



Cumberland Lodge

exchanging views, inspiring minds

Population Ethics: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Birth and Death



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Colloquium Report

This colloquium was kindly supported by:



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INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, many of the most pressing challenges of our age relate to changes in human population. Many people believe that the world is overpopulated and that population growth is causing significant social, economic and environmental harm. However, countries with low rates of population growth are struggling to cope with ageing populations and shrinking workforces.

Yet, engagement with the ethics of population change has, for many years, been divided up between different disciplines, each with their own perspective on the issue. Analytical moral philosophers have debated the value of future lives, bioethicists have considered the moral burden of unmet reproductive health needs, sociologists and anthropologists have studied the emergence of norms and moral beliefs about reproduction and its social context, political theorists have engaged with the limitations of contemporary discourse and economists have modelled the efficiency of allocating resources over larger and smaller populations. Meanwhile demographers, and other social scientists, study the causes and consequences of population change, but seldom engaged with its moral dimensions.

This colloquium was designed to bridge some of these gaps, by bringing together diverse groups to share their perspectives and learn from one another and to present their findings to policy makers and members of the public. In an ambitious program that presented the work of scholars from a wide variety of backgrounds considering very different aspects of population change the colloquium aimed to stimulate growth in new areas of interdisciplinary research towards solving the demographic challenges of our time.

The day began with an introduction to Cumberland Lodge by Owen Gower and opening remarks concerning the divisions and opportunities in contemporary population ethics by the lead organizer Simon Beard. The day was then structured into 4 sessions, each consisting of two presentations followed by opportunities to discuss the themes of the workshop in small groups, and ending with an open question and answer session. The day closed with a keynote address by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta.

OVERPOPULATION

Elementary relationships for long term population growth

- Martin Kolk

Martin Kolk opened the conference with a presentation examining the long term constraints on population growth from an economic demography perspective. Throughout history, he argued, the number of human beings has been constrained by a wide range of factors – including ecological, social and technical limitations to growth. In the past our lack of technology meant that population size was significantly limited by the number of available resources, and it is safe to assume that the number of humans was not significantly lower than that which the earth was capable of supporting at that time.

However, Martin showed how the industrial revolution dramatically changed the nature of these limits to growth, by vastly increasing the maximum possible population size the earth could support. This produced a period of exponential growth in global population. Such periods of exponential growth are not uncommon in the historical record, but they are never sustainable in the long term. In-fact the growth rate of the world population has long ceased to be exponential and has been slowing since the 1960s.

Whilst in the past limits to population growth have primarily been 'hard' Malthusian constraints, such as famine and disease, these are no longer the primary drivers of fertility and mortality, and therefore they no longer provide effective means of feedback for controlling long term population growth. Instead, since most people, especially in developed countries, could support more children than they currently do it seems that the major source of feedback for population growth is via individual birth preferences and people's desire to maximize their well-being. One thing that we can infer from this is that the most plausible way to understand the earth's carrying capacity is no longer in terms of its ability to support human life, but rather in terms of its ability to support life at particular levels of welfare – determined ultimately by the relationship between welfare, fertility and mortality rates.

Martin concluded by showing that, whilst there are good reasons for thinking that this degree of global carrying capacity has already been reached, or even exceeded, for people's current preferences there is at least one good reason to think that it has not and that we can expect more population growth in the future. Since people's birth preferences are correlated with the birth preferences of their parents (and hence the family size in which they grew up), groups with preferences for more children tend to outgrow those with preferences for fewer children. This effect has been seen to increase the fertility rate in some countries, such as Israel, and by reducing the relationship between welfare and birth choice it increases the effective carrying capacity of the earth so that it may end up closer to that which would be imposed by hard Malthusian constraints.

