

Modern Genocide—the Malthus/Darwin Influence

Population and Politics in the 19th Century

--from Avoiding Extinction, 1997

"It is quite conceivable that a country without colonies may cease to rank as a great European power, however strong it may be. Therefore, we must never become rigid as a purely continental policy must make us, but see to it that the outcome of our next successful war must be the acquisition of colonies by any possible means." [1]

--H. Von Treitschke, German historian, 1897

Not long ago, I watched a segment of a "Sightings" show devoted to the "population problem." The segment suggests that the fate of Easter Island serves as a warning to all of us on Earth, a warning that over-population can result in the extinction of peoples and possibly ... extinction of the species.

What was the fate of Easter Island? According to Dr. Paul Ehrlich, the chief "expert" employed in the report, the people of Easter Island went out of balance with their environment. They cut the forest cover, destroying their own principal food source. The hungry people of Easter Island then turned to cannibalism, according to Ehrlich.

The segment continues by showing the current destruction of the rain forests, and by suggesting that today the human species is following the path to extinction. The conclusion Ehrlich draws: The planetary population is now beyond the "carrying load." The population must be brought under control, or we'll all die.

Dr. Ehrlich is a modern-day Thomas Malthus, a population alarmist. His grim portrait of the end of the Easter Islanders is sheer conjecture, not science. It is highly unlikely that a people surrounded by the infinite bounty of the sea found themselves facing starvation. When populations disappear from an area,

the usual reason is severe climatic changes. In the case of island populations that disappear, the most probable cause is inundation by the sea. These possibilities are not discussed by Ehrlich. No, it is quite clear to the population specialist that the Easter Islanders vanished for the very same reason contemporary man could disappear--abuse of the environment.

1998: Two hundredth anniversary of Malthusianism

In 1998, we mark the two hundredth anniversary of Malthus' essay on population. How much longer will we tolerate Malthusian pseudo-science? In 1984, Roger Revelle, former director of the Harvard Center for Population Studies, estimated that the planet is capable of sustaining 40 billion people, many times the current "carrying load," without compromising itself or any life form on the planet, provided resources are managed intelligently. If there is indeed a serious threat to our biosphere, it comes from the under-application of intelligence rather than an over-supply of bodies. [2]

The Malthus conjectures on population have been reiterated so often, in so many different formats, they are now components of the "conventional wisdom" of the species. Today, most people accept as an obvious truism the idea that "over-population" is the big problem on Earth. News of this "truth" has traveled world-wide, and it has served as rationale, time and again, for the deliberate, systematic destruction of people, i.e., genocide.

Poetry of genocide

Prek Po is a village about fifty kilometers north of Phnom Penh. Here are the opening verses of a poem, "The Krasang Tree at Prek Po," written by the exiled Cambodian poet U Sam Oeur:

In '75 the krasang tree was green,
bore fruit for the soup of all the villagers.
By '79, the krasang tree had withered, its thorns
adorned with the hair of babies, its bark blood-stained

In '75 the krasang tree was surrounded
by people seeking refuge.
By '79, the krasang tree was surrounded
by babies skeletons, smashed

against its trunk by Utapats [evil ones].
The Utapats said: "To annihilate
grasses, uproot them, daily!" O, Grass!
What sin has the grass committed? [3]

To the question "What sin has the grass committed?" there is an answer. The grass had committed the crime of being too numerous. This crime was first identified as such by Thomas Malthus.

A glimmer of light

Genocide is defined as the deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, political or cultural group of people. The term was originated in 1944 to describe the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis. In the past several years, genocidal campaigns have been waged in Rwanda and Bosnia, Iraq and elsewhere. The Western world is alarmed. From what depths of horror, of perversion, has the monster arisen?

In this chapter, we'll chart, briefly, the rise of the monster, beginning with the population essay of Malthus. At this point, in our investigation of the dark, I would like to offer a glimmer of light: Genocide, the destruction of our species, and eco-cide are not inevitabilities. They are possibilities only, and they become impossibilities just as soon as we discard the belief systems which give them life. Now let us return to the matter at hand....

"The Principle of Population"

The Malthus population essay was written in response to the revolution in France. Malthus defined the revolution, and indeed any form of "mob" insurrection, as an inevitable result of over-population. Too many common people spells insurrection.

