

FAMILY PLANNING AND DEMOGRAPHIC PLANNING  
- A GENERAL VIEW ON THE SCALE DIFFERENCES

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**Abstract**

*Planning is an old concept, but its employment under various guises is one of the social mechanisms of the last century. Related to the population's numeric evolution and its structural complexity, planning manifests itself in two dominant directions – individual (familial) and collective (political). The paper consists of a brief review of the moral and social meanings and implications deriving from two types of planning associated with demographic behaviour.*

**Keywords:** planning, demographic policy, liberty, person.

**Introduction**

For the past years, most demographic reports on the increase of world population are suggestively accompanied by a chart detailing the increase in numbers registered by the inhabitants of the Earth in the last two hundred years. And if the historic perspective favours theoretical observations and debates, the evaluations being only remarks, future projections are always motivations for passionate debates, in various circles, and their practical implications are not at all negligible.

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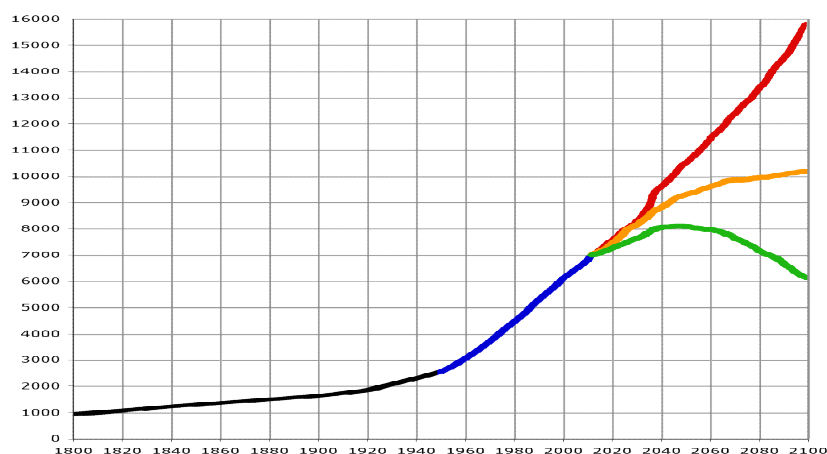


Figure 1. The population of the planet between 1800-2100  
 (according to UN scenarios, 2004)

The movement from the first billion inhabitants, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the second billion, in approx. 100 years, and then to the next values, up to the seventh billion reached in 2011, occurs simultaneously with a vast process of secular modernization and change in the social paradigm. Therefore, close to or after reaching a new scale value, as the spectacular growth and reproductive potential of the population were confirmed, the idea that it was necessary to plan the number of inhabitants became more and more frequent. On the background of large-scale economic transformations with a strong cultural-behavioural reflex, there is a gradual re-arrangement of social values, while the importance of some human rights and attributes, such as liberty, responsibility and planning ability, is re-evaluated.

### **From “planum” to “plan”**

*Planning*, a quintessentially human activity, entails, by its very nature, and in the most general sense of the term, three aspects that define it: knowledge, choice and ethics. It generally presupposes the existence of a known situation, with certain characteristics, and which must be undertaken within a certain time interval.

In point of etymology, planning comes from the Latin *planum*/ (*plana*, pl.) meaning “întindere, suprafață, nivel, câmp deschis”<sup>5</sup> [flat surface, level, open field]. English borrows it from French, as “plan/ to plan,” meaning action scheme or method, but also indicating a lack of clear delimitations or of any type of filling, suggesting, thus, the possibility of

<sup>5</sup> Dictionar latin-român, Ed.Stiințifică, București, 1973.

choosing the way in which the surface is to be “furnished.” This meaning given by English was favoured in approaches with explicit spatial references, where the *plan* is the “white” surface, with no restrictions, challenging because it offers multiple possibilities for action. Geographers, architects and urbanists are the oldest users of this meaning which they applied to space and, especially, to the city. Moreover, it is well known that, no matter the area where it is employed, planning has at its core a spatial component, even when this is less apparent. The new contexts for planning – among which the managerial was highly successful in the last century, turning planning into a keystone (J. Ivancevich, 2003) and fundamental function (H. Koontz et al. 2007) for the success of an entity – gradually integrate this spatial trait of planning, included in the definition provided by AESOP<sup>6</sup> – “planning is a tool to promote and manage change with a spatial approach.”<sup>7</sup>

Demographic planning, a branch of planning and a more recent syntagm in its long history, follows the above-mentioned definition bringing arguments in favour of the necessity for finding a balance between the number of people and the space they occupy at a certain time.