Arguments for Overpopulation

– Silvia Milano

Silvia Milano presented a philosophical review of arguments that policy makers and campaigners have offered when making the case that the world is, or will shortly become, overpopulated. She classified these arguments into one of three broad categories. Firstly, there are arguments to the effect that the global population is exhausting natural ecosystems and leading to resources become either overstretched or exhausted. Secondly, there are arguments that specific populations have become so large as to destabilize political communities, displace people from their home communities or hamper the transition to a free and democratic society. Finally, there are arguments that current population growth rates are incompatible with individual human rights and reproductive freedoms, especially of women, or that they are being caused by unmet reproductive health needs.

Silvia's presentation went on to place each of these arguments in their historical context and to show how a broadly equal concern for all three kinds of argument was replaced by an international and inter-group consensus around arguments of the third kind following the Cairo conference on Population and Development in 1994. Whilst heralded at the time as establishing a global consensus on the need to tackle international population issues this has subsequently proven to be very limiting to international discourse about population. However, recent concern about environmental change and political fragmentation, she argued, have undone much of this consensus and lead to a reemergence of arguments of the first two kinds.

Finally, Silvia considered the fundamental justification for these three categories of argument and pointed out that arguments about the environmental limits to population growth often rested on fundamentally utilitarian concerns about human welfare, whilst arguments from the second category, about the pressure of population growth on particular political communities, tended to rest more on deontological concerns about justice and the social contract.

As such Silvia suggested that there may be room for broad agreement between people who offer both of these kinds of arguments, but that their ultimate justification would tend to rest upon issues such as how the value of human welfare should be aggregated across populations of different sizes and how other kinds of political value, such as autonomy and environmental justice, ultimately related to welfare.

SOCIETY

Who should pay for the costs of children?

– Isabella Trifan

Isabella Trifan, gave a presentation on one of the most important social implications of demographic change, the costs and benefits associated with raising children. Isabella's presentation considered the possibility that justice required society to bear some of the costs of raising children because parenting provided a benefit to society itself. Specifically, she considered arguments to the effect that, since parents raised the next generation of tax payers, considerations of basic fairness required that they should be supported by the society in doing so – or else others would be free-riding on their efforts.

There are many arguments for and against these kinds of consideration, however ultimately Isabella concluded that justice did not require us to support parents for this reason. This is because, even if we accept that parents do benefit society in this way they are not raising children intentionally to provide society with such a benefit, let alone doing so out of the intention of participating in a cooperative enterprise of supporting society as a whole.

Isabella's primary objection to attempts to ground claims for supporting parents on the demands of justice in this way was that parents did not suffer a loss of personal autonomy when they raised children, but rather fulfilled their desires to have a family. As such, Isabella argued that parents were dissimilar from paradigm cases in which justice required that society support individuals because of the social benefits they provide, such as those who are required by law to protect the natural environment, and are more similar to cases in which people produce a public benefit as a mere by-product of their actions, such as when people who chose to cycle reduce congestion and pollution.

Isabella concluded that there may well be other reasons for supporting parents with child raising, such as to reduce gender divides or alleviate poverty, but that the mere fact that parents were raising the next generation of workers and tax payers did not constitute sufficient grounds for a requirement to support them.

The Value of Longevity

– Greg Bognar

Greg Bognar presented a paper on another key aspect of the social effects of demographic change, the value of increasing longevity and declining mortality. Greg pointed out that there were no established methods for evaluating longevity as such and proposed adopting such an approach based upon metrics for evaluating the global burden of disease. Such metrics evaluate health states by comparing a particular situation to the 'ideal', represented by the healthiest or longest lived society in the world today. At present this means comparing the additional life years a patient can expect to receive from a particular treatment or intervention with the life expectancy for somebody of the same age in Japan.

As well as being consistent with other ways of evaluating the value of health, this approach provides better results than either allocating an absolute arbitrary value to each additional life year or valuing additional years of life relative to a person's own theoretical (context dependent) life expectancy. However, it does yield surprising results. Chief amongst these is that, since a person's life expectancy increases as they get older – because they have avoided the risk of dying at an earlier age, the value of each additional life year tends to decrease over time. For instance, the life expectancy at birth in Japan is 86 years, whilst the life expectancy of an 80-year-old in Japan is 91 years (and that of a 100-year-old is 102 years). This means that an additional life year for somebody who is already 80 years old should be worth only 95% of that of a newborn (and an additional life year for a centenarian should be worth only 84% as much) even if these additional years of life came with the same level of health and wellbeing.

