

ONE-CHILD ETHICS AS THE ONLY SOLUTION TO OUR POPULATION PREDICAMENT

JAN GREGUŠ

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, MASARYK UNIVERSITY, BRNO
CENTRE OF PRENATAL DIAGNOSTICS, BRNO
CENTRE OF OUTPATIENT GYNAECOLOGY AND PRIMARY CARE, BRNO

**Oxford Global
Health and Bioethics
International
Conference
27-28 June 2022**



The background is a light blue gradient. There are several realistic-looking water droplets of various sizes scattered in the corners: top-left, top-right, and bottom-right.

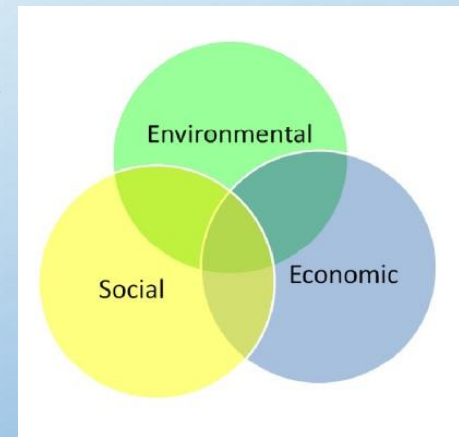
I HAVE NO FINANCIAL RELATIONSHIPS TO DISCLOSE.

INTRODUCTION – SUSTAINABILITY

SUSTAINABILITY AS AN IDEAL (CONCEPT):

- **THE GOAL OF SUSTAINABILITY** = 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 IS BASED ON **THREE PILLARS OF SUSTAINABILITY**



- **AS SUCH, IT PROTECTS THE ENVIRONMENT, STRENGTHENS COMMUNITIES, AND FOSTERS PROSPERITY**

INTRODUCTION – SUSTAINABILITY

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

- A SET OF GOALS ACCEPTED IN 2015 AFTER *MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS* HAVE BEEN MISSED
- **THE GOAL = TO CREATE A WORLD IN WHICH WE CAN ALL THRIVE AND PROSPER**

“END POVERTY, PROTECT THE PLANET, AND ENSURE PROSPERITY FOR ALL“ (UN 2015)



- **HEADS OF GOVERNMENTS HAVE UNDERTAKEN THE RESPONSIBILITY TO ACHIEVE SDG BY 2030**

INTRODUCTION – UNSUSTAINABILITY

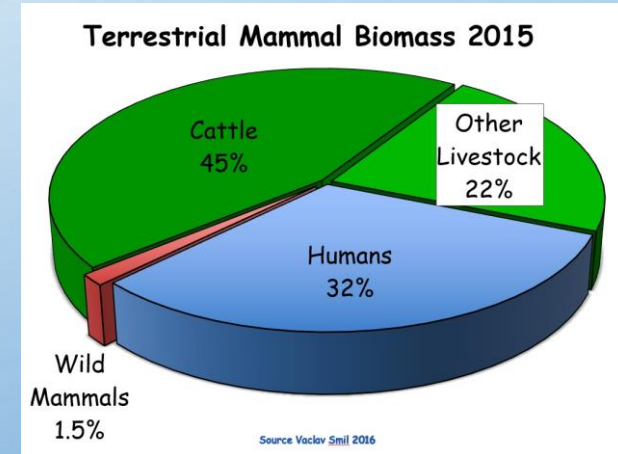
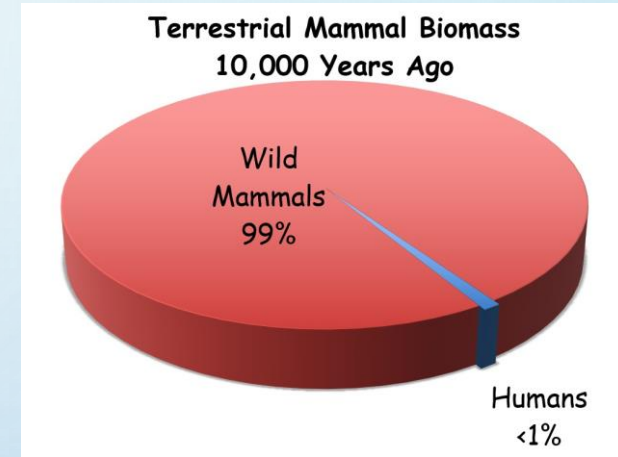
UNSUSTAINABILITY AS A FACT:

- 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 MANY (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 MANY MORE*
- **THE MAIN CAUSES OF UNSUSTAINABILITY = HUMAN NUMBERS, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION**

INTRODUCTION – UNSUSTAINABILITY

CONSEQUENCES OF OUR UNSUSTAINABLE NUMBERS:

- **CLIMATE CHANGE**
- ENVIRONMENTAL **DEGRADATION AND POLLUTION**
- RESOURCE DEPLETION
- INCREASE IN MUNICIPAL WASTE
- **BIODIVERSITY LOSS**
- DEFORESTATION, DESERTIFICATION
- MASS SPECIES EXTINCTION (**SPECIES GENOCIDE**)



INTRODUCTION – UNSUSTAINABILITY

CONSEQUENCES OF OUR UNSUSTAINABLE NUMBERS:

- **WATER SCARCITY**, FOOD INSECURITY, MASS 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**

- **MAJOR OBSTACLE TO ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**
NAMELY (1) NO POVERTY, (2) ZERO HUNGER, (3) GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



**IF HUMANITY WANTS TO AVOID ALL THESE NEGATIVE PHENOMENA,
POPULATION GROWTH MUST BE STOPPED AND REVERSED.**

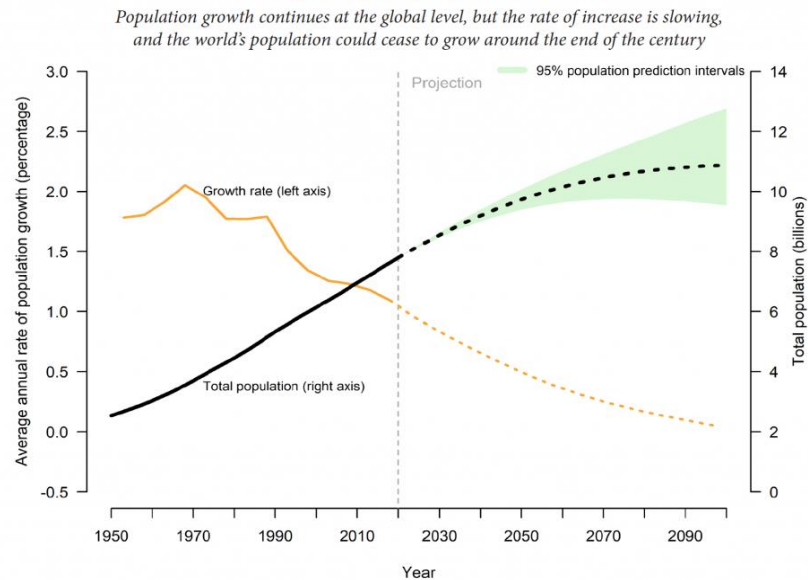
BUT TO WHICH SIZE? AND HOW TO DO IT HUMANELY AND ETHICALLY?



