civilization earthwide are: overpopulation, ecological imbalance due to pollution, and overconsumption by the West. I will condense here only one example of each given by one or other of these recognized scientists. I paraphrase, of course.

Research shows that the average American woman thinks it desirable that she should give birth to 3.4 children. If she cannot be shaken from this idea, somehow, somehow, then we are *kaput*, finished; the story is already over. By the year 2000, we will have overpopulated ourselves into a completely untenable condition.

People think about what pollution does to lungs, trees, and so forth, but what is much more serious is what it will inevitably do to the climate. As impurities increase in the atmosphere and layers above, the climate will inevitably grow colder. In about 30 years, spring will be starting much later and summer ending much sooner in the northern tier of states, and winters will be much, much colder. Quite soon we will have polluted ourselves into another ice age, and all the scientists I know agree that this is inevitable if the pollution rate continues; they only disagree about how soon. The estimates range from 30 to 60 years in the future. All my scientist friends feel as I do, that it is utterly futile to plan ahead any further than two or three years.

The United States now consumes 45 percent of everything that is humanly consumed on this planet, and at present rates it will soon climb to 80 percent. Smaller, underprivileged countries are waking up to this fact. They are starving while we throw away an abundance after fattening ourselves. What can they do about it against a superpower? Well, bacteriological warfare is the poor country's nuclear arsenal. I expect to see the population of this country reduced drastically by this means within a few years.

This television program is not the only source of information about how scientists view the future along such lines. You are familiar with similar outlooks expressed in other media and by other men, but these summaries supply my point of departure for a few simple questions. They arise from genuine puzzlement and a deep concern on my part.

One, how can the 'good' that we expect in 1975 make itself felt in ways strong enough to compare in effect with such planetary 'bads'? This is the *Kali Yuga*. Matter dominates spirit to such degree that intense and sustained effort is needed on the part of the average Westerner to become aware at all of the truth of spirit in this life, not to speak of nourishing it into life-dominance. In the rigid chaos of an overpopulated society, how can we expect that even a major influx of spiritual energy can realize itself on earth, can fail to be suffocated or lost in a welter of crowded suffering?

Second, will the entry by some means of the White Brotherhood into the overt world-picture in 1975 be at least in part directed to the solution of the above problems? With many years and from many sources, I have arrived at this concept, possibly wrong in general, though I feel probably right: they are superhuman in power, and that power may be vast, but in comparison with the giant inertia, the titanic ignorance, and the seemingly unchangeable *karma* of the world, their powers are quite limited. Of course, there's always the standard comeback: what do you know of what they are doing? What does any imperfected person know? But this resolves into a matter of faith and hope. I claim that these are not necessarily eradicated by logical questions such as this one.

Third, if the White Brotherhood cannot interfere with the *karma* of the world, how can they be expected to produce or bring about any far-reaching amelioration in time to avoid the *Gotterdammerung* envisaged by these scientists?

Our national population is expected to double by 1980. Knowing people to the small extent I do, I can still predict with full confidence in my small knowledge that people will not do what needs to be done about overpopulation until it is hurting severely, and by then the process may be irreversible. I feel that something should be started now if there are any effective tricks in the deck. And perhaps it has; perhaps just such programs as I saw last night are part of the starting. Yet, where are we in it? Is it logical to suppose that every small glimmer of light such as this

should be attributed to great workers behind the scenes? Science, imperfect as it is, is certainly of adequate stature to deal with statistics and make projections. Scientists, being co-inhabiting denizens of the planet, might well be expected to show such concern on their own without internal intervention.

I know that I sound impatient. I'm always impatient for the fire trucks when the house is already burning. And as for faith, my belief that I might be in a position this life to be of service is not other than a demonstrated faith on my part. I certainly didn't arrive at such a conclusion on my own.

Now, I'm not asking to be let in on the plans of the White Brotherhood, and I'm not assuming that you know all such plans, but you must know more than I do. Confusion and ignorance can hardly be an asset on the part of anyone who has any possibility of being of service. And as for the good *karma* of developing one's own work in service, I will gladly forgo it for the greater effectiveness of working with some degree of knowledge.