Greg therefore argues that we face a choice between accepting what appears to be the best theory for evaluating the benefits of longevity, and accepting that we should incorporate some, limited, degree of age discrimination in medical decision making when we are considering extending the length of individual lives.

PROCREATION

The right to procreate, population momentum and the normative significance of avoidable risk

– Karin Kuhlemann

Karin Kuhlemann considered the question of the ethics of procreation from a human rights perspective. Karin started by accepting that there is a fundamental human right to procreate, but then proceeded to argue that this right should be limited in some cases. In particular, she argued that the right to procreate was 'noncomposable' with other fundamental human rights. This is because all of these rights require resources in order to be respected and as the population expands the resources available to each individual can be expected to shrink, leading to some rights having to be violated.

Karin pointed out that this fact was fundamentally at odds with the 'Cairo consensus', the dominant view concerning population policy following the 1994 Cairo conference on Population and Development. This consensus implies that the right to procreate is unlimited and that population policies can and should only be concerned with protecting rights that are compatible with this, such as women's right to access reproductive health services upon demand.

Karin suggested that her view was compatible with the claim that the right to procreate should still be given priority when it is in tension with other human rights, for instance because of the special value associated with reproductive autonomy and the parent / child relationship. However, so long as the priority we give to procreative rights is not total then there will inevitably be cases in which we should limit this right in order to protect other human rights. However, she also argued that the point at which we should begin to limit the right to procreate is not the point at which other rights have already been violated to a significant extent, since demographic momentum implies that even when one acts to reduce birth rates the population will continue to grow for many years.

Overpopulation should therefore not be seen as a state in which the earth's resources are already overstretched, leading to massive rights violations, but rather a process in which a growing demand for resources (including resources that are to be committed to future generations) puts us on a direct path towards such rights violations unless we act.

Finally, Karin argued that there are many ways in which we might seek to limit individuals right to procreate, from those that are entirely passive (such as public information) to those that are highly coercive (such as enforced sterilization). Ultimately she claimed that the kind of policies we should use would have to be guided by our assessment of the risks associated with current demographic trends, but that we should always act so as to minimize both the degree to which individual's right to procreate have to be limited and the degree of active coercion required to achieve this.

Love's reasons and the value of procreative parenting

– Luara Ferracioli / Simon Beard

Due to personal circumstances beyond her control, Luara Ferracioli was unable to attend the conference in person, but delivered some of her presentation via skype.

In what she was able to present however Luara argued that even if we assume that having children constitutes a net cost to parents and society, for instance because of the costs of raising them or their social and environmental impacts, this does not mean that doing so is morally unjustified. There is an intrinsic value to the act of procreative-parenting she claimed, symbolized by the extraordinary sacrifices that parents are willing to make when bearing and raising their children.

If we did not believe that procreative parenting had this kind of intrinsic value then it would seem hard to justify the commonly held belief that it is morally acceptable to have children in order to satisfy ones desire to raise them, even if it was possible to adopt children who were without adequate parental care. Similarly, it would be hard to justify the claim that one has a presumptive right to raise one's own children even if there are others who might be better qualified to do so.

