



The Art of Living by John Stuart Mill

There is room in the world, no doubt, for a great increase in population, supposing the arts of life to go on improving, and capital to increase. But even if innocuous, I confess I see very little reason for desiring it. The density of population necessary to enable mankind to obtain all the advantages both of cooperation and of social intercourse, has been attained.

A population may be too crowded, though all be amply provided with food and raiment. It is not good for man to be kept at all times in the presence of his species. A world from which solitude is extirpated is a very poor ideal. Solitude, in the sense of being often alone, is essential to any depth of meditation or of character; and solitude in the presence of natural beauty and grandeur, is the cradle of thoughts and aspirations which society could do ill without. Nor is there much satisfaction in contemplating the world with nothing left to the spontaneous activity of nature; with every rood of land brought into cultivation; every flowery waste or natural pasture plowed up, all quadrupeds or birds which are not domesticated for man's use exterminated as his rivals for food, every hedgerow or superfluous tree rooted out, and scarcely a place left where a wild shrub or flower could grow without being eradicated as a weed in the name of improved agriculture.

If the Earth must lose that great portion of its pleasantness for the mere purpose of enabling it to support a larger, but not a better or happier population, I sincerely hope, for the sake of posterity, that they will be content to be stationary, long before necessity compels them to it. It is scarcely necessary to remark that a stationary condition of capital and population implies no stationary state of human improvement. There would be as much scope as ever for all kinds of mental culture, and moral and social progress; as much room for improving the Art of Living, and much more likelihood of its being improved, when minds ceased to be engrossed by the Art of Getting On. Even the industrial arts might be cultivated, with the sole difference, that instead of serving no purpose but the increase of wealth, industrial improvements would produce their legitimate effect, that of abridging labour.

Hitherto it is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being. They have enabled an increased number of manufacturers to make fortunes. They have increased the comforts of the middle classes. But they have not yet begun to effect those great changes in human destiny, which it is in their nature and in their futurity to accomplish. Only when, in addition to Just Institutions, mankind shall be under the deliberate guidance of Judicious Foresight, can the conquests made by the intellect and energy of scientific discoverers become the means of improving and elevating the universal lot.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was a famous British social and political philosopher. His works include books and essays covering logic, sociology, economics, political theory, ethics and religion. Among his most famous works are the books *A System of Logic* and *On Liberty*. He was an early and strong advocate of gender equity and women's liberty, writing the essay "The Subjection of Women." Mill's belief that the majority often denies liberty to the individual drove his interest in social reform, gender equality and labour unions. He is remembered as one of history's greatest thinkers. In 1848, when "The Art of Living" was written, the world's human population was just over 1 billion people.

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