From the beginning, the concept of "population problem" was defined by rulers and their ministers as, "A sufficient number of common people to cause serious disturbances to the establishment."

"It may be safely asserted," Malthus declared again and again, beginning in 1798, "that population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical progression of such a nature as to double itself every twenty-five years...." To this conjecture, the rulers of Europe replied, "How ghastly! Why we'll be over-run by masses of starving commoners! Something must be done!"

Early Malthusianism

After the explosion on the world scene of independent republicanism (the American and French revolutions), after the fear-wrought reactions of Burke et al and the dark expositions of Malthus, acts of reproduction among the commoners took on the colorations of criminal conspiracy.

The presumption of Malthus and the establishment was that the number of poor people (read commoners) is a direct reflection of the availability of food for the poor. The more assistance rendered to the poor, the higher the birth rate of the poor.

"Malthusianism"--political theory

"Malthusianism" was the political theory that sprang from the Malthus theory. The very first political application of Malthusianism in England was a cut-back of public assistance to the poor. Why feed potential enemies of the Crown?

It was obvious to commoners that early Malthusianism was nothing more than the self-serving rationalization of the upper classes. During the first fifty or so years of their existence, the doctrines of Malthus were embraced only by the upper classes, but embraced they were ... and held to be gospel.

As indicated previously, Rev. Malthus was employed by the East India Company, which was closely linked with British intelligence. The influence of Malthus on the intelligence people was profound. Malthus invented the field of "population and politics," i.e., population studies with an eye to the political implications of trends.

First "think tank"

In 1821, Malthus founded the Political Economy Club in London. Other founding members were George Grote, David Ricardo, James Mill, and John Tooke. [4] This association was the prototype for the modern "think tank."

Middle Malthusianism

Middle Malthusianism may be summarized in the phrase "laissez faire," which is defined as a political doctrine opposing government involvement in economic affairs beyond the minimum necessary to maintain law and order. The term came into use in 1825, as a political expression of Malthus' theory. The underlying premise is that if the poor are not supported by the state, they will simply lie down and die.

"Laissez faire"--malign neglect

Laissez-faire has nothing to do with the Jeffersonian concept that the best government is the least government. Laissez-faire translates, "The best thing government can do for the poor is nothing." If the governors are to do anything, let them work to debilitate the common people. "Instead of recommending cleanliness to the poor," the Rev. Malthus writes, "we should encourage contrary habits. In our towns we should make the streets narrower, crowd more people into the houses, and court the return of the plague. In the country we should build our villages near stagnant pools, and particularly encourage settlement in all marshy and unwholesome situations...." [5]

Herbert Spencer--"Mr. Malthusianism"

Malthus died in 1834, but his honorific chair as *Nemesis of the Poor* did not remain empty long. It was filled by philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820- 1903), whose vision of biology and evolution anticipated that of Darwin in many ways. Indeed, it was Spencer who coined the phrase "survival of the fittest."

Spencer was an exceedingly ambitious, self-taught social theorist who endeavored to unify all scientific knowledge into one Synthetic Philosophy. After Darwin's *Origin*, Spencer became a chief Social Darwinist. During the decade prior to the *Origin*, Spencer was Mr. Malthusianism. According to Richard Hofstadter, Spencer's "categorical repudiation of state interference with the 'natural,' unimpeded growth of society led him to oppose all state aid to the poor." The poor are unfit, Spencer declared, and they should be eliminated. "The whole effort of nature is to get rid of such, and to make room for better.... If they are not sufficiently complete to live, they die, and it is best they should die." [6]

Laissez-faire achieved, through Spencer, reputability among the common people, especially in America. As a self-made philosopher from the common stock, and as a literary jack-of-all-trades, Herbert Spencer appealed greatly to citizens of the nation where the common man was king.

Late Malthusianism (Social Darwinism)

If the proponents of Malthusianism were to succeed in achieving what they desired, i.e., severe population reduction, they had to enlist the support of those they wanted to eliminate--the commoners. The solution to their problem of unpopularity was provided ultimately by Charles Darwin, who incorporated the Malthus pseudo-science into his own theory of evolution.