Technically speaking, the concept also implies the idea of control that an entity gifted with intentionality has over a process, which is particularly significant for the current topic. The control and the management capability are subject to a linear rationality which sets, after a contrastive and prospective study, objectives and finds means of attaining them.<sup>8</sup> According to the activity scale for this process, planning can be the manifestation of a political organism, the expression of a group or the attribute of human individuality, in which case the connection with the theme of personal freedom becomes more obvious.

Since it is a complex category, with a definition at least as open to interpretations as planning, *freedom* can be expressed from the strict perspective of the person, as well as from that of social history, where freedom becomes the attribute of a community (people, nation). Adopting the Christian understanding of freedom, the correct meaning of the term when applied to a community is, rather, that of a sum of rights, because freedom as ontological condition and supreme gift for each human consciousness can only be individual.

This distinction is even more relevant in the case of the duo freedom-demographic planning, where the different scale of spatial and temporal manifestation suggests distinct, although, often confused meanings.

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<sup>6</sup> Association of European Schools of Planning.

<sup>7</sup> AESOP Charta, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Dictionnaire de la géographie et de l'espace des sociétés, Ed. Belin, 2003, p. 720.

*Malthus - a culpable theorist of demographic or family planning?*

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the topics of freedom and population (control) planning appear in philosophical texts, like that of J. S. Mill on freedom, as well as in socio-economic theories, like that of Malthus, which opens the series of concerns with overpopulation.

The Scriptural command "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1,28) was surely familiar to Robert Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), his biography stating that he belonged both to the sacerdotal (Anglican) and to the intellectual elite. However, in contrast with the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment's perspective, according to which society was a perfectible organism (Condorcet), his assertions on the population are rather pessimistic, the English theorist remarking the disparity between the rhythm of human reproduction and that of food supplies, in favour of the former, as well as the potential effects of this alarming disparity.

We do not know whether Malthus based his views exclusively on personal observations and calculations, carried out for several decades on certain communities within the flourishing colonial empire, but it is quite evident that his scenario reflects the beginning of a new perspective on the world, constructing an argumentative work with the instruments of his age. Accordingly, he enumerates novel solutions for stopping the population growth, later synthesized by Mark Blaug in two categories – preventive (voluntary, specific to man) and positive checks (resulted from the laws of nature) (M. Blaug, 1997).

"A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society does not want his labour, has no claim of right to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. She tells him to be gone, and will quickly execute her own orders."

If the contemporary man may well express indignation at the so-called positive checks, since a text such as this cannot be accepted in point of social ethics, not to mention Christian belief, the discussions on the preventive checks are more nuanced. There are two extreme possibilities in this category – vice and abstinence – both at the disposal of personal freedom.

This mixture of attitudes leads to a controversial reception of Malthus' work, even among Christians: on the one hand, contestation, rejection and condemnation of all the solutions proposed by the author of

the *Essay on the Principle of Population*; on the other hand, selective acceptance, continued in forms that left the century significantly changed.

It is not our intention to deliver here a critical analysis of the theory, but only to underline the fact that its author is the one who, while establishing the frame of debate for the connection between personal freedom and its expression in procreation, will start the dissemination of the idea of personal responsibility and choice in deciding the size of the family.

Does Malthus exaggerate individual freedom? Does he misconstrue it? At first sight, reading in a positive key, personal freedom is implicitly admitted in his text, since the entire construction of the preventive way is based on personal freedom. Vice and abstinence are, for example, manifestations resulting from exercising the freedom with which we have been endowed, reiterating the fact that, from a Christian perspective, vice is the expression of renouncing freedom, while abstinence is a means of asserting it. Freedom means following Christ and his teachings, consciously. As for the effects of procreation and birth, the Malthusian application acknowledges their efficiency. This might reveal a conflicting ambivalence, but Malthus solves it in favour of the Christian perspective, exhorting moral restraint.

What can be adopted both on an individual scale and extended, as attitude, to a collective scale is moral restraint freely adopted, considered by the ecclesiastic the best – or, maybe, the only – way of reducing poverty and famine, by reducing the number of children among the poor.

“I believe that it is the intention of the Creator that the earth should be replenished; but certainly with a healthy, virtuous and happy population, not an unhealthy, vicious and miserable one. And if, in endeavouring to obey the command to increase and multiply, we people it only with beings of this latter description and suffer accordingly, we have no right to impeach the justice of the command, but our irrational mode of executing it.”

