

Lecture 26: Other Major Theorists of Population

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In the second part of the twentieth century, especially in the context of developing countries, Malthus's ideas influenced the planners and social scientists a great deal. They explored the negative linkages between population and human welfare. Two important theorists of this period adopting Malthusian line are Hardin and Ehrlich. Hardin, a professor of Human Ecology at the University of California, having very strong views on the matter, even raised doubt about the ethics of saving lives in poverty stricken developing countries. Paul R. Ehrlich was an entomologist, associated with Stanford University, who specialized in studies of butterflies.

To Hardin, poverty and epidemics are nature's way of maintaining demographic equilibrium. By preventing deaths without putting a condition that the developing countries should control their population size, the developed countries are creating a situation in which a much larger number of people would die in the developing countries in the future. And those acting altruistically today will be responsible for greater misery in the future.

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Some of his major ideas are: in place of shortages of supply in the developing world attention should be shifted to longage of population; if the world is to be treated like a spaceship then it has to have a powerful captain and in absence of this the different countries should be seen as life boats some of which are overcrowded; commons cannot be managed because it is in the individual interest of all that they are exploited to the detriment of collective welfare; developed countries should not supply food to less developed countries facing starvation unless they decide to reduce their population size. To him the combination of welfare and freedom is the root cause of what he calls the run away growth. To prevent this either social welfare considerations have to go or laissez-faire birth control (freedom to breed) will have to be restrained. It is not possible to maximize two things simultaneously: population size and welfare. There is a need for mutual coercion, mutually agreed upon by the majority of people affected.

Paul R. Ehrlich declared that the battle to feed humanity is over and in the coming years the world will face scarcities, famines, drop in life expectancy, extinction of life in several regions, and smog disasters. He drew the attention of people to connection between hunger, deforestation, droughts, traffic congestion, drug abuse, global warming, widening hole in ozone layer, acid rains, increasing use of pesticide, inadequate sewage treatment plant, and aid and population growth. *The Population Bomb*, published in 1968, summarises his major ideas. The argument was further carried out in *The Population Explosion* written by Paul R. Ehrlich jointly with Anne E. Ehrlich. Ehrlich looked at the future state of mankind as an alarmist and attributed the emerging crisis not only to population growth (P) but also to rising affluence (I) and technology (T). Affluence is defined as per capita level of resource consumption, and T as the environmental impact per unit of consumption.

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Using the equation $I = PAT$, he showed that the environmental impact is the product of population size, affluence and technology. It may be noted that unlike neo-Malthusians of England, Hardin and Ehrlich give more importance to population control (i.e., reduction in population size) rather than birth control which focuses on reduction in fertility levels only and aims to reduce population growth rate.

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MORE ON MALTHUSIAN AND MARXIST THEORIES OF POPULATION

Even though demography, the science of population has gained tremendously in last few decades both from methodological sophistication and more data, the essential dividing line in the theories of population is still the controversy between Malthusian and Marxian paradigms. The controversy has strengthened mainly due to their roots in two dominant, political philosophies of modern times: rational capitalism versus socialism. All social science thinkers from West, including those critical of Malthus, are attacked by socialists for defending the interests of the capitalist class and providing a misleading theory. To quote:

Bourgeois sociological theories of population are extremely contradictory. On the one hand they criticize the positions of Malthus, Spencer, and the Social Darwinists; but on the other hand, bourgeois sociologists, while recognizing the decisive importance of social factors in demographic processes, do not accept the concept of a socio-economic formation. They replace the concept of classes by a vague concept of social stratum. They depict the antagonistic contradictions of capitalism as those of industrial society as well; ... (Smulevich, 1978)

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Yet, as argued by Caldwell (1998), Malthus's essay played a powerful role in the establishment of family planning programmes in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and many other countries. Lee and Feng (1999) examine the influence of Malthus on Chinese population policy and say that Malthusian focus on the potentially precarious balance between population and resources is one of the central present day preoccupations. Therefore, it should not cause surprise if the Malthusian pronouncement can be located in the population policy of a communist country or a concern with the institutional changes can be found in the capitalist thinking about population control programmes. The goals of the national policies are chiefly determined by the economic and demographic profile of the population. The countries where population is stationary or is declining and the level of development of productive forces is high, there is a pro-natalist policy; and the countries where population growth is rapid and the level of development is low there is an anti-natalist policy, directly or indirectly, strong or weak. There is a need to maintain a balance between population and resources. It is not a controversial issue now. Thus a document of Chinese Population Policy says:

Confronting us today are two possibilities either we control population growth strictly and effectively or we exercise no strict control, carry out no effective measures, and let the population continue to grow, thus leading to a state in which neither the people's living standard can be improved nor our economic, cultural and defense construction can be successfully carried out. Our option will certainly be one of these two possibilities. We believe that the comrades of the whole party and the people of the whole country can soberly realize the seriousness of this issue, and will voluntarily implement the policy and stipulations regarding the control of the population. (Chinese Population Policy Draft, 1982).

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It was made a constitutional duty for Chinese citizens to practice family planning under Article 49 of the country's Constitution approved by the Fifth National People's Congress on 4 December 1982. Commenting on the results of the Chinese Census conducted on 27 October 1982, Le Chengrui (1982), the Director, State Statistical Bureau, said:

Thus, of the more than 300 million increases in the 18 years, close to two-thirds occurred during the first nine years. This was mainly caused by the 'leftist' tendency in the guiding ideology during the first nine years. Because effective measures were not adopted in family planning, there was a drastic increase in the size of the population. This was a major mistake in population policy." The new Constitutional amendments in China enunciate the reciprocal duties of parents and children. In USSR, another socialist country, differences in population growth rates of Slavic, Baltic and Muslim groups have ultimately led to endorsement of a regionally differentiated demographic policy at the 26th Party Congress in February 1981 (Wever and Goodman, 1981).

Although the role of administrative pressure on individual Chinese families by family planning cadre and other officials is well documented (Aird, 1982), Greenhalgh (2003) argues that the core ideas underlying the one-child policy in China came from Western discourse. They were shaped by the Club of Rome's work on the future crisis of the world.

A synthetic approach to population is found in the explicit aim of the World Population Plan of Action-Bucharest 1974: "to help coordinate population trends and trends in economic and social development", prepared after an intense conflict between countries divided in two major camps: incrementalists, and redistributionists. The incrementalists group consisted of the Western European Nations, United States and Canada, which favoured increase in "Commitment of governments to family planning." The redistributionists consisted of the majority of developing countries and the countries of Soviet Bloc, which emphasized the need for developing better redistributive policies.

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India stood for the middle path (Berelson, 1975). The Indian slogan was: “development is best contraceptive”, by which the Indian representative Dr. Karan Singh Actually meant that we should have development of the underdeveloped sections, and propagate contraceptive through both development and family planning (Singh, 1975). Since then India has adopted a synthetic model that has gradually become the most popular policy model in the world.

In sum, Malthus warned that the world is suffering from large population and Marx warned that the problems of unemployment etc. cannot be solved within the capitalist framework. Subsequent writers on the subject emphasized population control not only for improvement in employment and income but also for the sustainability of development and the very planet itself. The question is not of either or type. If the global zero population growth has to be achieved through low and not high birth and death rates (Espenshade, 1991) efforts are needed at all the levels:

- Limit the growth of population
- Move from economic prosperity to economic sustainability
- Promote the value of simplicity, equality, brotherhood and peace
- Replace machine by man wherever possible and progressively everywhere