

# Towards a Sustainable Humanity

60-minute recorded session

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# The Participants

## Jan Greguš (chair)

Czech gynecologist and philosopher, author of thesis “Towards a Sustainable Humanity”

## John Guillebaud

British Emeritus Professor of Family Planning and Reproductive Health, author/co-author of circa 300 publications on these subjects, including 9 books available in 10 languages, his 2 textbooks being ‘best-sellers’ for over 30 years, Population Matters’ Patron and creator of “The Eco-Time Capsule Project” [www.ecotimecapsule.com](http://www.ecotimecapsule.com)

## Florence Blondel

Ugandan journalist, US-based, working with Population Matters, author of “Florence Blondel Population Voice”

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# Towards a Sustainable Humanity (Part 1)

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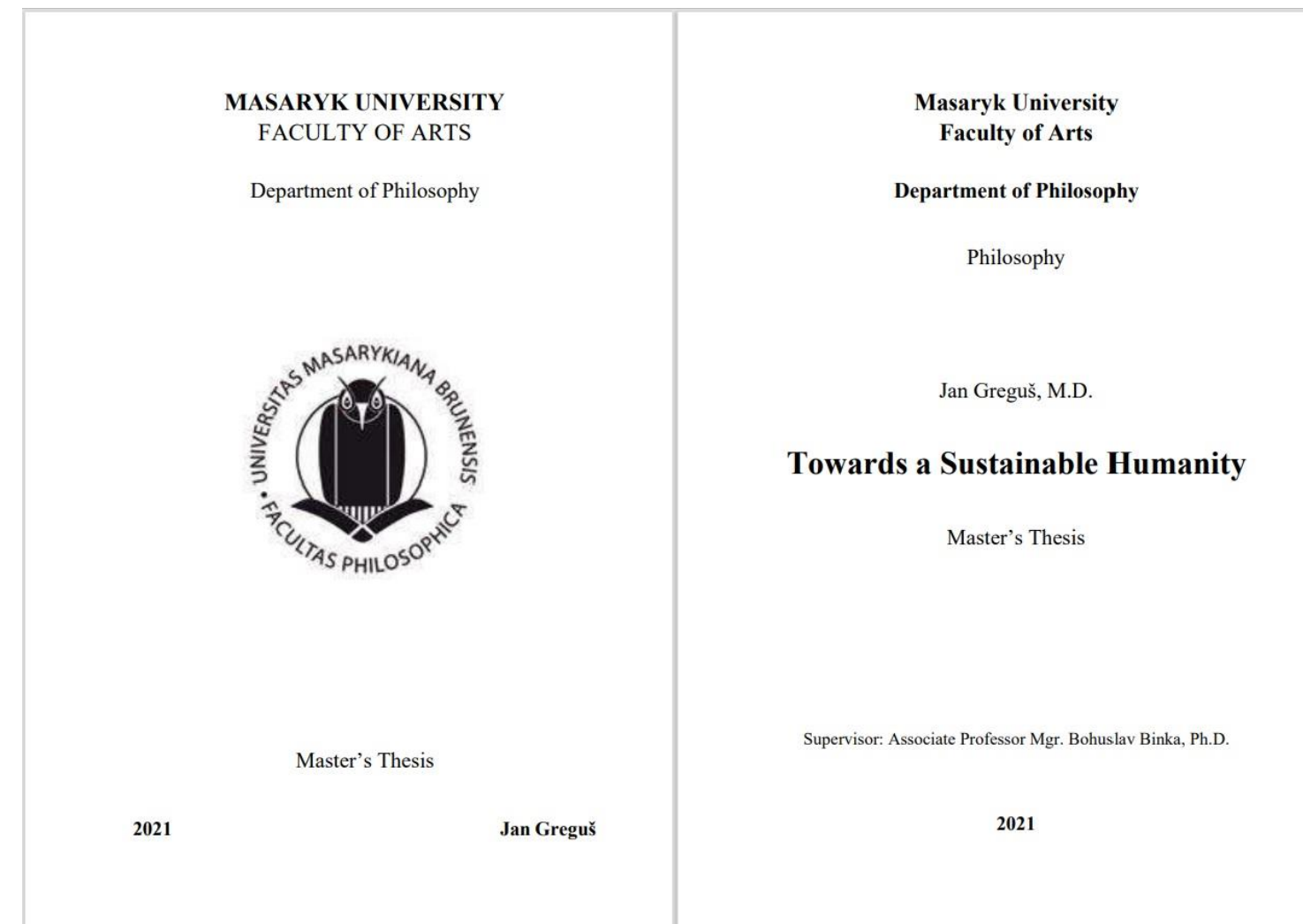
# Disclosures

Commercial Interest	Relationship(s)
No disclosure	n/a



# Introduction

The whole session is based on the Master's thesis "Towards a Sustainable Humanity" and the studies discussed in it.



The thesis is available in full on MUNI.cz:

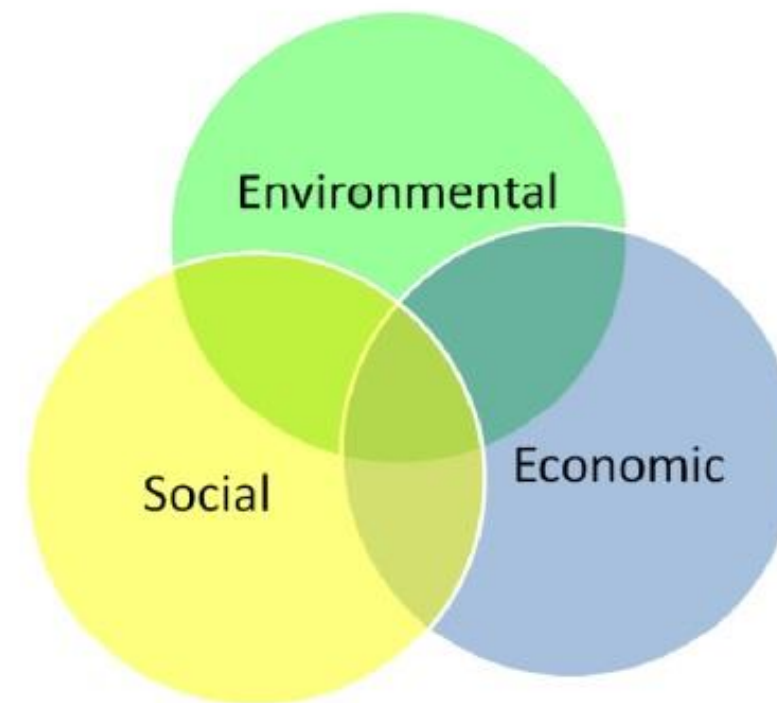
[https://is.muni.cz/auth/th/uc2qu/Towards\\_a\\_Sustainable\\_Humanity.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/auth/th/uc2qu/Towards_a_Sustainable_Humanity.pdf)



# Sustainability as an ideal (concept)

**The goal of sustainability** is to “create and maintain conditions, under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations.” (NEPA 1969)

A sustainable approach derives from a systems-based approach built on **three pillars of sustainability**.



**A sustainable approach** protects the environment, strengthens communities, and fosters prosperity.



# Unsustainability as a fact

The goal of sustainability is to **maintain equilibrium between humanity and nature.**

Humanity is not getting any nearer to this goal. On the contrary, it is going the opposite way despite (scientific) warnings:

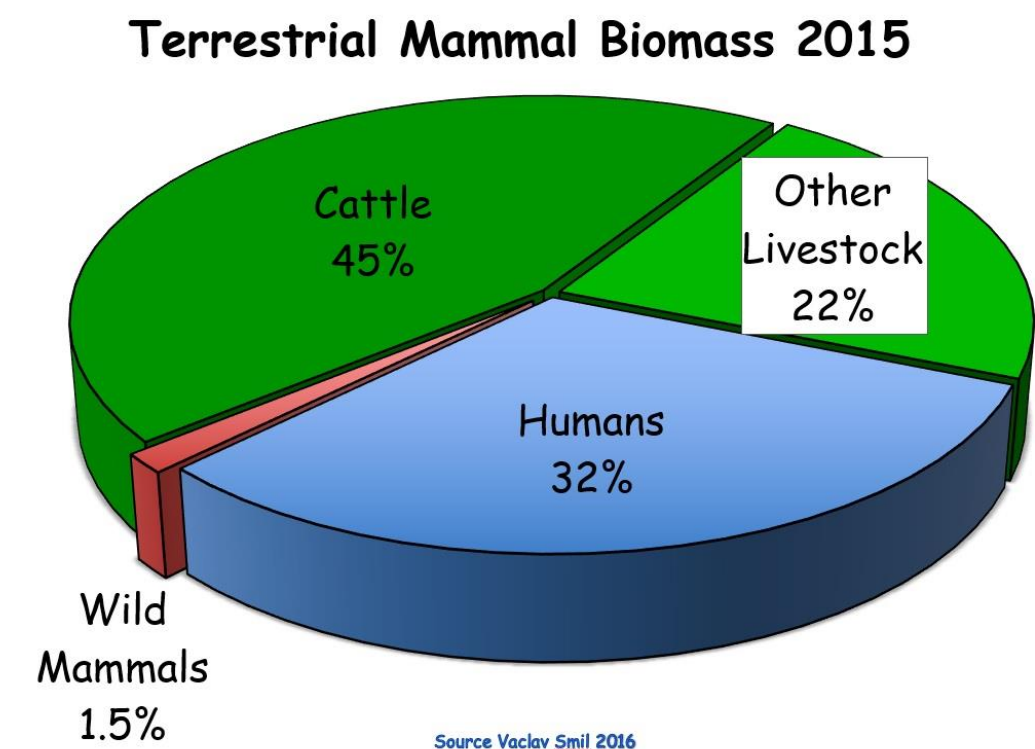
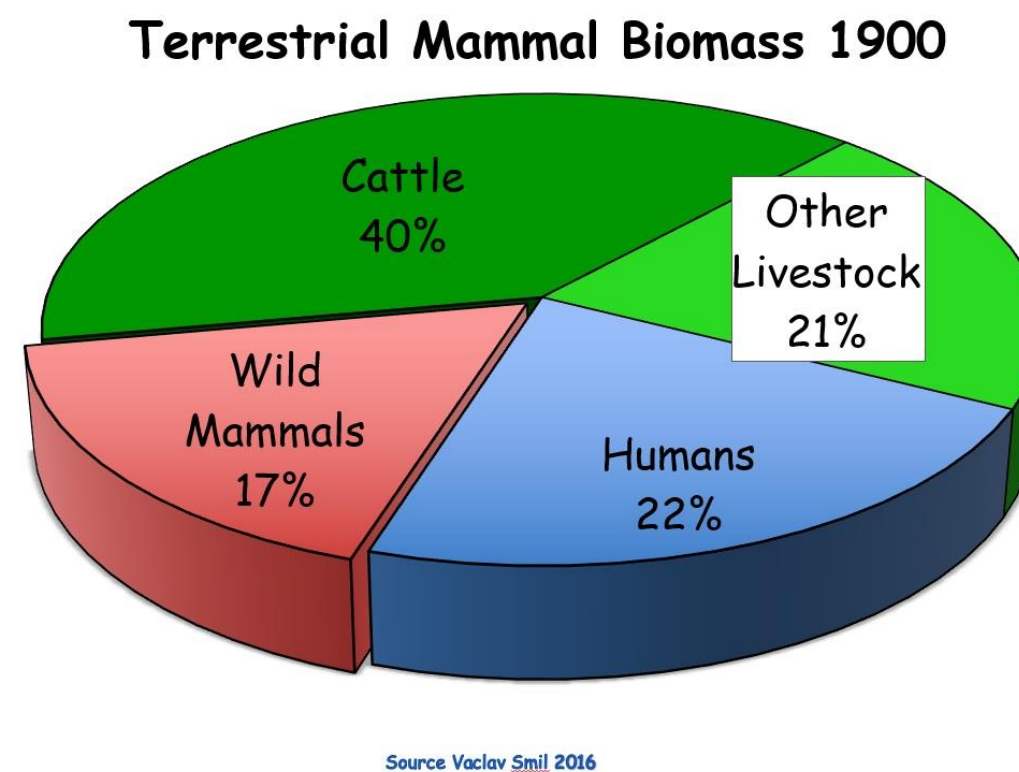
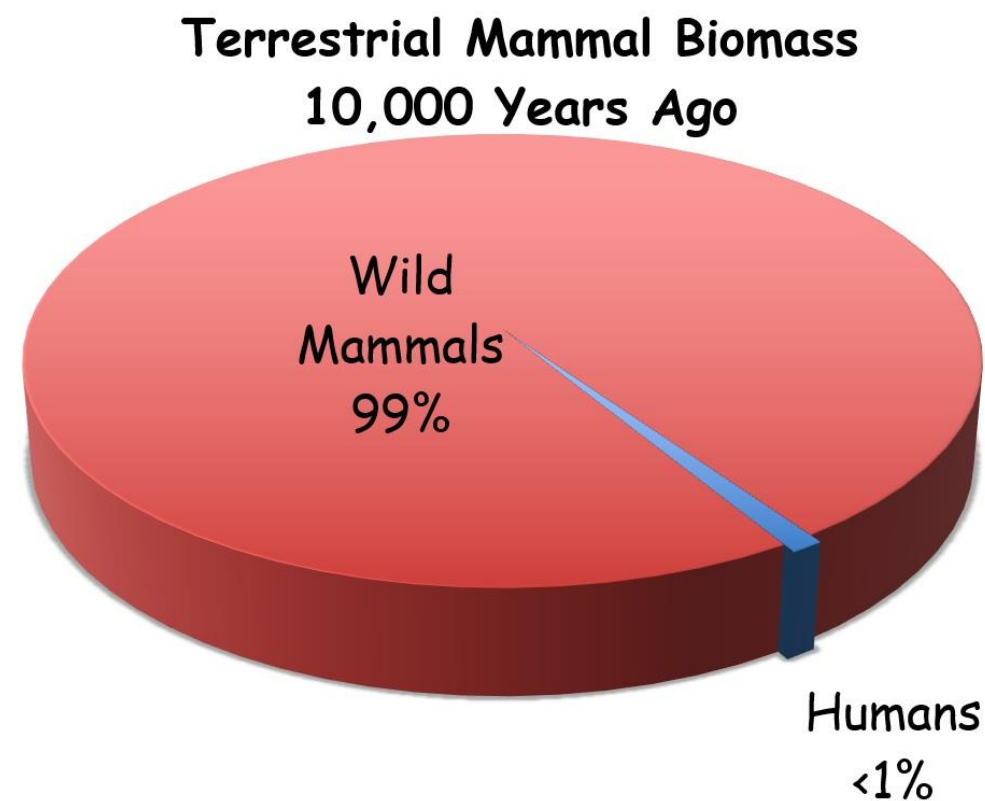
- *The Population Bomb* (1968)
- *The Limits to Growth* (1972)
- *World Scientists' Warning to Humanity* (1992)
- *World Scientists' Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice* (2017)
- *Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency* (2019), and more