(Malthus, ed. 1992)

Therefore, Malthus connects man's natural ability to reproduce with the obligation of using it not autonomously, but in perfect conjunction with God's other gift, reason, which invites responsibility and moderation. Accordingly, a more careful consideration of the social and natural laws of marriage and bringing children into the world, together with accepting the responsibility of raising them, is not an infringement of God's command, reiterated to Noah (“As for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.” Gen. 9, 7). On the contrary, it is an answer

to a higher command where freedom is the triumph of the balance between human natural law and reason.

Closer to our days, a Russian theologian writes: "Voluntary procreation is more noble than what is due blindly to chance, more often than not unforeseen and unwanted" (P. Evdokimov, 1994). What is not free, what is not conscious has no personal value. Reducing conjugal love to instinct and sensuality in procreation lowers the ties between spouses to animality (Todea-Gross & Moldovan, 2008).

It may seem that we defend Malthus. In effect, our intention is not to adhere to a model which, while imperfect to begin with, degenerated further in the following decades, but to identify and discern the grain of correct Christian attitude in the Malthusian writings, even though they are speckled with errors of the incipient rationalism.

Despite the fact that, when he addresses birth control, Malthus only proposes "soft" measures, applicable individually to each person in turn, according to his/her capabilities, his idea is revisited, more radically, by a compatriot.

Francis Place (1771-1854), a politician and social reformer, is a fervent supporter of contraception. Moreover, his name is much more closely connected with this "social theory," as he is the one to openly advocate adopting contraceptive measures instead of the moral restraint proposed by Malthus, providing, in some of his writings "for mature readers of both sexes," concrete methods of achieving this.

Francis Place, unlike other protagonists, had a strong incentive to support family planning from his own experience. He had been married early, before he was twenty, and he credited his wife's influence for the stability and purpose that his life had from then on. By this he opposed Malthus's prescription of delayed marriage. Place accepted Malthus's principles, namely the unfavourable effects of population increase, but found the means he advocated, late marriage and abstinence, to be extremely unrealistic, even detrimental. From his point of view, contraception was far more practical, and he introduced a pro-contraception position into the radical movement, combining for the first time population control with the idea of family planning.<sup>9</sup>

Opinions like that of Place became increasingly frequent and materialized into an important branch, which, in time, came to be called neo-Malthusianism. The pro-family planning and birth control ideas develop in parallel with a series of socio-philosophical trends from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup>. Feminism starts to make its voice heard, its first representative, the English Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-

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<sup>9</sup> Kurt W. Back, *Family Planning and Population Control. The Challenges of a Successful Movement*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1989, p. 31.

1797), being considered the first theorist of Enlightened feminism, an intellectual pioneer of modern feminism. Her work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) marks the beginning of a movement that would go hand in hand with birth control and the idea of both spouses having a right to decide on the size of the family.

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Annie Besant (1847-1933) is the next feminist whose involvement with fertility control is proven by the support she gave to controversial texts on contraception – especially Charles Knowlton's 1832 work, *Fruits of Philosophy: The Private Companion of Young Married People*, whose impact was decisive in extending the topic to every area of society, beginning with the healthcare system and ending with politics.

The two World Wars and the massive loss of human lives temporarily diminished the fears of the sceptics from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the theme of overpopulation and the need for large-scale control and planning would soon be revisited.

The history of the pro-planning policies, explicitly antinatalist, includes the Paul Ralph Ehrlich episode, the American biologist known for his studies on population, who resets the alarm of the demographic bomb in 1968. The scientist maintains that societies must take decisive action so as to stop the growth of the population, in order to reduce the consequences of the future disasters, both ecological and social. Ehrlich's opinions are downright immoral for the brutality of the ideas he formulates, although they are not singular.

"(...) We must have population control at home, hopefully through a system of incentives and penalties, but by compulsion if voluntary methods fail. We must use our political power to push other countries into programs which combine agricultural development and population control. (...) The birth rate must be brought into balance with the death rate or mankind will breed itself into oblivion. (...) Population control is the only answer." <sup>10</sup>

It is an imposition that is in no way concerned with the uniqueness of the person, but only with an impersonal collective welfare. Naturally, the argument in favour of the necessity for a judicious use of the earth's resources is valid, and the necessity for spatial planning, with emphasis on the 'spatial', is even more at home in this context.

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<sup>10</sup> Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, Buccaneer Books Cutchogue, New York, 1968, p. 78.