After a technological problem prevented from Luara from completing her presentation, Simon Beard offered a few remarks by way of a partial completion of the presentation. He argued that even if children represented a net cost in terms of their effect upon the welfare of parents and others, there were other defensible kinds of value that would be promoted by the act of procreative-parenting. These include the fact that procreative parenting constituted a meaningful activity for parents and other family members and that it provided opportunities for individuals to build caring relationships, which may be seen as having their own special value. Whilst these kinds of value provided a special justification for procreative-parenting, Simon concluded that it could also presented a challenge to society to offer more opportunities for meaningful and caring activities that were less costly and more beneficial.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Population, Climate Change and Global Justice: A moral framework for debate

– Elizabeth Cripps

The final session considered issues about global population within larger questions about economic justice, environmental change and cultural diversity. Elizabeth Cripps argued that population change is a crucial aspect of tackling climate change and achieving global justice. Elizabeth argued that everybody has basic responsibilities of justice both towards other people who are now alive (e.g. global justice) and to future generations (e.g. tackling change). These commitments required us to do many things, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, transferring resources to help the world's poor and funding the transfer of green technologies to everyone. However, Elizabeth argued that they also require us try and control global population growth in certain ways.

Elizabeth pointed out that population growth was an important contributor to climate change, but that it was only one of many. She therefore argued we must not ignore the variable responsibility we have for climate change and the important role played by different levels of consumption and technology amongst the rich and the poor. Similarly, Elizabeth argued that population change played an important role in limiting international development alongside environmental change and resource depletion. For instance, she pointed out that for a population of 7.3 billion to live sustainably we would have to adopt the ecological footprint of an average Ghanaian. Whilst dealing with population change today was a morally hard choice therefore, allowing the global population to continue growing further would leave future generations facing a moral tragedy – because it would be impossible for them to meet even the basic requirements of intergenerational and global justice.

Given this fact, Elizabeth argued that we should be more willing to engage with morally hard choices concerning population. These could include deciding to interfere, in a non-coercive way, with people's family lives, such as by publicly advocating for smaller family sizes, or to allow increasing inequality between children by reducing social support families. Whilst such choices are ones that we would rather avoid,

they are considerably better than other morally terrible options, such as coercive population policies or breaking up the family altogether, or than the tragedy of inaction. Such policies are therefore morally justified, so long as they are introduced as part of a wider commitment to fulfil the requirements of intergenerational and global justice.

Overpopulation and the Lifeboat Metaphor: A critique from an African Worldview

– Beatrice Okyere-Manu

Beatrice Okyere-Manu challenged us all to see global population from the perspective of those living in the global south. Her paper centered on the lifeboat metaphor suggested by Garrett Hardin. On this metaphor two groups of people, the rich and poor, are said to have set out on a journey in separate boats. Whilst the developed countries foresaw the risk of their lifeboat sinking and limited their numbers accordingly, developing countries continued to add more and more people to their boat until it sank. In such conditions, Hardin argued, to try and rescue so many people would only lead to our lifeboat sinking as well. He therefore concluded that “We cannot safely divide the wealth equitably among all peoples so long as people reproduce at different rates.”.

Beatrice responded to this argument in a number of ways, pointing out that it was not African irresponsibility, but colonial greed, that ultimately sank the lifeboat of the poor and that many Africans feel that large families are simply what was demanded of them by previous Europeans who told them to ‘go forth and multiply!’. Furthermore, Beatrice argued that whilst it may be apparent to many in the global north that large populations are a challenge for development, in large parts of Africa children are still necessary for people to prosper, since they contribute to the economic and social resources available to poor families dealing with harsh conditions. Indeed, Beatrice found that in most major African languages there is not even a word for overpopulation.

Going deeper, Beatrice argued that Garrett Hardin’s ethical world view, and that of many of us in the global north, is individualistic, ascribing everybody the ultimate responsibility for their own interests. However, many people in Africa subscribe to the communitarian worldview of Ubuntu, according to which value and responsibility are communal and “it is because of you that I am”. Whilst Hardin addresses the question of whether people should feel guilty about leaving others to die of poverty, Beatrice argued that from an African perspective guilt is not the right emotion to feel – because when we let others drown we are also harming ourselves.

