

# Valuable People: Debunking the Myth of Overpopulation

Proving the case against a popular and dangerous misconception

One of the most popular and persistent ideas about the future of humanity is that population growth inevitably makes resources scarcer, eventually leading to a crisis of overpopulation. But this myth is not only false, it's false in ways that provide deep insights into the nature of human action and economic progress.

This phenomenon is the focus of a new book by Cato senior fellow Marian Tupy, editor of HumanProgress.org, and his coauthor, Gale L. Pooley of Brigham Young University–Hawaii, titled *Superabundance: The Story of Population Growth, Innovation, and Human Flourishing on an Infinitely Bountiful Planet*.

After analyzing the prices of hundreds of commodities, goods, and services spanning two centuries, Tupy and Pooley found that resources became more abundant as the population grew. That was especially true when they looked at “time prices,” which represent the length of time that people must work to buy something. For example, a new television or refrigerator might cost a certain number of hours at an average worker’s wages.

**“*Superabundance* pulls off the remarkable feat of being both exhaustive and entertaining at the same time. It adds a critical piece to the growing canon of books documenting the rapid improvements in the quality of human life: an explanation that is grounded in rapid population growth. Anyone who cares about the future of humanity should read this book.”**

— JASON FURMAN, AETNA PROFESSOR OF THE PRACTICE OF ECONOMIC POLICY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY, AND FORMER CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISERS

To their surprise, the authors also found that resource abundance not only increased with population growth, it actually increased faster than the population—a relationship that they call superabundance. On average, every additional human being created more value than he or she consumed. This relationship between population growth and abundance is deeply counterintuitive, yet it is true and amply demonstrated by the data.

The fundamental fact driving this phenomenon, so often overlooked by zero-sum thinking, is the value of innovation. More people produce more ideas, which lead to more inventions

and new ways to use natural resources. People then test those inventions in the marketplace to separate the useful from the useless. At the end of that process of discovery, people are left with innovations that overcome shortages, spur economic growth, and raise standards of living. As the late Cato senior fellow Julian Simon once put it, people are the ultimate resource.

But large populations are not enough to sustain superabundance, as Tupy and Pooley document. China and India still experienced crushing poverty before their respective economic reforms despite booming population levels. “To innovate, people must be allowed to think, speak, publish, associate, and disagree,” they write. “They must be allowed to save, invest, trade, and profit. In a word, they must be free.”

In *Superabundance*, the underlying point is not just about economic statistics. It’s about seeing the world in a way in which human beings are the ultimate producers of value, not burdens to be regretted and reduced. In a time of growing pessimism and zero-sum thinking, *Superabundance* offers an important lesson in why misanthropic ideologies are not just wrong in principle, they’re also wrong on the reality of human nature. ■

**SUPERABUNDANCE IS AVAILABLE ONLINE AND AT MAJOR BOOKSELLERS NATIONWIDE.**

