

Mathematics: Its Content, Methods, and Meaning, Second Edition
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Letters from p. 156

at least 10 billion acres of arable land. At various times in the period 1960-63 it was reported to the United Nations and to other interested groups that an average acre of land could hardly support one person comfortably. However in 1965 a group of various Japanese experts, after an investigation which was more scientific, asserted that an average acre of land can support seven average human beings, even if not all the best techniques are used. Hence, assuming that these scientists were not significantly in error, the arable land alone four years ago had the capacity to support about 70 billion humans.

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Contagious depression

I refer to your report (which I have just seen) of Dr. Nathan Kline's work on a possible genetic link in mental illness (SN: 11/9, p. 465).

Consider the possibility that depression in a family may not be inherent but contagious. A child exposed to a parent given to frequent periods of gloom and apathy doesn't have much occasion for celebration. Entrance into a cheerful optimistic surrounding is cheering—which might indicate an area where a cure may be found. Note that a family raised on welfare will not easily remove itself from the welfare roles. A child in a family plagued by serious illness might be disposed to hypochondria. Both cannot readily be related to genetic causes.

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