**The main causes of unsustainability = human numbers, human activities, human production and consumption**



# Problems we are causing

- climate change
- environmental degradation and **pollution**, resource depletion, increase in municipal waste
- **biodiversity loss**, deforestation, desertification
- mass species extinction (**species genocide**)





## Problems we are facing

- **water scarcity**, food insecurity, starvation, malnutrition
- **pandemic emergence**, inadequate healthcare services
- increased poverty, slowing economic growth, inadequate housing
- **forced migration**, climate refugees
- radicalization, extremism, widespread conflict, **resource-driven wars**

**All of these problems are caused by human numbers and human activities, but the main driver is human numbers.**

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Also, human numbers are major obstacles to achieving SDG



# The greatest equation (Ehrlich and Holdren 1972)

$$I = P \times A \times T$$

- the relationship between population and environmental impact
- explanation of fundamental causes of environmental degradation
  
- **(I)** environmental impact,
- **(P)** population,
- **(A)** affluence (i.e. material resource consumption and concomitant effluence of pollutants - plastics, industrial chemicals, and carbon dioxide per person)
- **(T)** technology (in which fossil fuels measure more highly than renewable energy)

Today's concern is mainly about (T), whereas (P) and partially (A) are ignored or dismissed.

**But (P) needs to be addressed because it multiplies and affects literally everything.**



The greatest question (Cohen 1995)

# How many people can the Earth support?

“Joel Cohen’s 1995 question is the most important question that every citizen and leader should be asking themselves and each other, every single day. Yet, a quarter century has gone by, and we have collectively failed to take it seriously.” (Tucker 2019)

The question is not, however, what is the ‘maximum’ population the Earth can bear, but **what is the ‘optimal’ long-term sustainable population.**