Beatrice concluded that from an African worldview, it is necessary to see questions about population not only in terms of the problems that we face in the future, but also in terms of the political power differentials that brought them about. Furthermore, she said that we shouldn’t just see larger populations as impoverishing individuals but also consider how they can enrich the community as a whole. Ultimately, she argued for more dialogue, between countries, cultures and genders, and that it was only through the empowerment of Africans, and especially African women, that change would come.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Population Ethics and the Earth's Carrying Capacity

– Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta

For the keynote address Partha Dasgupta provided an overview of his findings from 50 years of thinking about population ethics. His presentation ranged across all of the themes from the colloquium as a whole, and fell into two distinct sections.

In the first part of his presentation Partha considered the limitations of addressing questions about population ethics solely from the perspective of reproductive health. From his perspective, he argued that to talk about population ethics as if children themselves were merely the outcome of their parent's reproductive health states was both shortsighted and unrealistic. People have children for many reasons he argued, and it was wrong that for so long academics and policy makers had been unwilling to address these as morally important.

In particular, he argued that both our embedded social preferences for having children, and the number of children we have, create significant externalities, principally in the form of environmental degradation, for both present and future generations. These externalities cannot be addressed within the framework of reproductive health alone. Furthermore, addressing them does not imply adopting any kind of coercive population policy, but merely placing a much greater value on the potential benefits that could be achieved by providing better family planning and other reproductive health services, and hence allocating more money to their provision. Whilst the unmet need for reproductive health was indeed great in many developing countries, Partha argued that the need for better provision of family planning services went even further, and that we should be willing to fund such services much more than we currently do.

In the second part of his presentation, Partha turned to the question of how to determine the size of the potential externalities imposed by overpopulation, and correspondingly the global population size that could be considered optimal. As many had suggested during the colloquium, Partha argued that the fundamental driver of population policies should be

the promotion of human wellbeing. The question however was whose wellbeing we should promote? He considered two models. On one of these, the classical utilitarian view, the welfare of all present and future people mattered equally. On the other, the 'generation relative view', only the welfare of the present generation mattered, but embedded into this was our concern for the existence and flourishing of future generations – including their own concern for generations to come after them. Whilst Partha produced models for establishing the optimum global population for both of these views he ultimately argued that the second, generation relative, view was more consistent with people's actual preferences.

Crucially, Partha argued that these models should not be applied simply to find the optimum population policy based on current patterns of human consumption, but that they must take into account the limited resources of our planet, and our capacity to degrade them over time. Each generation therefore does not merely act as the procreators of the next generation, but also as their stewards of earth's resources that we will pass on to them as well. Taking this into account, his models indicate that an optimum generation relative population policy is consistent with a stable global population of around 2 billion people (a figure consistent with previous studies using different methodologies), although simply maximizing long run total utility from consumption may require a somewhat larger population of 5 billion or more. Ultimately, however he concluded that even given the high degree of uncertainty over many of the parameters in his model, it was hard to construct a plausible case that the world is anything other than overpopulated.

Throughout his presentation Partha stressed the need for scholars from different disciplines to work together on understanding these problems and how to solve them. The ecologist's concerns, the economist's desires and the moral philosopher's sensibilities could only be satisfied, he argued, by cooperation, and no single group has the tools to answer all the questions each disciplines pose. In

closing, he offered one final question to the audience that he had not been able to answer – how we should account for the effects of inequality on optimum population size?. If it turned out that the global impact of the consumption of poorer people was equal to or less than that of the rich, then his models would still give roughly the correct answer. However, if it turned out that, per unit of consumption, poor people tended to have a greater impact on the global environment than the rich, then the optimum population would be even less than he predicted.

ADDITIONAL WORKSHOPS

Population and Ethics: Foundational Issues in the Value of Lives

Prior to the Colloquium, some foundational questions in the philosophy of population ethics were considered by a group of academics attending the conference, primarily with backgrounds in different aspects of moral and political philosophy.

