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# Toward a Small Family Ethic

How Overpopulation  
and Climate Change  
Are Affecting  
the Morality of  
Procreation



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*To Sinem,  
who taught me the value of parenting:  
Thank you for being our daughter.  
I hope we're doing okay.*



# Preface

The idea that sparked this project began in another paper entitled, “Adoption, Procreation, and the Contours of Obligation,” which was published in the *Journal of Applied Philosophy* in 2015. There, I investigated whether each prospective parent might have a duty to adopt rather than procreate, as there are several, powerful lines of reasoning in favor of such a view. Not only are there millions of adoptable children in need of the parenting resources (an argument made independently by philosophers Tina Rulli and Daniel Friedrich), but there seem to be moral concerns about the very creation of children in the first place. In particular, I raised concerns that each new person we create exacerbates global resource shortages and the threat of catastrophic climate change.

In 2014, I was discussing an early draft of this project with Macey Leigh Henderson, who was intrigued by the relationship between procreation and climate change. She asked if it was my view that overpopulation thus constituted a public health crisis. And, while I hadn’t thought of it in exactly those terms before, I said “yes” and that the real challenge of my view was accounting for how such a crisis generates individual moral obligation. Macey responded that this sounded like an interesting addition to a new book series that she was editing on public health ethics, and the current project was born.

My thanks to the *Journal of Applied Philosophy* for publishing that original article, to my friends, colleagues, and critics, who have pushed me on its argument, and to Macey for extracting a more sustained treatment of the climate ethics portion of the argument. The bulk of the first draft of this manuscript was written during my time as a Hecht-Levi Postdoctoral Fellow in the Berman Institute of Bioethics at Johns Hopkins University, and I am grateful to the Hecht-Levi Program, as well as the faculty and my fellow postdocs, who provided an exceptionally congenial environment for doing bioethics. In particular, I want to thank Ted Bailey, Jeff Kahn, Stephanie Morain, Bridget Pratt, Kevin Riggs, Yashar Saghari, and Miriam Shapiro, all of whom provided valuable feedback on one or more chapter, and audiences at Georgetown University’s Works-in-Progress Group, Southern Illinois University’s Philosophy Colloquium Series, the Berman Institute’s Faculty Workshop, and James Madison University’s Philosophy Colloquium Series, for helpful dialogue