**Estimations** for a sustainable population have been made and are **based on various criteria and assumptions.**

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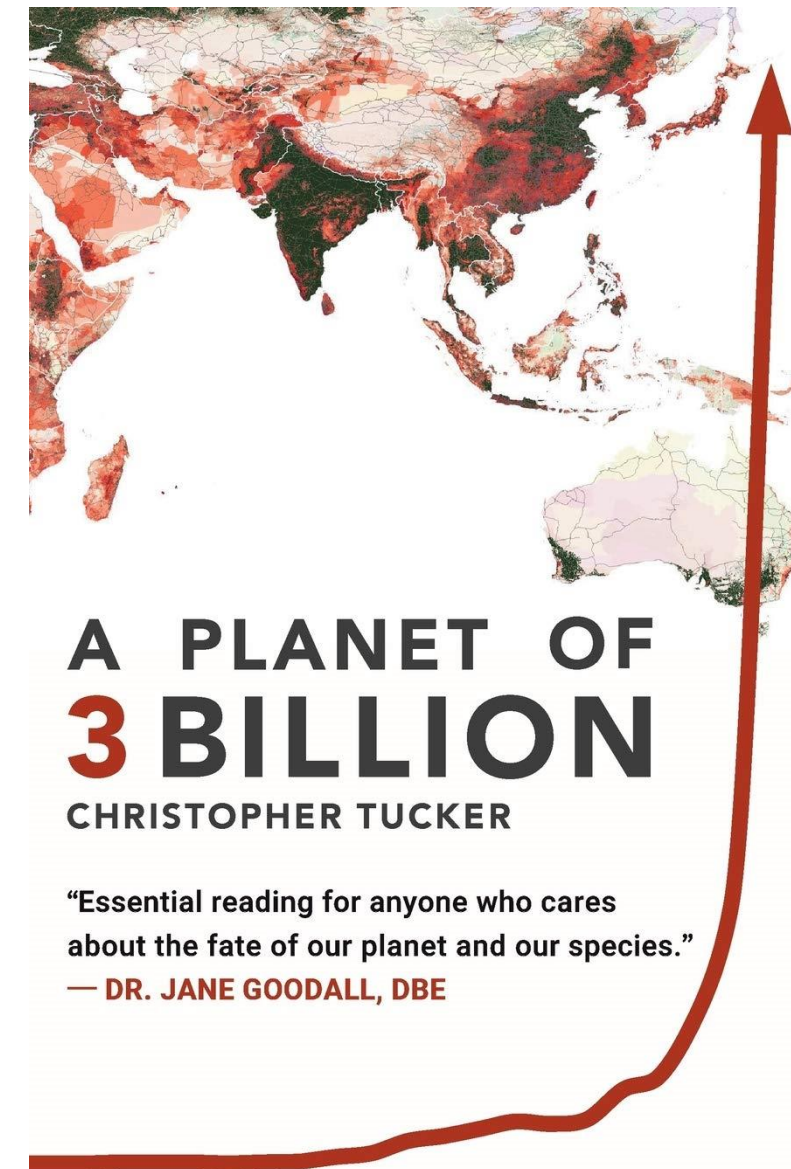
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## Sustainable population (as an ideal)

- 1.5 – 2 billion (Daily et al. 1994)
- 1.5 – 2 billion 3 billion (Pimental et al. 1994)
- 2 billion (Daily et al. 2010)
- 3.1 billion (Lianos and Pseiridis 2016)
- 0.5 – 5 billion (Dasgupta 2019)
- 3 billion (Tucker 2019)



Obviously, more studies, discussion, and general consensus on the ideal number are needed

Nevertheless, one thing is crystal clear – humanity is far beyond any possibly sustainable numbers.



# Unsustainable population (as a fact)

In 2021, the human population is **7.9 billion and rising**, with growth of **over 80 million a year**

Despite decrease in fertility rates and slowing population growth no sign of slowing down in the foreseeable future

Current medium-variant projections are **8.5 billion (2030)**, **9.7 billion (2050)**, and **10.9 billion (2100)**

