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書評
BOOK REVIEW

***Empty Planet: The Shock of Global Population Decline*, by Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson**

New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2019
288p, ISBN 978-1-9848-2321-2, 26.00 CAD hardcover

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Empty Planet: The Shock of Global Population Decline, by Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson

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You thought the earth was headed toward a population explosion? It's time to think again. *Empty Planet* is an investigative look at the benefits and disruptions posed by a steadily shrinking global population. Rather than a future where the number of human bodies strains the earth's resources, Bricker and Ibbitson argue that before the end of this century the earth's population will begin to sharply decline, bringing with it environmental advantages, economic difficulties, and shifting global superpowers. Written by Darrell Bricker, a Canadian journalist and international social researcher, and John Ibbitson, a Canadian journalist and political writer, *Empty Planet* is a modern guide to current global population problems and how we may be able to positively shape a future that we cannot avoid. The authors gathered their data by personally travelling to cities around the world and speaking with young people and their thoughts on building families.

In the first chapter, the authors present to us the four stages of the Demographic Transition Model (this name is introduced in Chapter Two). Stage One is when a society has a high birth rate and a high death rate, perhaps due to war, disease, and high mortality. The population may grow at this stage but only slowly and with fluctuations. Stage Two is characterised by a high birth rate and a declining death rate, as medicine advances and people live longer. Populations begin to grow slowly at this stage. Stage Three is when birth rate starts to fall and death rate continues to fall resulting in a rapidly increasing population. Finally, Stage Four is when populations reproduce around the rate of replacement—a Goldilocks-like stage where the population is stable or grows only slowly. The main cause of declining birth rates is attributed to urbanization and empowerment of women.

Chapter Two looks at past apocalyptic predictions of population explosions, the most famous being Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* from 1968. Ehrlich's predictions have not come to pass, mainly because while the population has doubled between 1950 and 2010, food production has tripled. India

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and China have urbanized, and global poverty has been drastically reduced. The United Nations Population Division still predicts that the global population will increase to 9.8 billion around 2050 before stabilizing; however, the authors cite the "recency bias," in which the future is predicted to continue the same as it has for the recent past, for the UN's favourable predictions. They say the UN's prediction is wrong, and instead the Demographic Transition Model will need to add a Stage Five: birth rate falls below replacement (2.1 babies per woman) and life expectancy slowly rises. A slow, deliberate decline in the global population will result.

A shrinking population may sound attractive to young people, as the authors' focus-group conversations reveal, but this is because the dangerous side effects aren't truly noticeable until around two generations later. Chapter Three outlines how Europe's demographic is changing, especially as countries (i.e., the United Kingdom) shut their doors to immigrants. The authors contend that immigration is the best way for developed societies to bolster their birth rates back up to replacement rate, and preventing people from coming is a short-sighted and precarious move. Countries like Sweden have tried to introduce financial incentives for families to reproduce during economic downturns. Ironically through, "Good times lead to fewer babies, then bad times lead to fewer babies," (p. 73) and families continue to have one baby or zero babies even with financial pushes from the government.

Chapter Four puts the focus on Asia, specifically Japan and South Korea. Both countries will face challenges of a shrinking and aging population, and in fact already are. Korea has a current birth rate of 1.2, down from 6.0 in 1950, and while Japan has an official policy to keep the total population above 100 million, it is predicted that it will be only 83 million by the end of the century. Korea and Japan are two closed countries with strong patriarchal cultures, and women in find it difficult to both have a family and work toward their education and careers. Korean culture is so discouraging it has produced a "Give-Up Generation," wherein women feel consigned to give up dating, marriage, childbirth, and more if they want to focus on their career. It is simply too difficult to build a career and a family at the same time, and women feel they must give up one for the other.

Chapter Five brings the topic of childbearing closer to the individual for a moment and discusses the costs of having children. In a developed country, it costs around $250,000 to raise a middle-class child until the age of 19. With urbanization increasing, children are no longer an asset to help on the family farm. Instead they are a liability and another mouth to feed in the city with little earning potential. Childbirth is also a major impediment to women advancing their education and career, and couples often weigh the economic benefits of not having a child or having a child much later in life.

Next in Chapter Six is Africa and in Chapter Seven, Brazil. As a regional representative, Kenya is expected to double in population in the time it takes for Europe to shrink by 4 percent. Many Kenyan woman plan to move to cities, and the authors believe the country will rapidly follow in the footsteps of urbanization, modernization, and women's empowerment. Women are already having less children,

and there are more girls in school than any other time in history. In Brazil, young, educated women struggle to reconcile their career goals and family dreams. High urbanization and decreasing religiosity mean the birth rate in Brazil is 1.8 and falling fast. One reason for this is the popularity of Brazilian soap operas, or *telenovelas*, that feature small families, empowerment, romantic relationships, one's own time, and consumerism—all things that stand to suffer if one or more children are present. Also, after the birth of one or two children, women are opting for sterilization. True women's liberation is being able to say "the factory is closed." Chapter Nine also notes Indian propaganda to have a "complete family" with two children. However, rather than an individual choice, women are coerced and sometimes forced into sterilization after giving birth to their second child.

