

Is the earth still underpopulated?

I was surprised by Andrew S. Kulikovsky's article on human population.¹ Although the article was in the 'Viewpoint' section of the journal, it was still striking that no more than a jot of evidence was adduced to support what seemed to be its central claim: that the earth is not yet full, i.e. that the earth's resources can easily sustain the current population at reasonable levels of consumption.

The 'jot' to which I refer is the fact that "assuming a population density similar to New York City, the earth's entire present population of seven billion could fit into the state of Texas" (or a slightly larger area at the lower population density of London). From this, and from this alone, Kulikovsky reasons, "It should be clear, then, that whatever the maximum sustainable population is, we are presently nowhere near it."

Readers wishing for a more evidence-based treatment of the issue of population, from a Christian perspective, would do well to start with the chapter by John Guillebaud and Pete Moore in the recent book *Creation in Crisis*, from which I quote:

"When God said, 'Fill the earth', it is reasonable to assume he did not mean us to 'overflow' it. God's earth is finite. On the basis of the numbers already present and sharing in its total biocapacity ... and, since we are unlikely to accept an ecological footprint per capita that would dictate unremitting extreme poverty, the planet is 'full'.²"

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References

1. Kulikovsky, A.S., Human dominion and reproduction, *J. Creation* 26(1):43–47, 2012.
2. Guillebaud, J. and Moore, P., Population matters: voluntary contraception for environmental sustainability; in: White, R.S. (Ed.), *Creation in Crisis: Christian perspectives on sustainability*, SPCK, London, p. 97, 2009.

Andrew Kulikovsky replies:

I would like to thank Anthony Smith for his comments and for giving me an opportunity to clarify why I believe the earth is not 'full'. Smith complains, of my article, that "no more than a jot of evidence was adduced to support what seemed to be its central claim: that the earth is not yet full". According to Smith, the article by Guillebaud and Moore in *Creation in Crisis* provides a more evidence-based treatment of the issue of population, although the passage he cites simply asserts that the earth is full, yet offers no supporting evidence.

In any case, I did draw special attention to the work of J.E. Cohen, who has authored a detailed investigation into the maximum population that the earth could support. Cohen concluded that the answer depends on many parameters, including personal tastes, values and fashions.¹ As I stated in my article, if we assume a population density equivalent to London, the earth will still be largely empty.

In addition, I would also point readers to the comprehensive work *The State of Humanity*, edited by the late Julian Simon. This work contains 58 chapters by 67 authors and examines human progress and our impact on the earth and its resources. It contains numerous chapters on human life, death, and health, standard of living, and productivity. It examines the availability of natural resources and of agricultural land, food and water, as well as reviewing humanity's impact on the environment. Simon concludes that, based on present trends of development and technological progress, "[t]he material conditions of life will continue to get better for most people, in most countries, most of the time, indefinitely."² But why should we believe Simon and his colleagues rather than others such as Guillebaud and Moore? Simon answers: "My colleagues and I have been right across the board in the forecasts we have made in the past few decades, whereas the

doomsayers have been wrong across the board."²

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References

1. Cohen, J.E., *How Many People Can the Earth Support?* W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1995.
2. Simon, J.L. (Ed.), *The State of Humanity*, Blackwell, Oxford, p. 642, 1995.

Creation and the courtroom—what is the right strategy?

I read with interest Rachael Denhollander's article on how Christians may be able to reopen the public schools to at the very least ID (Intelligent Design). She offers this statement as a possible line of reasoning to enable ID to be taught in public school science classrooms:

"Yet a converse line of reasoning is equally valid for evolution, for evolution is every bit as markedly linked with particular religious sects as ID. Further, while ID does require at least a foundational belief regarding a deity, evolution most certainly does as well. Developing these two facets of evolution may be useful in creating an analogy to demonstrate that neither theory is disqualified simply by association with a religious group, or inherently religious simply because it entails a belief regarding a deity" (p. 115).

She goes on in the following sections to make the case that evolution forms the basis for belief in certain religious sects (humanism and atheism). This would put evolution on equal religious footing with ID, thereby paving the way for ID to be taught alongside evolution in the science classroom (pp. 115–118). However, she failed to comment on theistic evolutionist groups such as the Biologos foundation and the Templeton foundation. The existence of such theistic evolutionary interest groups would seem to show, at