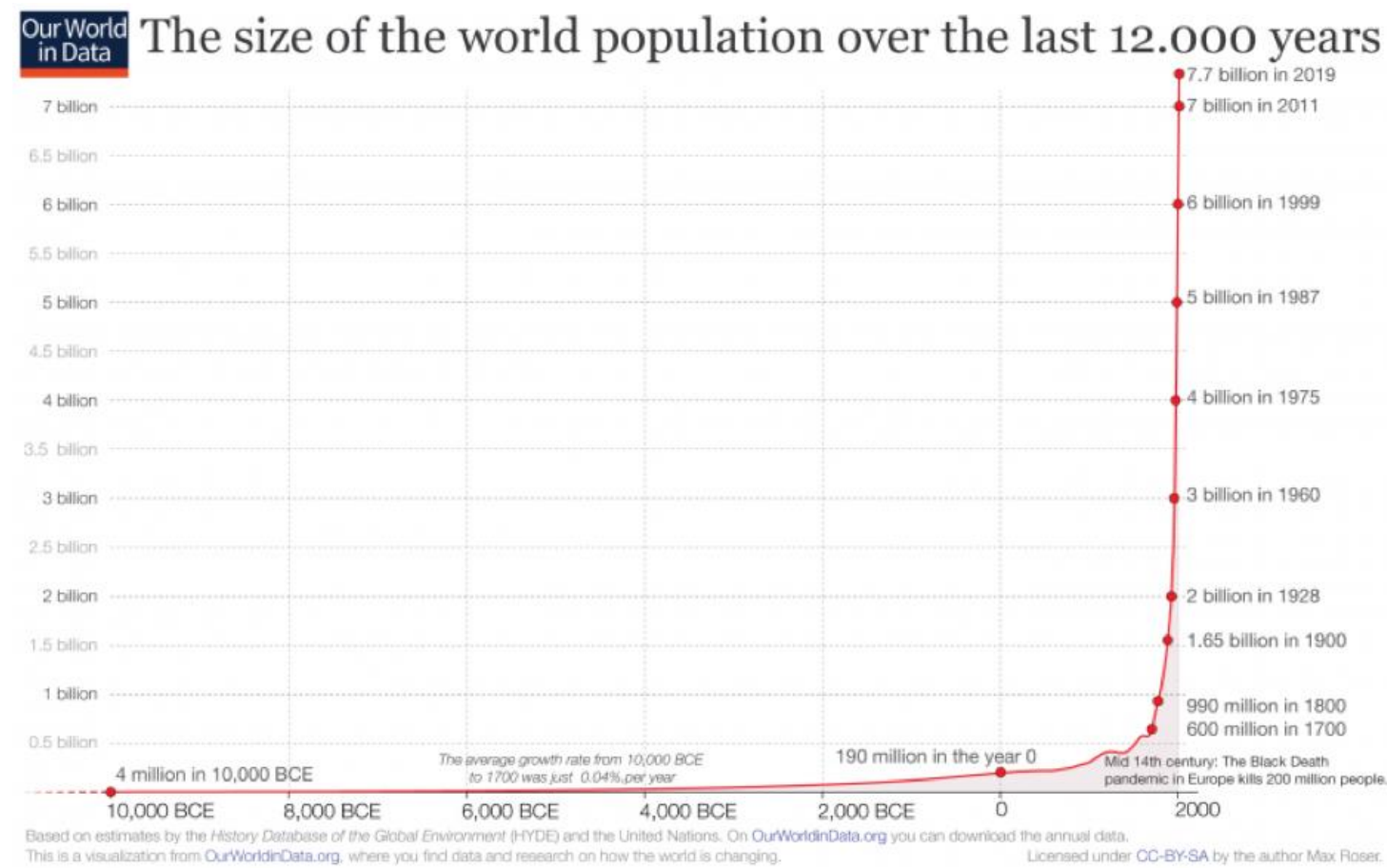
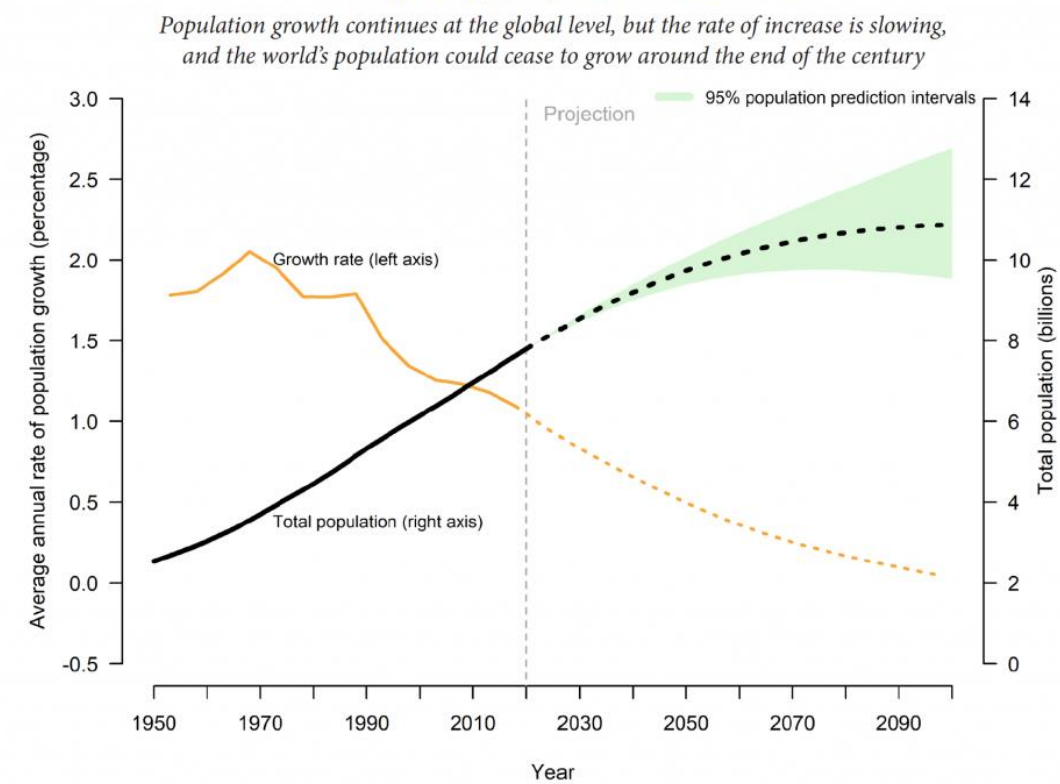


Figure 1. Population size and annual growth rate for the world: estimates, 1950-2020, and medium-variant projection with 95 per cent prediction intervals, 2020-2100



# Roots of our unsustainability

## Components of population growth:

(1) Mortality decline

(2) Population momentum (caused by a population 'bulge' of earlier-born young people continuing to enter the reproductive pool)

(3) Wanted fertility

(4) Unwanted fertility

(5) Coerced fertility

**Obviously, (1) mortality decline is desirable. Curbing it would be unethical and unacceptable.**

**(2) is built-in for some decades in previously high fertility settings, even after they reach replacement fertility**

**(2)-(5) have potential to be reduced by appropriate, benign means**



# Solutions

## Restrictive measures

- Economic measures (taxation of additional family members)
- Forced regulations (forced sterilizations)
- Policies restricting family-size (one-child policy)

## Should be avoided

## Supportive measures

- Voluntary family planning
- Education and empowerment
- Environmental education

**Should be supported and promoted (especially by specialists in our field)**





# Supportive solutions

## Voluntary family planning

- contraceptive prevalence as the greatest factor for a country's fertility rate
- essential, wanted, needed and doable; can be seen as the greatest medical achievement alongside vaccination
- greater investments into family planning worldwide are necessary, far beyond current 1% of development aid

## Education and empowerment

- girls' education (and women's empowerment) among the most powerful forces on the planet
- educated girls are healthier and wealthier; it benefits whole communities and economics