The focus of Chapter Eight is immigration and why this should be embraced by developed countries. The world is more stable now than any other time, and ¾ of migrants are pulled to migrate for economic factors. The other ¼ are pushed by war, conflict, famine, or disease. If the United States wishes to stay on top as a global superpower, it will also need to embrace immigration more positively than it is currently. While the United States accepts twice as many immigrants than any other country, fertility rates are still dropping among all ethnicities. In Chapter Ten, we see that if America wants to remain great it needs to overcome racist and nationalist intolerances and keep its doors open to newcomers. In opposition to immigration is the threat of cultural and linguistic extinction, as discussed in Chapter Eleven. In Australia and Canada, indigenous birth rates are at or close to replacement rate and falling for the same reasons as everywhere else—urbanization and empowerment of women. Unfortunately, as women become part of city life it becomes harder to preserve indigenous languages and cultures. The authors argue that as English is the new common language of humanity, the prospects for indigenous roots and culture are bleak. Many languages have already become extinct, and small indigenous groups face the same threat.

In Chapter Twelve, the authors give us an unlikely new superpower—Canada. As a Canadian, I was surprised by this turn of events, but after their explanation I couldn't help but side with some of their points. Their main argument is that immigration is the most likely way to increase birth rates, and Canada has had the most successful immigration strategy so far. Why? Precisely because Canada has such a weak national identity and sought immigrants for purely selfish economic reasons. In a mini history lesson, the authors explain the reasoning for inviting immigrants from Eastern Europe, then Asia, then everywhere to the cold, barren, boring country of Canada. Upping policies to focus on highly educated and skilled immigrants also means newcomers can more easily contribute to society while not ending up in ghettos. Without a strong national identity to define the country, people who came were not excluded: "The very inability of Canada to gel as a nation is the secret to its success as a postnational state" (p. 219). Of course, this does not mean everyone is supportive of multiculturalism, even within Canada. Quebec's strong identity makes it harder to absorb immigrants. In short, nationalism is a curse that does not affect Canada (except maybe Quebec). Of course, as the

authors are both Canadians, they may be biased in their favourable portrayal of Canada and its future.

Finally, in Chapter Thirteen we see some of the positive sides of a smaller global population. More people living in dense cities means lower per capita carbon emissions because all of life's daily necessities are close by and easy to access. Forests have the chance to regrow as people move out of the country, and land and sea animals will repopulate as there are less humans interfering in their lives. Unfortunately, while the population shrinks and ages there will be a loss of creativity and innovation, though perhaps with each generation the gender equality gap shrinks and there will be a time of full equality between men and women meaning having children will not derail a woman's career aspirations. And maybe people will continue to have children later, even into their 50s. At this point, who knows?

The authors credit the decline in population to two main factors: urbanization and empowerment of women. These go together as women move from rural areas to urban centres for work and education. Opportunities for education and career possibilities quickly present themselves, and it becomes clear that having a child will mean putting their dreams and aspirations on hold, perhaps indefinitely. You may expect that at this point the authors would gently encourage women readers that they should be having more babies. However, young women (and men) reading this book should appreciate that the authors' tone is never berating or guilt-tripping. They simply state their conclusion for the cause of population decline but do not put the responsibility on young women to give up their dreams and start breeding. Some outside sleuthing will find that one of the authors has only one child, so it would be quite hypocritical of him to push women to have 2.1 babies when even he doesn't.

The authors believe the best way to counter declining birth rates is through immigration, but there are several problems with this approach. If all countries are aiming to have decreasing populations in the future, there simply will not be enough people to migrate at all. And countries that have previously been sending countries will fight to keep their people from leaving. An immigrant here is an emigrant there, and it will be in all countries' best interest to prevent their citizens from increasing the birth rate in another country. Also, as developing countries become more developed and urban, there will be less reason for people to leave in search of better opportunities. The authors also highlight the importance of family, and if the economic incentives of emigrating are not extreme, people may often choose to stay closer to home. Immigration can only be a solution for so long. While one country wins, another loses.

When discussing the economic and environmental benefits of living in cities, the authors do not consider the negative side effects that increase in large, anonymous cities. They seem to have overlooked the consequences city living has on mental health. Technically, dense cities may be more efficient in providing things that people need, but there are a host of social and psychological side effects, such as depression, anxiety, isolation, loneliness, mental illness, and suicide. More people

moving to cities would increase these negative effects at rates we don't yet know, and mental health services would be another cost.

Other than stressing immigration, they don't offer any real solutions to the population problems—and they shouldn't be expected to—but they also don't offer the idea of a declining population as an apocalyptic event. It is something that we should be aware of and devise ways of dealing with as we are presented with challenges. Bricker and Ibbitson have written this book well and in a way that is easy to understand. It is backed by research, and it is entertaining and intriguing to read. If you have only ever been exposed to the horrors of an impending population explosion, this book will welcome you to challenge that way of thinking. Although they are backing their point of view with much research, they must be aware that any future prediction is and can only ever be speculation. Innumerable things could happen that produce outcomes we never would have expected. They do allude to this near the end of the book, but it should be emphasized. In the end, any prediction that comes true, no matter how supported by research, is simply an educated guess. Still, this was an enjoyable read with a methodical look at the world's changing population. It will help you appreciate the gravity of what it means for the global population to get smaller and older, but it also won't leave you in terror for what the future holds. Certainly, things will be different, but that doesn't mean things will be bad. Hope is not lost for future generations.