

Population Growth and the Malthusian Prophecy

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All exponential growth must have a limit. There is simply no getting around this reality for the following reason: any population or other object which grows exponentially will eventually overtake the size of the universe, a physical impossibility, at least as we conceptualize physics. Take the example of Standard Oil, run by John [D. Rockefeller](#), the largest monopoly this country has seen. Just past the beginning of the twentieth century, Standard Oil was growing at an exponential pace greater than that of the economy. That single business came to make 14% of the US's GDP (today, 12% is about the entire size of the healthcare industry, from HMO's to your neighborhood physician) and eventually grew so large it had no market and collapsed. The same must happen to the human population, though ideally in not such a catastrophic manner. Eventually, human population size will bump up against the limits of what our finite resources can support, resulting in the fulfillment of the Malthusian [prophecy](#). The only questions that remain are: when will this occur? and how can we prepare the human race for this occurrence?

To go more in depth regarding [exponential growth](#), traditional logistic organism population growth models, and resource limitations, I've included several mathematical functions

(which produce related graphs; use a graphing calculator while plugging in the appropriate values to view these) in with this piece. The basic exponential model which identifies population size (“P”) next year (period “t”) based on a growth rate over a period of time (“g”) is: $P(t)=P(t-1) \times (1+g)$. Of note is that this is an exponential growth model that depends on a given growth rate. Ente...

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...r, the question now becomes how can we improve the quality of human life in light of this limitation? A few short suggestions will have to suffice for now. Especially in industrialized nations, we should decrease our use of resources. The best way to do this is simple: do away with air conditioning and reduce heating in the winters by only 5°F. Decrease the amount of meat in our diets. Walk rather than drive—in short, all of the suggestions those protecting the environment have shared with us for years. These slight changes will amount to a much greater average quality of life in the coming decades of the population crunch. The only way to make the future better for humans as a population is for the higher-level members of the good consumption chain to cut back. Convincing the public to start suffering now for our future is, however, unlikely in the extreme.

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