The workshop first heard presentations from Tim Campbell (Institute for Futures Studies), Daniel Cohen (Future of Humanity Institute and Charles Steward University) and Michael Plant (University of Oxford) on the non-identity problem. These three papers each considered whether actions that affected the lives of people who did not yet exist could be said to harm them. Tim argued that whilst we cannot harm future people, this does not mean that we cannot act wrongly towards them. Daniel, on the other hand, argued that we can harm future people, just as we can harm actual people whose identity we do not know. Finally, Michael argued that whilst we can neither harm nor wrong future people, this is not as problematic as philosophers tend to think. One interesting point of agreement amongst all three of these presenters was their desire to avoid claiming that we might ever have moral obligations to create future people, although it emerged in discussion that on each of their views there were certain special circumstances under which such a moral obligation could arise, albeit for different reasons in each case.

Next the workshop heard three presentations concerning welfare and the value of future lives from Gustav Alexandrie (University of Stockholm), Chris Cowie (University of Cambridge) and Patrick Kaczmarek (University of Glasgow). Gustav's paper considered how many different kinds of life could fulfill our description of lives in terms of welfare levels. For instance, longer or shorter lives with a greater or lesser density of positive and negative welfare components. He then argued that when considering extreme welfare levels, it was impossible to identify any one kind of life at each level about which we could have reliable intuitions. From this he concluded that we should not therefore try to found population ethics on our intuitive evaluation of such lives.

Chris's presentation took almost exactly the opposite approach, arguing that there were many possible welfare levels that might be said to fulfill certain descriptions of a life (in particular a life that was 'barely worth living'). On the basis of this he considered whether we could rely upon the intuitions we have about such lives to provide mathematically useful information for models of population ethics. Finally, Patrick's paper considered whether our intuitions about the value of future lives depend upon their welfare level at all, or rather on how we should distribute our resources and whether future people can be said to have claims to them.

These six papers were discussed and debated by the workshop participants, and provided some useful overviews on foundation questions in the philosophy of population ethics.

Population and Ethics: Informing and Improving the Quality of Debate

Following the Colloquium, a group of 21 attendees reconvened to consider how to pursue some of the issues raised during the Colloquium to stimulate better policy making and public debate around these issues.

Diana Coole, Professor of Political Theory at Birkbeck College, University of London, presented on “Overpopulation: Urgent Issue or Taboo?”. Diana has conducted an extensive critical analysis of political debates about population issues and concluded that there are many powerful silencing arguments that are embedded in contemporary political discourse and that tend to prevent useful discussion on these issues taking place. Amongst these are “population shaming” (it is wrong even to discuss population), “population skepticism” (there is no problem associated with population), “population declinism” (population growth is currently too low), “population growing” (this specific country, region or ethnic group requires more people), “population-decomposing” (there is no single population issue, only specific issues with birth rate, life expectancy, population density or micro issues at the individual or household level) and “population fatalism” (whilst there may or may not be a problem, there is nothing we can do about it).

David Cope, a fellow of Clare Hall, University of Cambridge, also gave a presentation to this workshop. Drawing on 40 years’ experience as a demographer engaging in public policy debates in the UK and around the world, including time as director of the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology and the UK Centre for Economic and Environmental Development. David highlighted the many complexities of demographic debates around the world, such as a public backlash against recent ‘pro-natalist’ advertising in Italy and the many different kinds of stakeholders at work, and the need to be careful in engaging with them. However, he also offered an inspiring insight into the roles that academics can play in informing and improving policy and the need to provide better evidence to policy makers about how and why population mattered. In

particular David argued that it was unlikely that any one population policy or concept of ‘optimum population’ could be right for every group, but that there was still a lot for academics to do to improve policy making in this area.

The workshop ended with a participatory session; all those present were asked to try and move beyond the academic arguments that divided them and to consider what might be agreed on and what it would be beneficial to share with others who have not thought about these issues in as much detail. Following this, practical ways were considered in which academics could get involved in public debate and engage with policy making, from finding out what questions policy makers were interested in when considering what we would like to research to responding directly to public consultations, or even running for office.

