

**Study Questions
Week 3**

Topic for the Week:

Population Change and Food

Readings for the Week:

Thomas Malthus. 1798. *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Preface, Chapters 1 & 2.

Friedrich Engels. 1844. The Myth of Overpopulation, from *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*. Reprinted in Ronald L. Meek (ed.), *Marx and Engels on the Population Bomb*, Ramparts Press, Berkeley, CA (1971).

UNFPA. 2001. *Footprints and Milestones: Population and Environmental Change*. The State of the World Population 2001, United Nations Population Fund, New York, pp. 1–36.

Ester Boserup. 1965. *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth: The Economics of Agrarian Change Under Population Pressure*. Aldine Publishing Co., Chicago. Introduction, pp. 11–14; Chapters 4 & 5, pp. 35–55.

Study Questions:

- (1) What are Malthus' two basic postulates about human nature? What does he assert about the relationship between population growth and food production? What does he conclude about the effects of population growth, given his postulates?
- (2) Given Malthus' formula, what would one conclude would be the fate of human beings? What can humans do to escape that fate?
- (3) On what grounds is Engels' refutation of Malthus' thesis based? What claims does Engels make in contradiction to those presented by Malthus?
- (4) How does Engels' assertion help us understand the issue of population growth and food production? Is there a direct relationship, as Malthus claims?
- (5) The United Nations Population Fund identifies environmental issues as being among the most important questions facing humankind at the dawn of the twenty-first century, What factors affect environmental quality? How do these affect human well-being? Are these currently in balance on the planet as a whole, or in any locality on the planet?
- (6) How does cultural change affect population changes and environmental impacts? Provide concrete examples of these interactions.

(7) The United Nations Population Fund identifies four areas of concern pertaining to the environment: water, food, climate change, and biological diversity. For each, identify:

- The nature of the issue and the particular threats or challenges it poses
- The interactions between this issue and population change
- How the dynamics and impacts of this issue vary across global regions
- The particular ways in which each issue affects our ability to feed ourselves

(8) On p. 27 of the UNFPA report, the authors note:

“Increasing pressure on the environment is the result of, on one hand, increasing affluence – that is, more consumption, pollution and waste, and on the other persistent poverty – that is, lack of resources and the technology to use them, and lack of the power to change these circumstances.”

Trace ways in which level of development (affluence, poverty) affect environmental quality and food production.

(9) What is meant by the term *ecological footprint*? What does the ecological footprint measure? Which regions of the world produce the biggest footprint, and which produce the smallest footprint? Which factor contributes the most to these results?

(10) What is meant by *environmental refugees*? What actions produce environmental refugees and how are they distinguished from other types of refugees?

(11) What are the important variables or factors in Boserup's theory? What types of societies is she discussing (e.g. what social and economic conditions are prevalent)? What is the relationship between population change and food production that she posits under such conditions?

(12) How do Boserup's ideas relate to those presented by Malthus? By Engels?