And so on.

In answer to the foregoing, I wrote as follows:

I shall try to answer your letter re: population explosion, damage to ecology, pollution, and so forth, concerning which you seem to have just become cognizant. I have been aware of this for some years and regard it as more serious than the problem of the atom bomb. But as I have not the energy to go into these matters on a purely individual basis, and am working on a record of my thought for general use, I propose to read the main portion of this letter onto the tape of which a copy will be taken by Jim for preservation there. Incidentally, he has quite a store of my tapes now and they're being played on Thursdays.

What are the implications of the present-day damage to ecology; growing pollution of air, water, and land; growing population; pest poisoning; and increased damaging radiation? In simplest and most brutal terms, the answer is, assuming that heroic steps are not now taken, a world so poisoned and otherwise damaged that it could not support a human population more than a few hundred years more. I do not expect that it will be this bad since consciousness of the problem is growing, even with a sense of urgency. We may, before it is too late, take the desperate steps that are necessary, at least among the civilized peoples of the earth, but concerning the other peoples, I am more than a little doubtful.

How large a population can this world support? I'm not qualified to suggest a numerical figure, but in more abstract terms, I may say, the maximum for which the world could supply the minimum food necessary for maintaining productive capacity; the minimum clothing for protection against cold and none for modesty or aesthetic value; and minimum shelter against the elements, and there could be no materials diverted to use for culture. Also, maintenance of the maximum possible would require

the liquidation of all non-productive, or non-producers, except children; that means the liquidation of the aged, the permanently infirm or incapacitated for any reason. Doctors would have to change their attitude and keep alive only those who can be returned to production.

How much could the earth produce? Part would be mineral and could be reused, part would be energy, and with the exhaustion of fossil fuels, atomic and solar energy, and so forth; but for the greater part, the population would depend upon the productivity of the earth's surface and the oceans. Would maximum production mean the use of every bit of land that could grow a crop and the killing off of all other creatures that compete for food? The ecologists tell us no, and I think they are probably right. By that means we might attain a temporary increase of production followed by a decline because of the violated ecological balance which is necessary for maximum production.

What would be the kind of life with maximum possible human population? It would be life with but one purpose, namely, living in order to live and maintaining the future population. There would be no room for culture or any spiritual interest—a meaningless existence. To preserve any culture or higher interest, there would have to be a special class set aside for whom there would be the necessary leisure and special resources, and corresponding reduction in the possible maximum population. Of course, with the atom bomb there would be a substantial reduction of population, but at the price of rendering a substantial portion of the earth's surface non-productive. So I see no hope in this direction. There is no point in being emotional about the situation, nor hope in placing one's confidence in the action of an extracosmic God. If there is such a God, the record of history would indicate he's more a demon than anything else.

Well, what can be done? The answer is very simple in terms of formulation, namely, cut out most breeding, lower the standard of living by using fewer things and using them longer, reduce pollution to the point where nature can handle it, learn the necessities of ecology and apply them, and, finally, cut out competition, including war, for war is the essence of competition. And now, how do you apply the above? Ah, there is the rub. Let us look at some of the implications.

First, cutting out most breeding: determine first the optimum possible human population compatible with ecological balance. One ecological authority has said that the U.S. population is already too great for such balance by about 50 million persons. Then restrict every family to not more than two children when we reach this optimum or have passed it. To enforce this, I see several steps that might be taken: (a) an income tax disadvantage or a welfare disadvantage to every family with more than two children, (b) sterilize both parents of every family that has more than two children, (c) if the above is not sufficient, then sterilize the parents of every family after they have had two children. Of course all this could hardly be done in a democracy, so there would have to be a powerful dictatorship.

Two, lowering the standard of living: ecologists have stated that the modern American makes 50 times the demand upon the ecology that was made by the primitive Indian. This would have to be cut drastically—drive cars that will go for 200,000 to 300,000 miles instead of 50,000 to 100,000 miles and thus reduce scrapping, as an example; and the same for all other items.