"Evolution comes from conflict"

"In October 1938," Darwin writes in his autobiography, "I happened to read for amusement Malthus *On Population*, and being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence which goes on, from long-continued observation of the habits of animals and plants, it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved and unfavourable ones to be destroyed." Darwin's cognition seems harmless enough, at first glance. But consider the idea in these somewhat poetical terms: "Evolution arises from the Cauldron of Conflict."

The "struggle for existence" is rarely discussed any longer as an issue in biology. As Norman Macbeth indicates, "Darwin took it over from Malthus, who was a sociologist (and a grim one) rather than a biologist. It was not derived from a loving contemplation of plants and animals. Such a contemplation would show that there were always more seeds than were needed for the replacement of the parents, but it would not show that each organic being was striving to increase at a geometrical ratio or that there was continual struggle...." [7]

Today, in biology, the emphasis is on co-operative relationships among organisms rather than competitive ones. In *The Lives of a Cell*, for instance, biologist Lewis Thomas writes: "Most of the associations between the living things we know about are essentially cooperative ones, symbiotic in one degree or another; when they have the look of adversaries, it is usually a standoff relation, with one party issuing signals, warnings, flagging the other off...." [8]

Following the publication of the *Origin*, however, the Malthusian ideas of "geometrical population pressure," "life is incessant struggle" and the Spencerian idea of "survival of the fittest" became the major themes in biology and derivative social theory, i.e. "Social Darwinism." Once Darwin had committed himself to the proposition that all life forms tend to reproduce at a geometrical rate, he was compelled to conclude that, as a necessary consequence, life is incessant struggle. Who wins in the struggle of life? The "fittest"-- those having certain advantages over the competition.

Darwinists carry "life is fight" concept into the land of absurdity

In their great enthusiasm for Darwinism, some of Darwin's followers carried the idea of "life-as-fight" to absurd lengths: "T.H. Huxley said that all the molecules within each organism were competing with each other. August Weismann [a German biologist] suggested that the particles of germ plasm were in conflict with each other, so that the ancestors who had contributed them could be seen as struggling with each other as to which should be re-created. Wilhelm Roux developed the theory that the organs were struggling with each other for nourishment, kidneys against lungs, heart against brain." [9]

Earth becomes one ... war zone

Within a decade of the publication of the *Origin*, war became the order of the day. "War," writes Jacques Barzun, "became the symbol, the image, the inducement, the reason, and the language of all human doings on the planet. No one who has not waded through some sizable part of the literature of the period 1870-1914 has any conception of the extent to which it is one long call for blood,...." [10]

To reiterate the insight of Max Nordau in 1889: "The greatest authority of all the advocates of war is Darwin. Since the theory of evolution has been promulgated, they can cover their natural barbarism with the name of Darwin and proclaim the sanguinary instincts of their inmost hearts as the last word of science." [11]

Had there been a hundred Nordaus in the late nineteenth century, it is not likely they could have stopped the juggernaut Social Darwinism. After eighty years of Malthusian lectures and thirty years of neo-Malthusianism in the form of the Darwin theory, the elites of Europe were fully convinced that population was in fact a very big problem, a powder keg under the throne.

Imperialism

From the point of view of those living twenty or thirty years from now, the twentieth century will look like a genocidal nightmare. In this century, our planet has become one vast killing ground. The slaughter began in the nineteenth century, as the major European powers, convinced that the possession of colonies was the key to national survival, set about the grisly work of appropriating as much of the "uncivilized" world as they could seize. Why were colonies so important?

"Surplus populations" and Imperialism

As a result of the "first wave" of Social Darwinists, the rulers of Europe found themselves suddenly with "surplus populations." Nation after nation entered the race to acquire foreign lands. The motive was not greed, it was ... "survival." The nations that would survive into the future, it was believed, would be those in possession of vast tracts of land for dumping of surplus population. The alternative was drowning in a Malthusian sea of flesh. Thus was born the "Age of Imperialism."

African Holocaust

In a very short time, all of Africa was carved up by the European powers. Aboriginal peoples of that continent who objected to slavery were destroyed. Many great tribes, tribes that for thousands of years existed in balance with the environment, were eradicated. This was the "African Holocaust." Today, the holocaust continues.

Empire-building, it may be argued, has always been a main theme of Western civilization. Indeed, modern Western civilization officially begins with the establishment of the Roman Empire and later the worldwide empire of the Roman Catholic Church. These early empires were built slowly, methodically, as expressions of the will of man manifesting the will of the gods, or God.