**These are important in themselves, and curb listed 'roots' (4) and (5), i.e. unwanted and coerced fertility**

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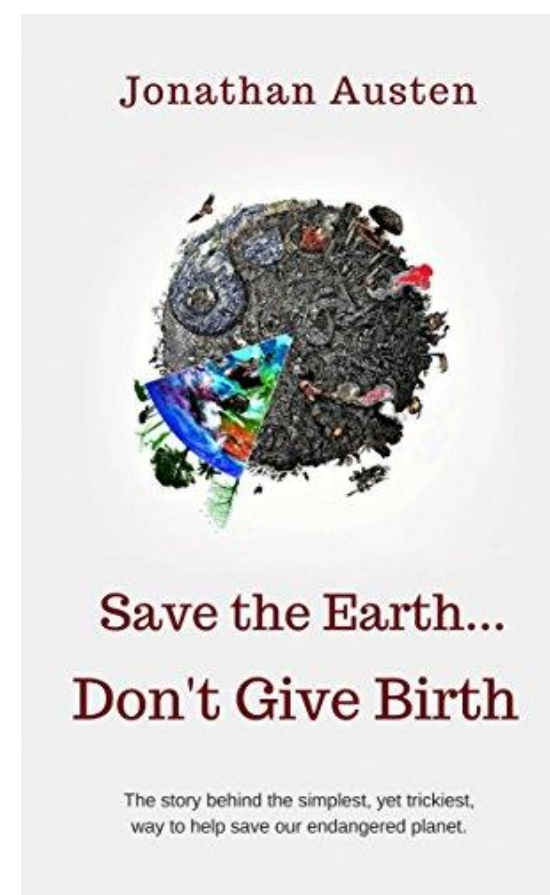
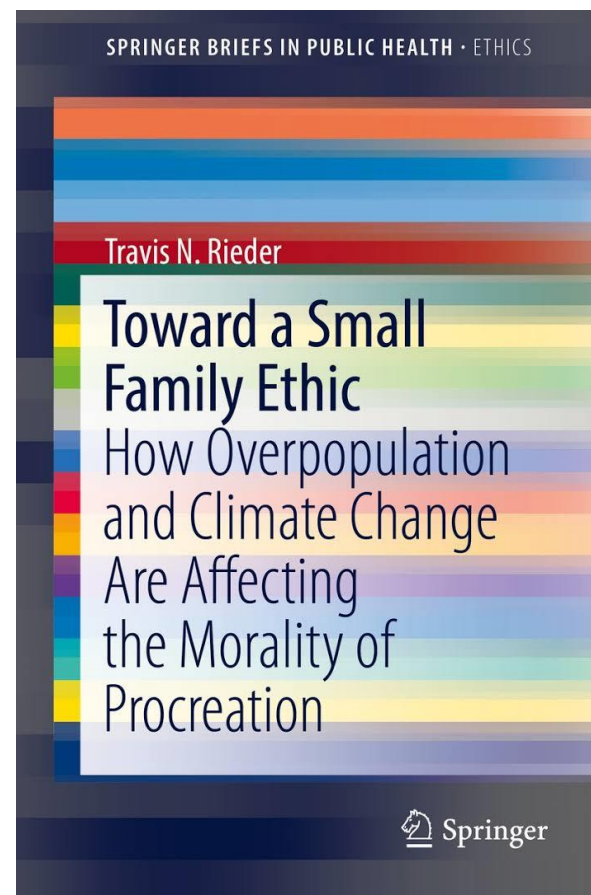
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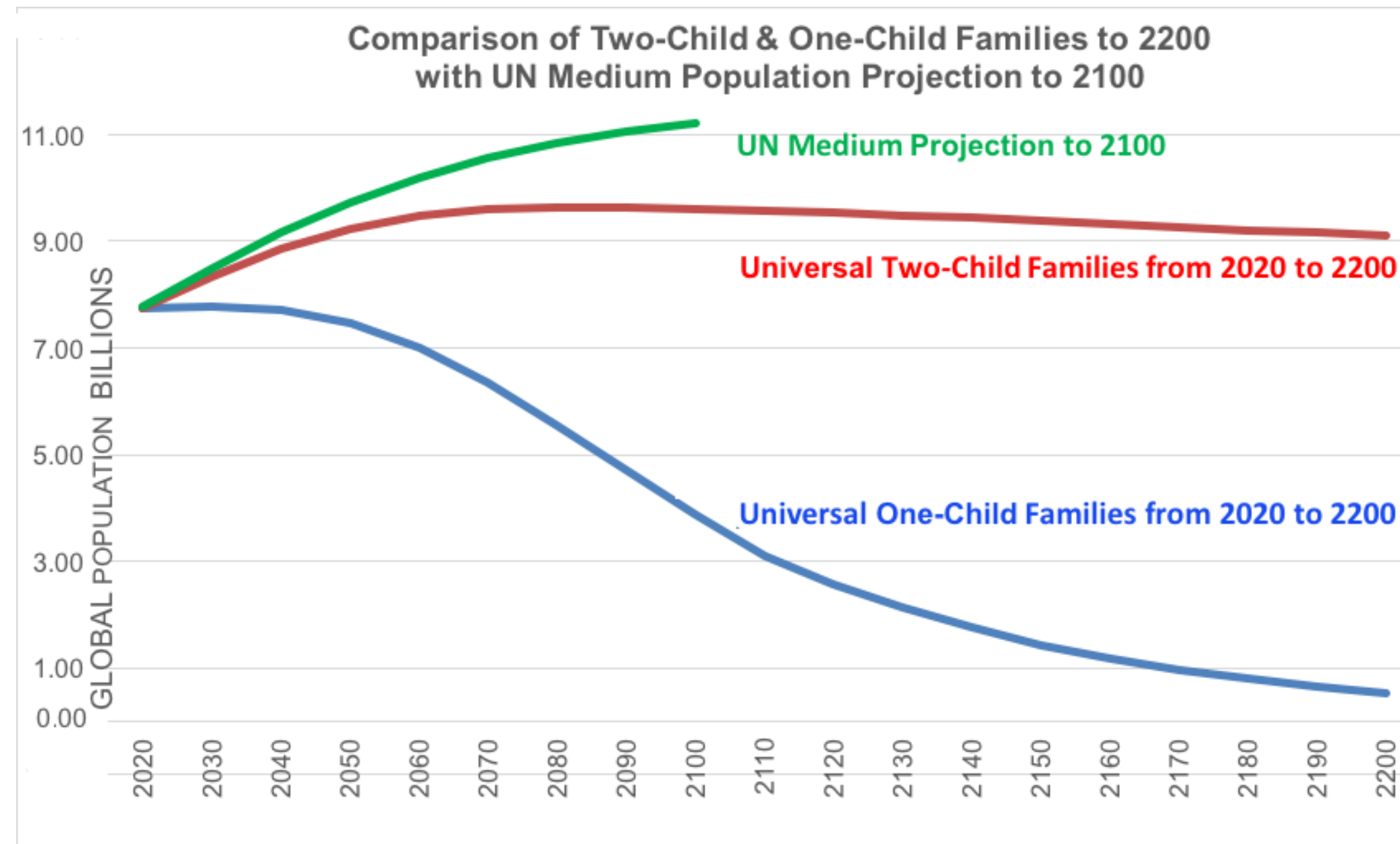
# Reproductive ethics 1 – Reproductive ethics of small families