Three, reduce pollution: technically this seems to be an engineering possibility, but the price would be a greater cost for the products consumed. This, too, means a reduced standard of living.

Four, learning the necessities of ecology: this is a critical problem. I do not think we know enough yet, so further research should be encouraged, and the lessons learned taken to heart. We may have to accept more bugs in what we eat and settle for lower agricultural yields than we have currently, but the lower yields might be maintained indefinitely.

Fifth, cutting out the competitive spirit: competition is the essence of war, and with the atom bomb war is a luxury we cannot afford.

How can all this be done? One way is to have a one-world government with dictatorial powers. All freedoms would go out the door. I do not like it at all, and I would be most reluctant to accept an incarnation in such a world.

As to the effects of polluting the air, scientists are of two opinions, neither very attractive. If temperature goes down and the ice advances, life would be driven away from the interior of continents and especially from the north, concentration would be heavier at the coasts and tropics. But if the theory of the greenhouse effect due to the excess carbon dioxide in the air, then the air will warm and the ice melt faster. It is estimated that if the ice on Greenland were all melted, the oceans of the world would rise 75 feet, and the ice from the south polar continent would raise the oceans 250 feet, or all together, 325 feet. This would be a little rough on coastal residents, but the interior would be warmer and also the north and this might compensate for reduced land area. Clearly the scientists are not yet certain or there would not be two prognostications.

Are there other possibilities? There is a thought from *The Secret Doctrine* re: the population explosion. It is there stated that the evolution of this humanity is 150,000 years behind the cycles and that there would be a pressure for speeding up so as to come abreast of the cycles. Not everyone could stand the speed up, and some, perhaps most, would drop out, enter *Pralaya*, and wait for another opportunity. Those who could meet the pressure would remain with this earth evolution. Further, there would be an increased number of human entities entering incarnation for their last chance to stay with this earth. Now, this might account for the population explosion, and it may be under control so that the desperate situation outlined above would not arise. The problem would remain a possible one. We would see an automatic slowdown, probably by an increased sterility

among potential parents. But if there is not help of this sort, and humanity must handle the problem by its normal resources, then what I have outlined above would seem to be substantially correct.

All that has been handled so far concerns only the short term problem of the next few hundred to perhaps a thousand or two years. I have much more to offer on the long term problems of the next million or millions of years. This is already in the tapes which Jim has and if you are interested, I suggest you go and listen to them.

The problem here presented in these communications is of premiere gravity. There is yet a problem of the atom bomb, which, because it is so dramatic in its effect, has so far so well appealed to the imagination that we may have taken steps sufficient to keep it into control. And the control is by technical men, professional men, and that makes it more promising. For the problem of population explosion, and of pollution, and of poisoning, and so forth, involves practically the cooperation of all persons on this earth. And the average intelligence and the average forethought of the mass of humanity makes one very doubtful about an educational program being a sufficient means for effecting the necessary results. It would appear, then, that when the situation becomes desperate, our ideals of government, of procedures that are reasonable and just, may have to go out of the door, be thrown away, in the desperate attempt to preserve human life itself. In the last analysis, so far as the mass of humanity is concerned, I would say that the will to survive, the will to live, is a greater power than the force of any ideal of justice or reason. I, therefore, do agree with a statement made by Sri Aurobindo concerning the probable future of the world during the near term—that it would appear that it will become the worst imaginable; he says the worst and maybe more than the worst, which I would say is a poetic expression rather than a logical one.

However, and this I do realize, that the *sadhaka*, we assert, should not dwell too much on this, but continue with his spiritual practice, his orientation to the ideal, his striving towards the heights, and perceiving that the resolution is bringing from those heights the necessary manna for the redemption of this world. That is the task of the *sadhaka*. For the technical part of the problem, we may leave that to the scientists, the men of money, the men of managerial ability, the technicians, and the politicians of government. But for the *sadhaka*, there remains this non-spectacular but most important part of the task.