“War is progress & prosperity”

In the late nineteenth century, empire-building has a different character, a character derived from acceptance of Darwinism as scientific truth. "Life is war," wrote the nineteenth century novelist Henry James. Evolution is war. Progress is war. Darwinism was formulated in the mind of Western man as a call to battle in the service of evolution. War was the "pruning hook of the human orchard." War was the grand test of virtue--of manliness. War was a means of assuring the future prosperity of one's nation,--through acquisition of new lands and their resources.

Masses led to agree to their own destruction

From the point of view of a young man in the late nineteenth century, all this was the stuff of grand adventure. From the point of view of the Malthusian elite, it was a dream come true ... the masses were eagerly agreeing to their own destruction. Further, whatever territorial gains were made as the result of war would serve as future dumping grounds for excess population. Had not Malthus proved that in just two centuries the ratio of population to the means of subsistence would be 29 to 1?

Essentially, the nineteenth century race for empire was an attempt to find an external solution to the "population problem." As the years went by, imperialism led Europe deeper and deeper into a madness from which there was no escape. There was only so much land that could be seized from the people with spears. Sooner or later, the empire-builders had to turn upon each other....

Germany wants an empire, too!

Competition for empire was major cause of World War I. Germany was a late-comer to the race for empire, and this meant she had to "step on others' toes"

in order to seize her share. In 1901, Arthur Dix, the editor of two Berlin journals, wrote: "A timorous people, which knows not how to use its elbows, may of course put a stop to the increase of population--it might find things too narrow at home. The superfluity of population might find no economic existence. A people happy in its future, however, knows nothing of artificial limitation; its only care can be to find room on the globe for a livelihood for other members of its own race." [12]

In *Britain as Germany's Vassal* (1912), F. von Bernhardt, retired German general and a highly influential Social Darwinist, writes, "In the interest of the world's civilization it is our duty to enlarge Germany's colonial empire. Thus alone can we politically, or at least nationally, unite the German civilization throughout the world, for only then will they recognize that German civilization is the most necessary factor in human progress. We must endeavor to acquire new territories throughout the world by all means in our power, because we must preserve to Germany the millions of Germans who will be born in the future, and we must provide for them food and employment. They ought to be enabled to live under a German sky, and to lead a German life." [13]

War becomes "biological necessity"

Given such attitudes (not only in Germany, but throughout Europe), war between the nations became inevitable. It became inevitable for another reason as well: War was viewed by Bernhardt and other influential Social Darwinists as an "indispensable regulator" of populations. "If it were not for war," Bernhardt writes, "we should probably find that inferior and degenerate races would overcome healthy and youthful ones by their wealth and their numbers. The generative importance of war lies in this, that it causes selection, and thus war becomes a biological necessity." [14]

References:

- [1] *Conquest and Kultur--Aims of the Germans in Their Own Words* (Washington, D.C.: The Committee on Public Information, 1918) 71. Treitschke was described by the Kaiser as "Our great national historian." Extremely popular, revered by many, Treitschke was the chief spokesman for late nineteenth century German nationalism. In the view of Treitschke, Germany had to become the dominant state in Europe and the world.
- [2] Robert W. Lee, "Feeding the World," [The New American](#), 1 June 1992.
- [3] *Selections from Sacred Vows*, trans. U Sam Oeur and Ken McCullough (Iowa City, IA: Zephyr Limited Edition Chapbook Series, 1993) 15. "U Sam Oeur is a Cambodian poet who survived four years in Pol Pot concentration camps by feigning illiteracy and by destroying the manuscripts of his literary work. Since he had grown up on a farm, he was able to adapt to the brutal rigors of forced agricultural labor."
- [4] *Masterworks* 195.
- [5] *Masterworks* 235-36.
- [6] *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1962 [1944]) 41.
- [7] *Macbeth* 59.
- [8] *The Lives of a Cell--Notes of a Biology Watcher* (New York: Bantam, 1975) 6.

- [9] Macbeth 56-57.
- [10] *Darwin, Marx, Wagner--Critique of a Heritage* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955) 92.
- [11] Hofstadter 171.
- [12] *Conquest and Kultur* 23.
- [13] *Conquest and Kultur* 79-80.
- [14] *Conquest and Kultur* 32.

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