THE SKEPTIC ARENA.COM

November 22, 2014

Population controls will not solve environment issues

By Matt McGrath

*A worldwide one-child policy would mean the number of people in 2100 remained around current levels, according to a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.*

Matt, China is the only country in the world where a one-child policy has actually been tested. According to United Nations and U.S. Census Bureau estimates, its population will decrease incrementally over future decades.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China\_population#Population\_projection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China_population%23Population_projection)

And Matt, the Chinese policy isn't even a true one-child policy as it is enforced on less than half the population.

*Even a catastrophic event that killed billions of people would have little effect on the overall impact, it said.*

Matt, that should have been your second ... big red flag.

*There may be 12 billion humans on Earth by 2100, latest projections suggest. Concerns about the impact of people on the planet's resources have been growing, especially if the population continues to increase.*

Matt, *if* it continues to increase? Do you have any data to suggest that the world's population has ever failed to increase in the last 2,000 years? If not, then why would you even question an increasing population?

Humans must take drastic action, and soon, if we are to avoid the horrors of overpopulation such as wars over resources, famines, etc. These horrors are already beginning to make themselves felt.

*The authors of this new study said roughly 14% of all the people who ever existed were alive today.*

Matt, here are a couple of links which explain why, trying to estimate the percentage of people alive today out of all those who have ever lived, cannot be accurately estimated:

<http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2002/HowManyPeopleHaveEverLivedonEarth.aspx>

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/fact-or-fiction-living-outnumber-dead/>

Matt, even those studies have some glaring errors in them, such as starting their calculations with only 2 people, and beginning their calculations only 50,000 years ago when homo sapiens sapiens had been in existence well over a hundred thousand years before that. Then there is the issue of the other human species. We had to descend from one of them. Where do we begin counting?

*These growing numbers mean a greater impact on the environment than ever, with worries about the conversion of forests for agriculture, the rise of urbanisation, the pressure on species, pollution, and climate change.*

Unfortunately Matt, those worries aren't shared by the rich; and humans have yet to figure out ... how to bring the rich under control.

*The picture is complicated by the fact that while the overall figures have been growing, the world's per-capita fertility has been declining for several decades.*

*The impact on the environment has increased substantially, however, because of rising affluence and consumption rates. Many experts have argued the best way of tackling this impact is to facilitate a rapid transition to much lower fertility rates.*

*To work out the impact on population, the team constructed nine different scenarios for population change up to the year 2100, using data from the World Health Organization, and the US Census Bureau's international database. They also used "catastrophe scenarios" to simulate the impacts of climate disruption, wars or global pandemics on population trends.*

*According to the study, attempts to curb our population as a short-term fix will not work. If China's much criticised one-child policy was implemented worldwide, the Earth's population in 2100 would still be between five and 10 billion, it says.*

Matt, why didn't they give us an estimate without a worldwide one-child policy so that we could compare the difference?

Obviously, the estimates will differ by billions. In China alone, their policy has resulted in a reduction of 200-400 million people, and they only make up less than 20% of the world's population. Eliminating billions of additional humans can only alleviate the problem. It doesn't have to "cure" the problem. Why does it have to be an everything or nothing proposition? What is wrong with improving the situation?

*"We've gone past the point where we can do it easily,*

Okay Bradshaw, then let's do it the hard way - start passing out condoms.

Global warming has also been going on way too long. We can't worry about solving the problem quickly - but we do need to start taking action now to solve the problem. Whatever time it takes ... it takes. But we can no longer afford to let the rich destroy the planet while they increase their portfolios.

*just by the sheer magnitude of the population, what we call the demographic momentum. We just can't stop it fast enough," said Prof Corey Bradshaw from the University of Adelaide.*

Matt, tell Bradshaw that soon we may have no choice. It may not be a matter of stopping it fast enough. If we don't stop it - it will stop us. The Earth has finite resources so population growth has to stop at some point. The sooner it stops, the less suffering there will be.

*"Even draconian measures for fertility control still won't arrest that growth rate - we're talking century-scale reductions rather than decadal scale, because of the magnitude."*

Matt, we don't have the luxury of not arresting it. Regardless of the time it takes, it is something that must get done ... or else.

*In their paper, the researchers also look at the impact on numbers of a global catastrophe in the middle of this century. They found that even an event that wiped out two billion people would still leave about eight and a half billion in 2100.*

Matt, 19% would still be a hell of an improvement. I'm getting the impression that just because there is no magic bullet, that the researchers feel like we should take no action and just let it all play out. The problem with that is, we already know how it will play out, and it doesn't play out all that well ... for us.

*"Even if we had a third world war in the middle of this century, you would barely make a dent in the trajectory over the next 100 years," said Prof Bradshaw, something he described as "sobering".*

Matt, that depends on how many casualties there were, doesn't it?

