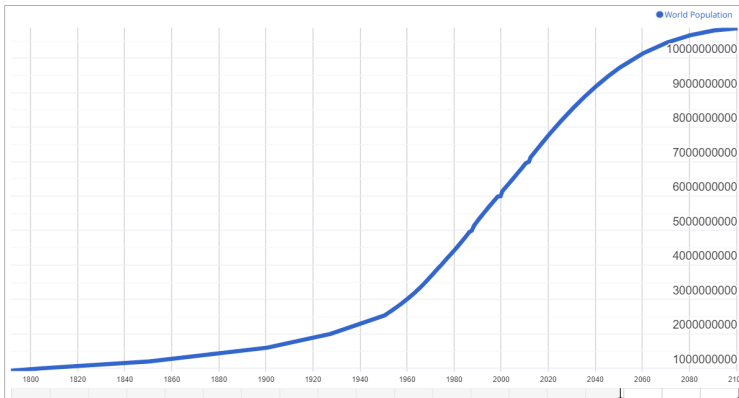


The Fossil Fuel Myth

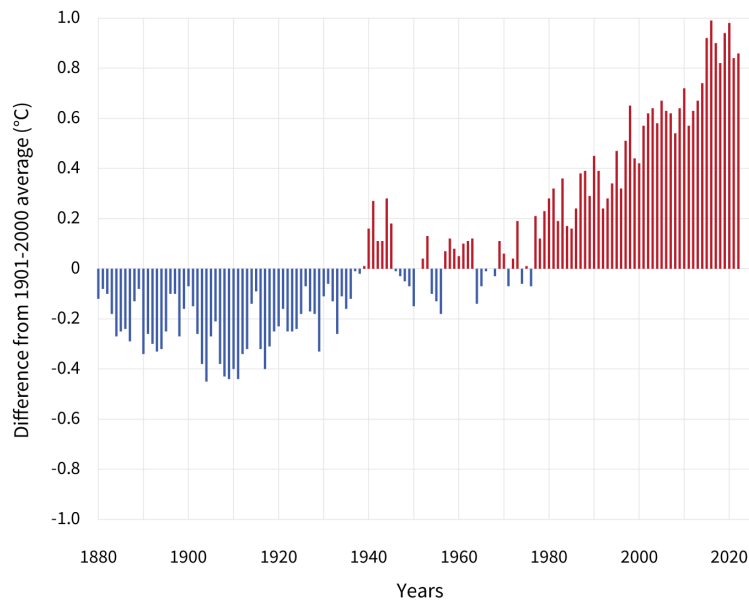
News reports regarding climate change attribute the crisis of the warming climate to the burning of fossil fuels. But humans have been polluting the air without causing climate change for centuries. At one time coal burning in London caused air pollution that killed all but the hardiest of trees. But the earth's temperature did not change.

When I was born, two billion people inhabited our planet. A mere 81 years later, we have a world population of over eight billion. In that short period, four times as many people have caused the burning of fossil fuels to pollute the air.



The soaring population has matched the soaring earth temperature.

GLOBAL AVERAGE SURFACE TEMPERATURE



And now we find that the rising planet temperature is melting the ice caps thus raising the sea level and reducing the area where people can live and where food can be produced. We are seeing extreme weather conditions leading to flooding and drought. There are predictions that most animal species will become extinct.

Simple arithmetic demonstrates that if human couples produce more than two offspring, the population will increase exponentially unless deaths check the growth. Wars, genocide and pandemics have slowed the population increase, but the growth steadily continues.

<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/world-population-by-year/>

On January 16, 2023, the New York Times reported that for the first time the population of China had declined. That might have been heralded as evidence that population control might really be possible. But the Times called it a “demographic crisis.”

“Now, facing a population decline, coupled with a long-running rise in life expectancy, the country is being thrust into a demographic crisis that will have consequences not just for China and its economy but for the world.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/business/china-birth-rate.html>

The theory is that more people are needed to provide for the people already here. But that proposal resembles a giant Ponzi scheme that requires one to ignore the fact that the earth’s resources are limited. China’s population control proves that it is possible to stop the earth from being overrun by humans. But any such effort faces tax laws, religious leaders and politicians encouraging people to go forth and multiply.

Efforts to control pollution and to replace the use of fossil fuels with renewable energy sources are laudable. Ann Arbor has made its contribution to saving the planet with a one mill tax to provide funds for “climate action.” But no amount of control of what we put into the air will be effective in the long term if the number of people on the planet continues to grow.

I recognize that recent history may not be a good predictor of future growth. The next pandemic may really kill enough people to reduce world population. Putin may wipe out a big part of the earth’s population. In his book, Factfulness, Hans Rosling points out the many ways life on earth has improved. More people are educated and they are living longer. But the modern medicine and nutrition that keeps people living longer may be a big part of the population problem. Many more people are living long enough to produce more children. Despite all the improvements, we still have ten percent of the earth’s population without enough food.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/28/why-is-global-hunger-on-the-rise-2>

Draconian measures such as the China one child policy should not be needed to control the population. Nor should we need a war, genocide or a pandemic. The same medical technology that has led to longer human life has also produced means of family planning so that reproduction can be by choice rather than chance. Although the world population continues to grow, the balance between birth and death rates is small enough to be susceptible to change. Change could begin with the realization that having many children may please the grandparents, but it is not good for the planet.

Bruce Laidlaw
May 28, 2023