

Bioethicist: We Must Have Fewer Children Because of Climate Change

Travis N. Rieder says he doesn't hate babies. But in [a recent article](#) written for The Conversation he does say it's time to "discuss the ethics of having children in this era of climate change."

The threat is just that serious, he writes:

In my work, I suggest that 1.5-2 degrees Celsius warming over preindustrial levels will be "dangerous" and "very bad," while 4 degrees C will be "catastrophic" and will leave large segments of the Earth "largely uninhabitable by humans." Here is a very brief survey of the evidence for those claims based on what I consider reputable sources.

At 1.5-2 degrees C, a World Bank report predicts an increase in extreme weather events, deadly heat waves and severe water stress. Food production will decrease, and changing disease vectors will create unpredictable infectious disease outbreaks. Sea levels will rise, combining with increased storm severity to place coastal cities at risk. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that from the years 2030-2050 – as we reach this level of warming – at least 250,000 people will die every year from just some of the climate-related harms.

Rieder, a research scholar at the Berman Institute of Bioethics at Johns Hopkins University, is not a climate scientist. He cites the WHO and World Bank data, and points out that 97 percent of "relevant experts" agree that humans are causing global warming.

That 97 percent figure is important, and an article Rieder links to explains why:

People's awareness of the scientific consensus affects their acceptance of climate change, and their support for climate action. The psychological importance of perceived consensus underscores why communicating the 97% consensus is important. Consensus messaging has been [shown empirically](#) to increase acceptance of climate change.

The article he cites was written by John Cook, author of *Climate Change Denial*. As it happens, Cook's 97 percent statistic was [eviscerated](#) by David Legates, former head of the University of Delaware's Center for Climatic Research. The figure is often still rolled out by politicians and climate alarmists, since it can make anyone who disagrees with their environmental diagnosis and prescription appear "a climate change denier" even if said person acknowledges that global temps are rising and humans activity is contributing to the rise.

Rieder's article certainly contains some alarming predictions:

Many coastal cities will be completely under water, and all low-lying island nations will likely have to be abandoned. Hundreds of millions, if not billions of people could become [climate refugees](#), as their homelands become uninhabitable.

We're talking *billions* of misplaced people, a dystopian future akin to [Waterworld](#) (that movie Kevin Costner wished he never made).

Could or will all of this happen? I have no idea. But I think skepticism in the face of such predictions is warranted, especially considering other scientific evidence at hand.

NASA has admitted the Earth is experiencing a (["temporary" but unexpected](#)) ["climate hiatus."](#) [Antarctic sea ice is increasing](#)

even though carbon emissions are rising *faster* than scientists predicted. Sea-levels are still rising, but the rate of increase [is slowing](#), not increasing as scientists had predicted. We're seeing fewer droughts and hurricanes.

By ignoring such facts, Rieder is embracing what Bjorn Lomborg calls "[the one-sided story of alarmism](#)."

Such apocalyptic scenarios are no doubt necessary if one is going to suggest that an environmental phenomenon is so dire it requires humans to rethink their breeding habits. But by ignoring the full picture scientists (and, in Rieder's case, philosophers) risk becoming modern-day [Malthusians](#) who see environmental Armageddon lurking behind human procreation and consumption.

Finally, let's assume for a moment that all of Rieder's predictions are true. How would we go about curbing family sizes?

That is a question he never bothers to ask.

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Jon Miltimore is senior editor of Intellectual Takeout. [Follow him on Facebook](#).