UNSUSTAINABLE HUMANITY

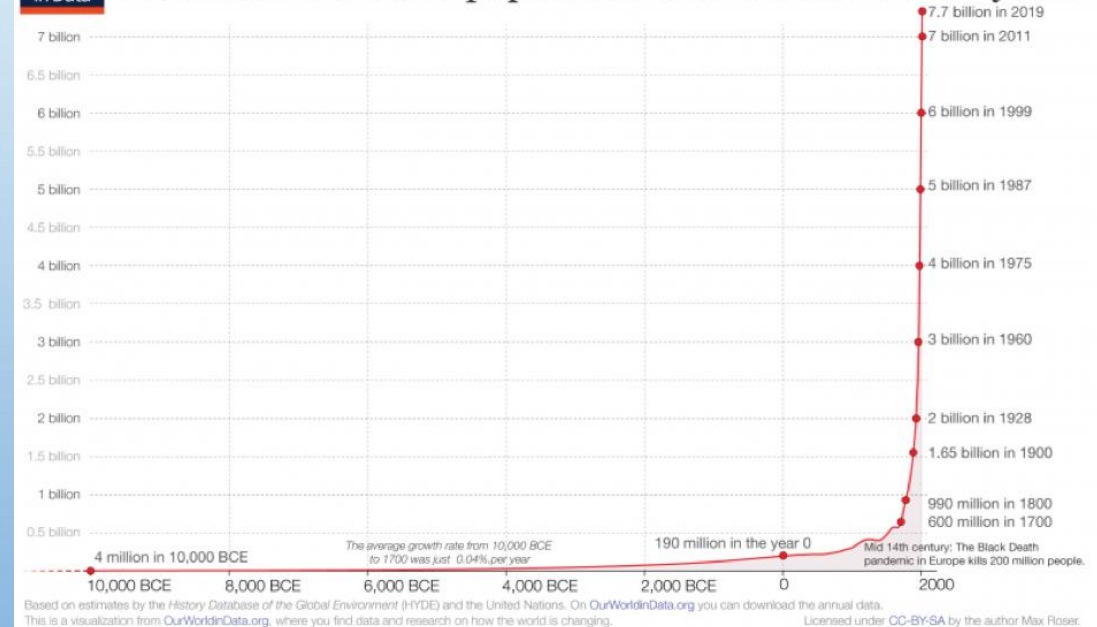
- IN 2022, HUMANITY OF **7.9 BILLION**, **RISING** WITH GROWTH OF **OVER 80 MILLION A YEAR**
- NO SIGN OF SLOWING DOWN IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE (DESPITE SLOWING POPULATION GROWTH & FERTILITY DECREASE) – CURRENT MEDIUM-VARIANT PROJECTIONS (UN 2019) ARE:
- **8 BILLION (2023)** ... 8.5 BILLION (2030) ... 9.7 BILLION (2050) ... **11 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



Data source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *World Population Prospects 2019*.

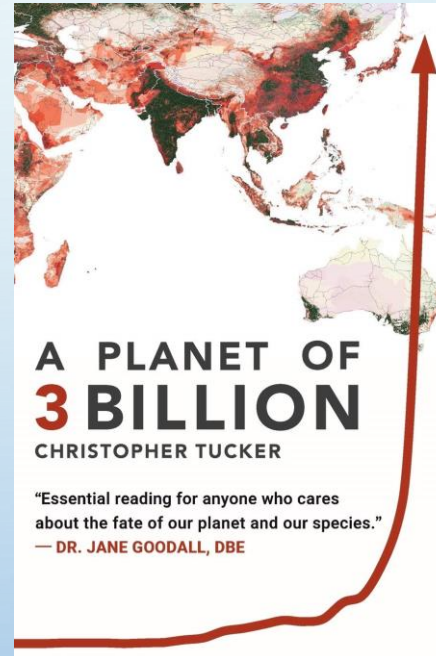
Our World in Data The size of the world population over the last 12,000 years



SUSTAINABLE HUMANITY

- STUDIES FOR A LONG-TERM SUSTAINABLE HUMANITY ARE BASED ON VARIOUS CRITERIA AND ASSUMPTIONS:

- **1.5 – 2 BILLION** (DAILY ET AL. 1994)
- **3 BILLION** (PIMENTAL ET AL. 1994)
- **2 BILLION** (DAILY ET AL. 2010)
- **3.1 BILLION** (LIANOS AND PSEIRIDIS 2016)
- **3 BILLION** (TUCKER 2019)
- **0.5 – 5 BILLION** (DASGUPTA 2019)



- OBVIOUSLY, MORE STUDIES, DISCUSSION, AND GENERAL CONSENSUS ON THE IDEAL NUMBER ARE NEEDED
- NEVERTHELESS, ONE THING IS CRYSTAL CLEAR – **HUMANITY IS FAR BEYOND BEING SUSTAINABLE**

ROOTS OF OUR UNSUSTAINABILITY

- **FIVE ROOTS OF HUMANITY'S GROWTH:**

- (1) MORTALITY DECLINE
- (2) POPULATION MOMENTUM (A BULK OF YOUNG PEOPLE ENTERING INTO THE REPRODUCTIVE POOL)
- (3) WANTED FERTILITY
- (4) UNWANTED FERTILITY
- (5) COERCED FERTILITY