JOINT STATEMENT ON POPULATION AND ETHICS FOLLOWING THE 2016 CUMBERLAND COLLOQUIUM

Drawing on the research presented at the Colloquium and the discussions that took place at the associated workshops, a statement was drafted by and agreed on by a small group of participants, on informing and influencing the quality of debate around population ethics. This is offered as a representation of what some of those who have spent time studying the complex issues of population ethics have gained from this study, and from their time at the Colloquium, and what they would like to share more widely with others.

“It is ethically unacceptable to exclude discussions about demographic change from policy debates and public discourse. Whilst it is undoubtedly a difficult and complex issue, factors that are affected by, and affect, our choices concerning birth and death are of fundamental moral importance and should not be ignored.

“At the level of individual countries like the UK, population change has a significant effect on social policy and people’s life chances. Demographic features such as generation size, gender ratio and life expectancy have profound implications for individuals and for society. These features are in turn influenced by a variety of policy measures – often in ways that were never intended. There are many ways in which life would be better for people if there were fewer of us and it would likely be, on balance, good if there was a social norm for people to want fewer children. However, in the absence of clearer visions about how such a society could be possible it is so often tempting to assume that there are no acceptable ways by which policy makers could influence population growth, this is a mistake.

“There should be open discussion not only about the rights, but also the responsibilities linked to the exercise of individual autonomy in reproductive decision-making and its social context. Procreative decisions always affect people other than the parents. In particular, population growth is an important public issue. There are many points of symmetry between our attitudes to natural population change and to migration and public discussion about demography should never focus on just one of these issues to the exclusion of the other.

“At the global level, the need to understand and control population change is even more pressing. Population change is an important contributor to both climate change and global justice. However, it is also an issue that highlights many of the cultural divisions and historical injustices that persist between societies in the global north and south. Within international human rights discourse it should not be assumed that there is an uncontested or unlimited right to reproduce, since this right might be in tension with other vital human rights. Furthermore, unwanted pregnancies are an avoidable harm that impose significant reductions in personal autonomy on those required to bear and raise the resulting children. As with domestic policy therefore, it is necessary both to empower individuals, through education and reproductive health, to only have those children that they want to have and to discuss reproduction and population both privately and publicly, especially when this includes dialogue between genders, generations, societies and cultures.

“Finally, at the intergenerational level, reproductive choices are one of the main ways in which each generation affects the wellbeing of the next. A significant increase in the world’s population will alter the lives of our children far more than our own. Whilst many people agree that each generation can be justified in prioritising its own wellbeing, this should be no barrier to acting in the interests of future generations as well. In so far as we have a concern for the wellbeing of younger and future generations, we should also care about their numbers and it would be a bad thing if the human population were to collapse or become extinct. However, even allowing for this, the natural constraints of planet earth are such that it is likely that we are past the point at which further increasing global population can be seen as being in the long term interest of future generations.”

ABOUT CUMBERLAND COLLOQUIA

Through the Cumberland Colloquium scheme, Cumberland Lodge offers its expertise and beautiful venue to facilitate interdisciplinary and inter-institutional conferences, run by and for postgraduates and early career researchers. Fully mentored by Cumberland Lodge, organisers have the opportunity to deliver a well-crafted one-day conference and gain valuable experience in the processes of funding applications, administration, recruitment, networking, publicity, report-writing and press releases.

Find out more at:

www.cumberlandlodge.ac.uk/colloquia

ABOUT CUMBERLAND LODGE

Cumberland Lodge is an educational charity which was established in 1947 as an institute dedicated to the betterment of society through the promotion of ethical discussion.

Inspired by the beauty and history of its surroundings, Cumberland Lodge is dedicated to the discussion of ethical, spiritual and topical issues in contemporary society. Preparing young people for their future responsibilities is at the heart of its work, but the Lodge seeks through the enquiring nature of its programmes and the quality of its hospitality to enhance the well-being of people whatever their age or wherever they live.

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