

analysis, quantitative historical analysis, statistical analysis, content analysis, qualitative interviewing, and participant observation) is truly impressive. The book provides an excellent example of how multiple methods can be used to tackle different pieces of a research design. It also makes a convincing argument for not treating transnational activist networks as monolithic, but rather analyzing how changes in network structures influence organizational choices and networks' ability to influence policy.

Goldin, Ian, ed. 2014. *Is the Planet Full?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Scholars have for centuries had the hubris to ask whether their generation would be the one to witness Earth finally crumbling under the weight of humanity's excesses. One of the most famous, of course, was the Rev. Thomas Malthus, who in 1798 was horrified that population growth might outpace the planet's ability to provide food for the less than one billion people alive at the time (Malthus 1888). In *The Population Bomb*, Paul Ehrlich (1968) echoed those same fears while living among a global population of 3.5 billion. Today, with population more than double that of Ehrlich's time, Ian Goldin and a group of Oxford colleagues have revisited the question: *Is the Planet Full?*

Rather than depicting a purely Malthusian vision, the volume's contributors ask whether more people might bring benefits to the planet as the number of minds to create potential solutions to the world's problems grows—the cornucopian vision of population growth often proselytized by neoclassical economists. The book's title is somewhat misleading, since what the contributors ask at heart is whether the upside of population growth outweighs the downside.

A focus on the “upside of down”—what good could result from a large population—is a welcome change from the doomsday literature that predominates in environmental studies. However, the chapter authors do not shy away from pointing out dangerous inefficiencies in resource distribution, including food and water, nor in pointing out the inconsistencies between free market ideology that professes to raise the standard of living, but in practice leads to the excesses and waste of modern consumption. Ian Johnson's chapter assessing the lessons of *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1971) for the contemporary world, for example, encourages the reader to think about the limits of economic theory and its emphasis on using measures of GDP growth to indicate improvements in quality of life. Likewise, H. Charles J. Godfray's chapter on feeding the global population highlights the environmental harm caused by increasingly resource-intensive diets in countries with growing GDP and thus increased quality of life.

The contributors come from a variety of interdisciplinary backgrounds, from demography to philosophy, biology, environmental studies, and more. The subjects of their chapters, likewise, span a wide range, including health care, inequality, water scarcity, and food security. Goldin charged contributors with addressing the ethical implications of population growth, the effect of population growth on incomes and resource allocation, the effect on the ecosystem, and approaches various actors might take to “harness the positive effects” (p. 12) of population growth, while stopping the negative ones.

The book’s greatest strength is that it recognizes that any attempt to answer the question “Is the planet full?” also implies a need to answer the question “Is the planet *too* full?” What are the ethical implications of a growing human population? Asking demographers, ecologists, and so forth to answer the question not only from an empirical standpoint, but also from a normative one, increases the utility of each chapter and makes for a more comprehensive discussion. The inclusion of both empirical and normative aspects also means the book includes some fresh perspectives. For example, Toby Ord asks the reader to consider the value of individual lives, rather than the faceless billions typically addressed in questions about global population.

In addition to demographic, philosophical, and economic approaches, a few chapters use a biological lens to ask whether the planet is full. Yadvinder Malhi argues a resounding “Yes” to the book’s central question, arguing that the Earth’s natural metabolism—which is that preceding humans—has been disrupted and dominated by a species—humans—at a high trophic level. Mark New looks at water availability, extraction, and consumption, but misses the opportunity to examine issues about access to water within and among societies, which would be in perfect alignment with the ethical themes in the book.

The volume does suffer from a few shortcomings. For one, all of the volume’s contributors come from the University of Oxford, except for one—Ian Johnson, Secretary General of The Club of Rome. While the contributors are clearly venerated experts in their fields, not all focus on population matters as their research core. The book might have been stronger if contributors were chosen based on their expertise in population studies. Second, while the book’s interdisciplinary approach to a single, important question in environmental politics is interesting, it does limit the book’s utility for classroom use in traditional disciplines; it would likely work well in interdisciplinary environmental studies survey courses.

## References

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