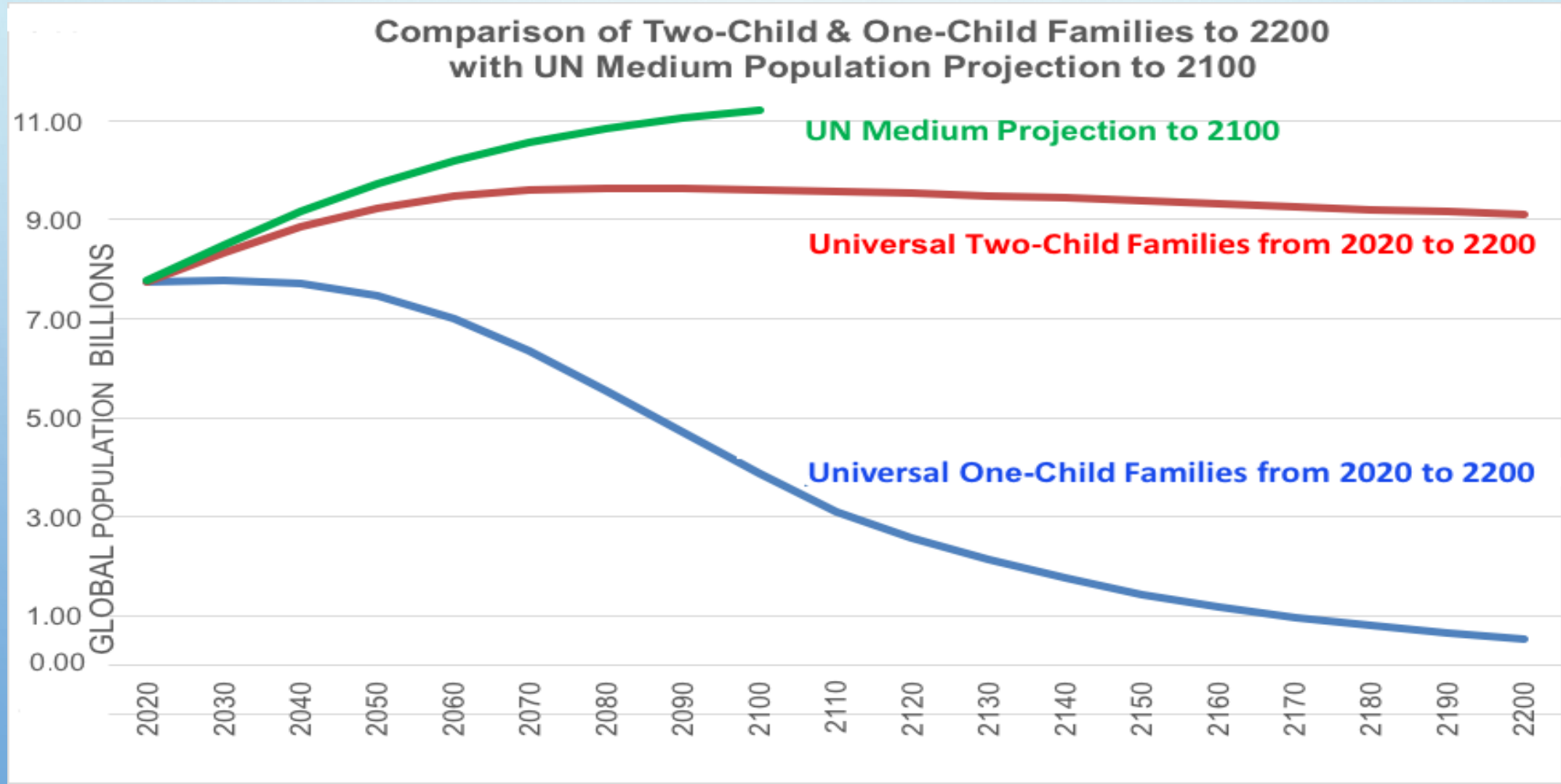
- **OBVIOUSLY, ROOT (1) IS DESIRABLE AND CURBING IT WOULD BE UNETHICAL AND UNACCEPTABLE**