- in philosophy, increasing focus on reproductive and environmental philosophy and ethics
- given the plethora of problems mentioned above, authors such Philip Cafaro, Travis Rieder, Jonathan Austen, Sarah Conly and more discuss and promote **reproductive ethics of small families as a new ethical norm**
- small family = a 2-child maximum per family (i.e., replacement fertility) and ideally less (**one-child ethics**)



# Reproductive ethics 2 – The case for one-child ethics

- one-child ethics is what really can get us to sustainable numbers (Ferguson and Rimmer 2017)



Crucial for curbing 'roots' (2) and (3), i.e. population momentum and wanted fertility

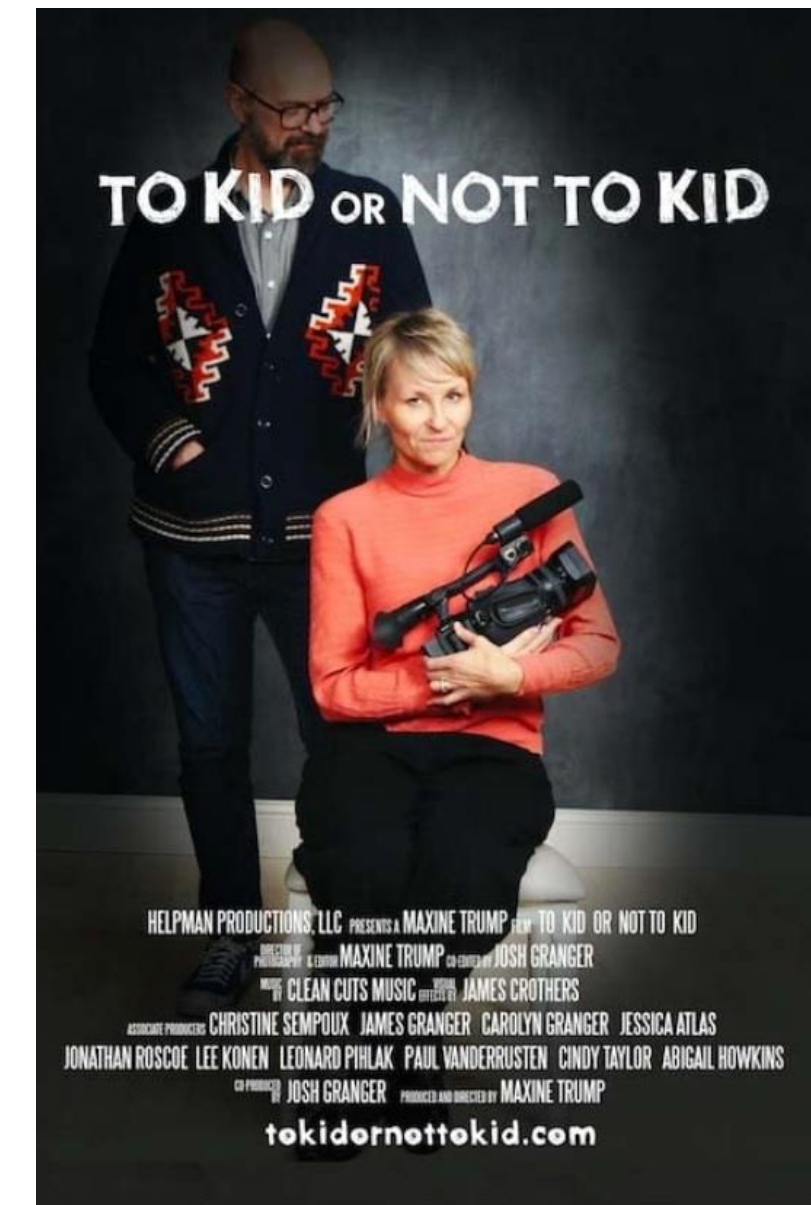


## Reproductive ethics 3 – “To kid or not to kid”

- there is a segment of women who may NEVER want to get pregnant and have kids
- this is **absolutely legitimate** – it is a woman’s right NOT A DUTY to have kids
- **parenting is hard and may not be suitable for everyone**