### **Planning to the extremes**

*... as global state policy*

Seen as a motor of development, demographic planning becomes a serious topic of discussion with the economic development scenarios and policies created after the Second World War. Characteristic for this stage is that it will be successfully applied by authoritarian governments, as democracy cannot provide the same stability to the political institutions and agencies initiating the long-term implementation of certain measures with demographic impact. Nevertheless, the phenomenon is visible in both types of states. In the '70s, the developed countries register a widespread movement supporting the necessity of "population planning." It triggered great interest and sustained action in numerous fields, from foundations sponsoring conferences on this topic, to journals constantly including opinions and articles on the direct relation between population planning and achieving the objective of economic development, later also become "sustainable." On the agenda of this new orientation, there were several basic topics. One of them was to show that the rapid growth of the population had a negative impact on the social and economic objectives in the years after the War. Alerting the planners and the politicians under these conditions seemed logical, judging by the correlations made between the rates of demographic growth and those of the economic indicators, some of them further supported with illustrations of economic models created on the first computers (Hirschman, 2008: 571). The second key topic concerned the manner in which public policies could reduce fertility by diminishing the incentives and the opportunities for raising children. Adopted at government level, they practically became implicit demographic policies.

Demographic planning as demographic policy on the macro-decision-making level is an expression of state sovereignty and right to decide on certain demographic phenomena, within the bounds of its own jurisdiction, respecting (or not) the rights and liberties of its citizens. The Chinese antinatalist demographic policy started in the '70s and the Romanian pronatalist one of the same age are two relevant examples in this respect.

Although birth rate is, by far, the most targeted planning phenomenon, by extension and association other demographic phenomena can also be subjects of controlled planning for the aimed results. Thus, it is a proven fact that migration and marriage are often the subject of a variety of measures. Moreover, it is also remarkable that no matter the nature and the targeted phenomenon, within any demographic policy there are underlining, interfering cultural and historic elements.



It was stated that demographic planning as state policy invalidates human freedom, although, in reality, in our opinion, between demographic planning and personal freedom there are neither contradictions, nor correspondences, since they operate on different levels.

*...as personal choice*

The situation is different on the micro-demographic level, in the case of the family/ couple and person respectively, where we speak of *family planning*. The phenomenon begins to take shape at the end of the '60s in developed countries, among young families, rapidly gaining enough legitimacy to be adopted as a program of the public sector. In effect, the family planning movement was seen as a response to the issue of population growth in the less developed countries, facing a series of critics and questions from inside and from outside the movement (Hirscham, 2008: 566).

However, there were voices who stated that family planning programs can only provide service and information to those already interested in birth control, without addressing the ground issue of weakening the motivation to reproduce in the developing countries. In other words, policies to change the social structure are also required, so as to encourage postponing marriage and wishing smaller families.

In this case, the stress is, clearly, on individuality and the assumption of freedom of choice. However, from the same Christian perspective, the freedom invoked in the act of procreation as demographic pre-event of birth is not attained by abolishing certain constraints coming from outside, being, above all, a personal human attribute.

The undifferentiated shift in the meaning of demographic planning between its scales of manifestation, based on the idea that one deals with the same common factor – personal freedom –, is inadequate. Planning, on the most general level and in terms of demography, possesses, essentially, a horizontal political dimension which, by implying a common project, excludes, in most cases, the person's liberty, while for family planning freedom is implicit, as a basis for the process: *Liberi, ergo cogito plani* could be the appropriate paraphrase.

However, this acceptation also remains on the horizontal plane of decision, in connection with the landmarks of society, since the profound meaning of personal freedom has a vertical dimension. It does not exclude the possibility of choice, of decision making, even of "planning," but in terms of another finality than that of the material aspect and, the less so, that of procreation. The complex nature of the human being makes the use of the term 'family planning' incorrect, not so much because, in certain areas of human existence, it does not correspond to the range of expression

for the love between two people (and, therefore, the impossibility to plan love), but mostly because it becomes a substitute for true responsibility, although it seems to appeal to it.

### **Conclusions**

That the last two centuries gradually led to the loss of the Christian understanding of personal freedom is obvious. The multitude of theories, positions and solutions for demographic planning is sufficient argument. However, it is not necessarily this particular aspect that discourages, since ideological accidents are frequent in history, but rather the fact that they joined forces with other sociocultural movements, like the ecology movement. The mixture of the two – demographic planning and planetary concern – generated deviant hybrid solutions embraced not only by sceptic demographers, but also by an entire mass of Christians.

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