TARGETING THE ROOTS

- (4) UNWANTED FERTILITY + (5) COERCED FERTILITY ARE ADDRESSED AND COMBATED BY:
- **VOLUNTARY FAMILY PLANNING**
- CONTRACEPTIVE PREVALENCE AS THE GREATEST FACTOR FOR A COUNTRY'S FERTILITY RATE
- ESSENTIAL, WANTED, NEEDED AND DOABLE; THE GREATEST MEDICAL ACHIEVEMENT ALONGSIDE VACCINATION
- **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 **CRUCIAL FOR CURBING POPULATION GROWTH**, BUT THEY ARE **ALSO IMPORTANT IN THEMSELVES**.
- **RESTRICTIVE MEASURES ARE UNETHICAL AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED; THUS, THEY ARE NOT DISCUSSED HERE.**

TARGETING THE ROOTS

- (2) POPULATION MOMENTUM + (3) WANTED FERTILITY ALSO MUST BE ADDRESSED. WHY? BECAUSE (FERGUSON AND RIMMER 2017)

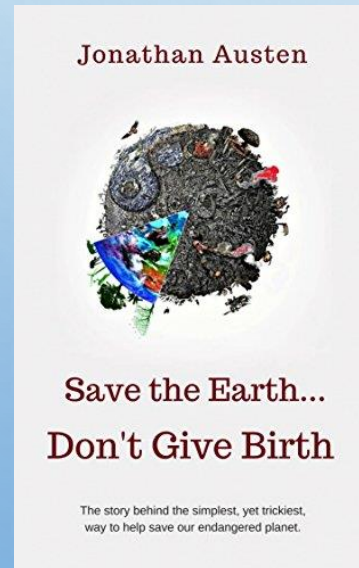
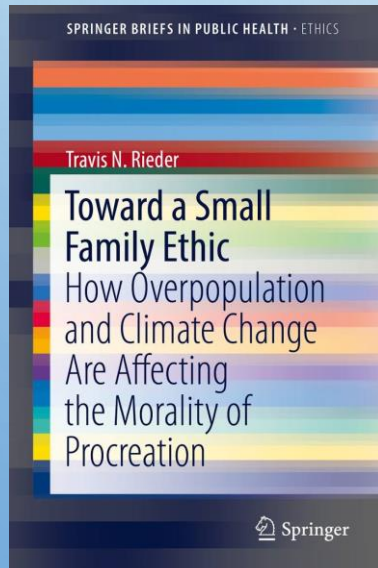


ONE-CHILD REALITY

- **ONE-CHILD REALITY (ETHICS OR POLITICS) IS THE ONLY SOLUTION TO OUR POPULATION PREDICAMENT:**
- THE AFOREMENTIONED 2017 STUDY EXPLORES THE HYPOTHETICAL RESULTS OF A VOLUNTARY, GLOBAL AGREEMENT FROM 2020 THAT ALL FAMILIES SHOULD HAVE EITHER TWO CHILDREN OR ONLY ONE CHILD, AND COMPARES THEM WITH CURRENT POPULATION PROJECTIONS, CONCLUDING THAT **ONLY UNIVERSAL ONE-CHILD FAMILIES COULD SOLVE THE PROBLEM.**
- IT FURTHER DISCUSSES THE REMARKABLE FACT THAT A UN-PROJECTED FERTILITY DECREASE, DOWN FROM 2.4 IN 2020 TO BELOW 2.0 BY 2100, RESULTS IN A **STEADILY INCREASING POPULATION: 11.2 BILLION BY 2100. THIS IS BECAUSE DECREASING FERTILITY IS COUNTERBALANCED BY A HIGHER POPULATION BASE OVER TIME. THOUGH A HYPOTHETICAL DECREASE TO TWO-CHILD FAMILIES WOULD STOP THE GLOBAL POPULATION FROM RISING ABOVE 10 BILLION, IT WOULD TAKE UNTIL 2480 TO RETURN TO 2020-LEVEL POPULATION.**

ONE-CHILD ETHICS

- **REPRODUCTIVE ETHICS OF SMALLER FAMILIES:**
- IN PHILOSOPHY, INCREASING FOCUS ON REPRODUCTIVE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS
- GIVEN PLETHORA OF PROBLEMS MENTIONED BEFORE, PHILOSOPHERS AND ENVIRONMENTALISTS DISCUSS AND PROMOTE REPRODUCTIVE ETHICS OF SMALL FAMILIES AS **A NEW GLOBAL ETHICAL NORM**
- SMALL FAMILY = A 2-CHILD MAXIMUM PER FAMILY (**REPLACEMENT FERTILITY**) AND IDEALLY LESS (**ONE-CHILD ETHICS**)