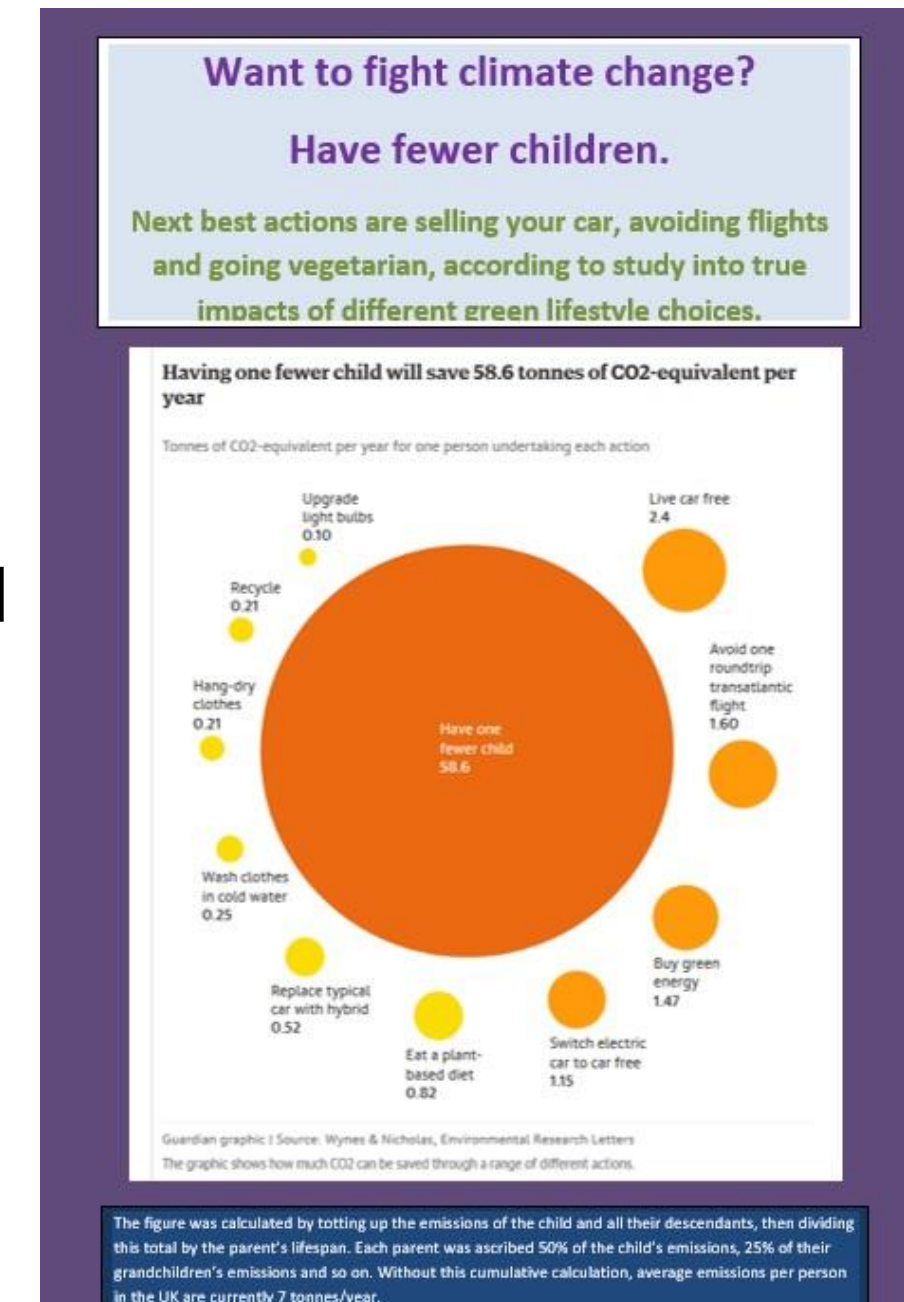
“The choice to have or not to have children is the biggest decision in one’s life and, thus, one should not feel obliged to have children and should not be forced to keep one’s decisions hidden.”  
(Maxine Trump 2018)

To stay child-free is a valid option. Such women **should not be stigmatized but supported in their autonomy**; we can contribute to get this topic on the table and support **their decision to be ‘child-free’ (not ‘child-less’)**



# Environmental ethics

- another important sub-discipline in philosophy (alongside reproductive ethics)
- it helps to point out **we are not a single species on the planet** and that **other species have their rights too** (species' rights to continued existence)
- also, that **our future generations have the right to** live in a world in which they can **thrive and prosper** – that is not possible in an overpopulated world depleted of nature resources, afflicted by climate change, etc.
- helps to illustrate consequences of human prolific reproduction (and activities) and **what can be done about it – reduce our numbers in the first place**



This is important in itself, and also to help curbing roots (2) and (3), i.e. population momentum and wanted fertility



# Lengthening generations

= women delaying their first child (e.g., until their thirties)

- another effective measure against population momentum

- gynecologically controversial topic (pregnancy and delivery complications increase with higher age, etc.),

but, given its positive demographic effect, needs to be openly discussed

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## First conclusion

- **family planning** within the larger context of reproductive health often receives the briefest of mentions
- however, it is of **the greatest importance**
- for this reason, the world's only 'Professor of Family Planning and Reproductive Health', John Guillebaud, will now continue

**Thank you for your attention**

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# Final Conclusion

Sustainability is **achievable**  
but requires a **sustainable human population**

**Without a sustainable humanity, there can be no sustainability in general, no sustainable development in particular, and finally no chance of achieving Sustainable Development Goals**



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# We must

- 1 **stop** population growth,
- 2 **stabilize** population, and then
- 3 **lower** it to long-term sustainable numbers –

It is our ongoing ethical responsibility  
to future generations and other species

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# To achieve that, we must:

- 1 focus and invest in **voluntary family planning** (i.e. achieve full availability **and** accessibility of contraceptive care to all women and couples that want it),
- 2 support **girls' education and women's empowerment**, and
- 3 promote **reproductive ethics on principle to small families worldwide**

**Overall, we must develop long-term thinking that extends beyond our individual life-spans, fully understanding with James Grant that:**

*Family planning can bring more benefits to more people at less cost than any other single technology now available to the human race (UNICEF Annual Report , 1992)*

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