And the researchers seem not to have considered that you can't just subtract the catastrophe's casualties - you also have to subtract all the children and grandchildren that those casualties would have produced. A catastrophe that takes out a billion victims will reduce the population in the future by many billions.

*The scientists said the issue of population and its impact on global consumption was often described as the "elephant in the room" - a problem that the world ignores as it is politically and ethically difficult to tackle.*

Matt, like global warming, Nature doesn't really care if humans ignore it.

Matt, look at these two definitions of the word "inertia":

(physics) The property of a body that resists any change

to its uniform motion.

(figuratively) In a person, unwillingness to take action.

Matt, the first definition describes Mother Nature; the second describes the human response.

I think "inertia" is the perfect word to describe both the global warming and overpopulation crises, both from the side of Nature, and from the side of reluctant humans.

Matt, there is only one way to win ... and it doesn't involve sitting around.

*But the research shows that curbing numbers will not deal with environmental challenges in the short term.*

Matt, that is irrelevant. We don't have a choice. Either we deal with it or it will deal with us. The more numbers we curb ... the more time we buy for ourselves.

*"Our work reveals that effective family planning and reproduction education worldwide have great potential to constrain the size of the human population and alleviate pressure on resource availability over the longer term," said Prof Barry Brook from the University of Tasmania.*

Matt, now that guy has the right spirit ... that makes one.

*"Our great-great-great-great grandchildren might ultimately benefit from such planning, but people alive today will not."*

Matt, the people in China probably don't agree. Since they instituted their one-child policy, China has climbed from a third-world nation to one of the most powerful economic countries on Earth. Having hundreds of millions fewer people means that those who are alive get more per capita of the limited resources that are available. As bad as their pollution problem is, imagine it with a few hundred million more consumers and polluters.

Matt, you are falling for the "All or Nothing" fallacy. The fact that these difficult problems can't be magically solved as fast as you would like, doesn't mean that we shouldn't be taking immediate action to mitigate the damage. The consequences are simply too dire to imagine ... if we don't.

*As a result of this long-term impact, the world should focus on curbing consumption and designing ways to conserve species and ecosystems.*

*"Society's efforts towards sustainability would be directed more productively towards reducing our impact as much as possible through technological and social innovation," says Prof Bradshaw.*

Matt, I just went back up and reread the title of this article. It seems pretty misleading. You went for the sensational headline. But the scientists did not say that "Population controls will not solve environment issues." They said it would take time and that population controls will not solve these problems in the near future.

But in going for the splashy headline you misled your audience into thinking that we are helpless to stop the looming disaster, when in fact, we have already seen evidence that shows we are anything but helpless.

The biggest issue is: how do the masses take control from the rich in time to save the planet?

Answer that one, Matt, and you will have redeemed yourself.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-29788754>

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

How curiosity changes the brain to enhance learning

For the study, participants rated their curiosity to learn the answers to a series of trivia questions. When they were later presented with a selected trivia question, there was a 14 second delay before the answer was provided, during which time the participants were shown a picture of a neutral, unrelated face. Afterwards, participants performed a surprise recognition memory test for the faces that were presented, followed by a memory test for the answers to the trivia questions. During certain parts of the study, participants had their brains scanned via functional magnetic resonance imaging.

The study revealed three major findings. First, as expected, when people were highly curious to find out the answer to a question, they were better at learning that information. More surprising, however, was that once their curiosity was aroused, they showed better learning of entirely unrelated information (face recognition) that they encountered but were not necessarily curious about. People were also better able to retain the information learned during a curious state across a 24-hour delay. Curiosity may put the brain in a state that allows it to learn and retain any kind of information, like a vortex that sucks in what you are motivated to learn, and also everything around it.

Second, the investigators found that when curiosity is stimulated, there is increased activity in the brain circuit related to reward. This reward circuit relies on dopamine, a chemical messenger that relays messages between neurons.

Third, the team discovered that when curiosity motivated learning, there was increased activity in the hippocampus, a brain region that is important for forming new memories. Also there were increased interactions between the hippocampus and the reward circuit. So curiosity recruits the reward system, and interactions between the reward system and the hippocampus seem to put the brain in a state in which you are more likely to learn and retain information, even if that information is not of particular interest or importance.

The findings could have implications for medicine and beyond. For example, the brain circuits that rely on dopamine tend to decline in function as people get older, or sooner in people with neurological conditions. Understanding the relationship between motivation and memory could therefore stimulate new efforts to improve memory in the healthy elderly and to develop new approaches for treating patients with disorders that affect memory.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

Richard Eskow

He is a well-known blogger and writer, a former Wall Street executive, an experienced consultant, and a former musician. He has experience in health insurance, finance, and information technology.

"They call themselves bipartisan because they're able to buy members of both parties."