ONE-CHILD ETHICS

- **ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND EDUCATION**
- ANOTHER IMPORTANT SUB-DISCIPLINE IN CURRENT PHILOSOPHY
- ILLUSTRATES THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR VAST NUMBERS FOR THE BIOSPHERE, AND OTHER LIVING SPECIES
- POINTS OUT THAT HUMANITY IS NOT THE ONLY SPECIES ON THE PLANET
- **OTHER SPECIES HAVE RIGHTS TOO**
- **OUR POSTERITY ALSO HAVE RIGHTS...**
- ... **TO LIVE IN A WORLD IN WHICH THEY CAN THRIVE AND PROSPER** – SOMETHING IMPOSSIBLE IN AN OVERPOPULATED WORLD DEPLETED OF NATURE RESOURCES, AFFLICTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

ONE-CHILD ETHICS

- ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

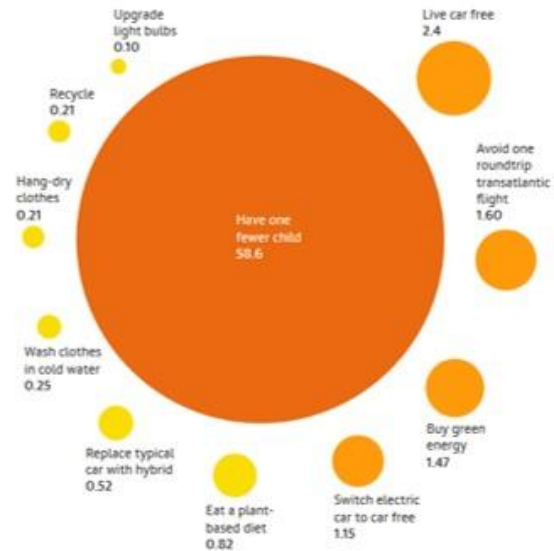
Want to fight climate change?

Have fewer children.

Next best actions are selling your car, avoiding flights and going vegetarian, according to study into true impacts of different green lifestyle choices.

Having one fewer child will save 58.6 tonnes of CO₂-equivalent per year

Tonnes of CO₂-equivalent per year for one person undertaking each action



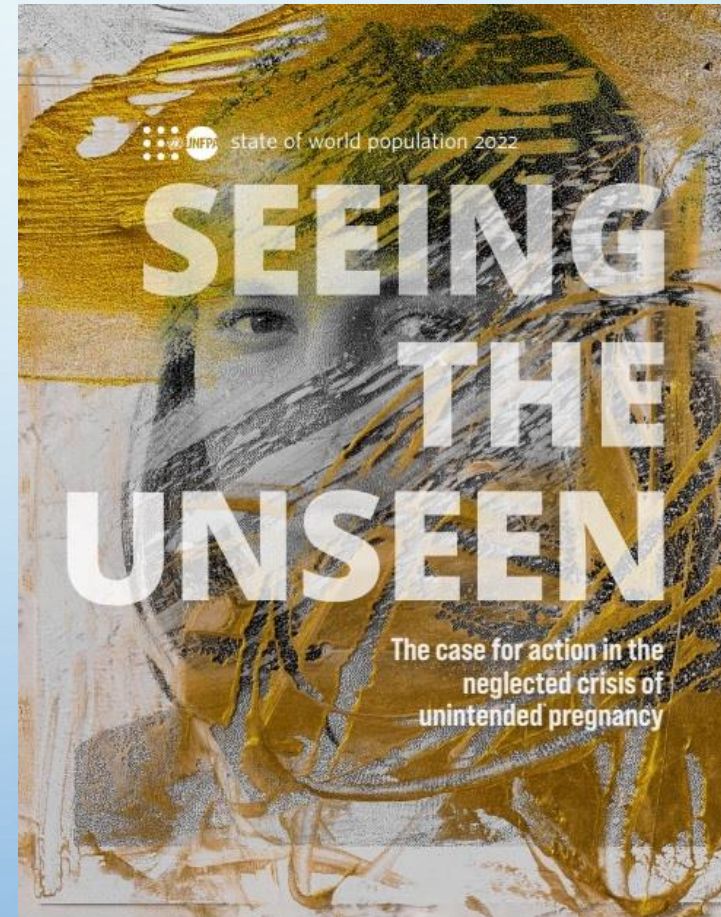
Guardian graphic | Source: Wynnes & Nicholas, Environmental Research Letters
The graphic shows how much CO₂ can be saved through a range of different actions.

The figure was calculated by totting up the emissions of the child and all their descendants, then dividing this total by the parent's lifespan. Each parent was ascribed 50% of the child's emissions, 25% of their grandchildren's emissions and so on. Without this cumulative calculation, average emissions per person in the UK are currently 7 tonnes/year.

(WYNES AND KIMBERLY 2017)

FURTHER ETHICAL MEASURES

- **LENGTHENING GENERATIONS**
- = WOMEN DELAYING THEIR FIRST CHILD (E.G., UNTIL THEIR THIRTIES)
- **VERY EFFECTIVE MEASURE AGAINST POPULATION MOMENTUM**
- GYNAECOLOGICALLY **SEEMINGLY CONTROVERSIAL** (PREGNANCY AND DELIVERY COMPLICATIONS INCREASE WITH HIGHER AGE)
- IN FACT, **VERY ETHICAL** (RISKY ADOLESCENT AND UNINTENDED PREGNANCIES IN LATIN AMERICA, SSA)



FURTHER ETHICAL MEASURES

- **CHILD-FREE WOMEN**
- THERE IS A SEGMENT OF WOMEN WHO MAY NEVER WANT TO GET PREGNANT AND HAVE CHILDREN
- THIS IS **ABSOLUTELY LEGITIMATE** – IT IS A WOMAN'S RIGHT, **NOT A DUTY TO HAVE CHILDREN**
- PARENTING IS HARD AND MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR EVERYONE
- **VERY ETHICAL** (NOT SELFISH, WEIRD, OR SOMEHOW WRONG) **IN OUR OVERPOPULATED WORLD**
- **STAYING CHILD-FREE IS A VALID OPTION – SUCH WOMEN SHOULD NOT BE STIGMATIZED BUT SUPPORTED IN THEIR DECISION TO STAY CHILD-FREE (NOT CHILD-LESS = STIGMATIZING !)**

CONCLUSION

- **SUSTAINABILITY IS POSSIBLE AND ACHIEVABLE, BUT REQUIRES SUSTAINABLE HUMANITY.**
- SUSTAINABLE HUMANITY IS ALSO POSSIBLE AND ACHIEVABLE, BUT REQUIRES TARGETING ALL FOUR ROOTS OF HUMANITY'S GROWTH INCLUDING POPULATION MOMENTUM AND WANTED FERTILITY.
- **THIS CAN BE DONE THROUGH PROMOTION OF SMALL FAMILIES, IDEALLY ONE-CHILD ETHICS.**
- WHILE IT IS NOT LIKELY FOR VOLUNTARY ONE-CHILD ETHICS TO BE GLOBALLY ACCEPTED AND EMBRACED IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, IT SHOULD BE WIDELY CIRCULATED AMONG BIO-ETHICISTS AS WELL AS ALL HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS TO EMPHASIZE THAT THIS IS ULTIMATELY THE ONLY ETHICAL SOLUTION TO OUR OVERPOPULATION PREDICAMENT.

ETHICS ABOVE ALL

- **HUMAN POPULATION IS UNSUSTAINABLE BUT WE SHOULD TARGET IT HUMANELY, ETHICALLY**
- **WHATEVER OUR MOTIVES ARE (FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE, SPECIES GENOCIDE, POVERTY, INEQUITY), WE MUST DO IT – ALWAYS – WITH HUMANITY, WISDOM AND COMPASSION,**
- **AND WITH UNDERSTANDING OF ETHNICAL, REGIONAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS SPECIFICATIONS**
- **WHAT WE MUST NOT DO, IS TO IGNORE OUR POPULATION PREDICAMENT DUE TO ITS MONSTROSITY. FAILING TO DO SO, MEANS TO BRING ABOUT COERCIVE, UNETHICAL MEASURES (ONE-CHILD POLICY, ETC.) IN THE FUTURE**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION



OSTRICHES DON'T REALLY DO IT, BUT ONE SPECIES OF MAMMAL DOES.