Human Population 2018

Lecture 23
messaging, disavowal

Term project discussion

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

MLK, jr.

And there comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because it is right.

MLK, jr.

Before the Media Lionized Martin Luther King Jr., They Denounced Him

memes: like idea genes...

- **smallest transmissible unit of ideas, opinions, beliefs.**

- **mutate upon transmission.**

- **not necessarilly statements.**

- **agents of Lamarckian evolution.**

Rose, N. (1998). Controversies in meme theory. *Journal of Memetics-Evolutionary Models of Information Transmission*, 2(1), 43.

Boyd, R., & Richerson, P. J. (2000). Meme theory oversimplifies cultural change. *Scientific American*, *283*, 54-55.

Brodie, Richard. *Virus of the mind: The new science of the meme*. Hay House, Inc, 2009.

Unwinnable games should be changed.
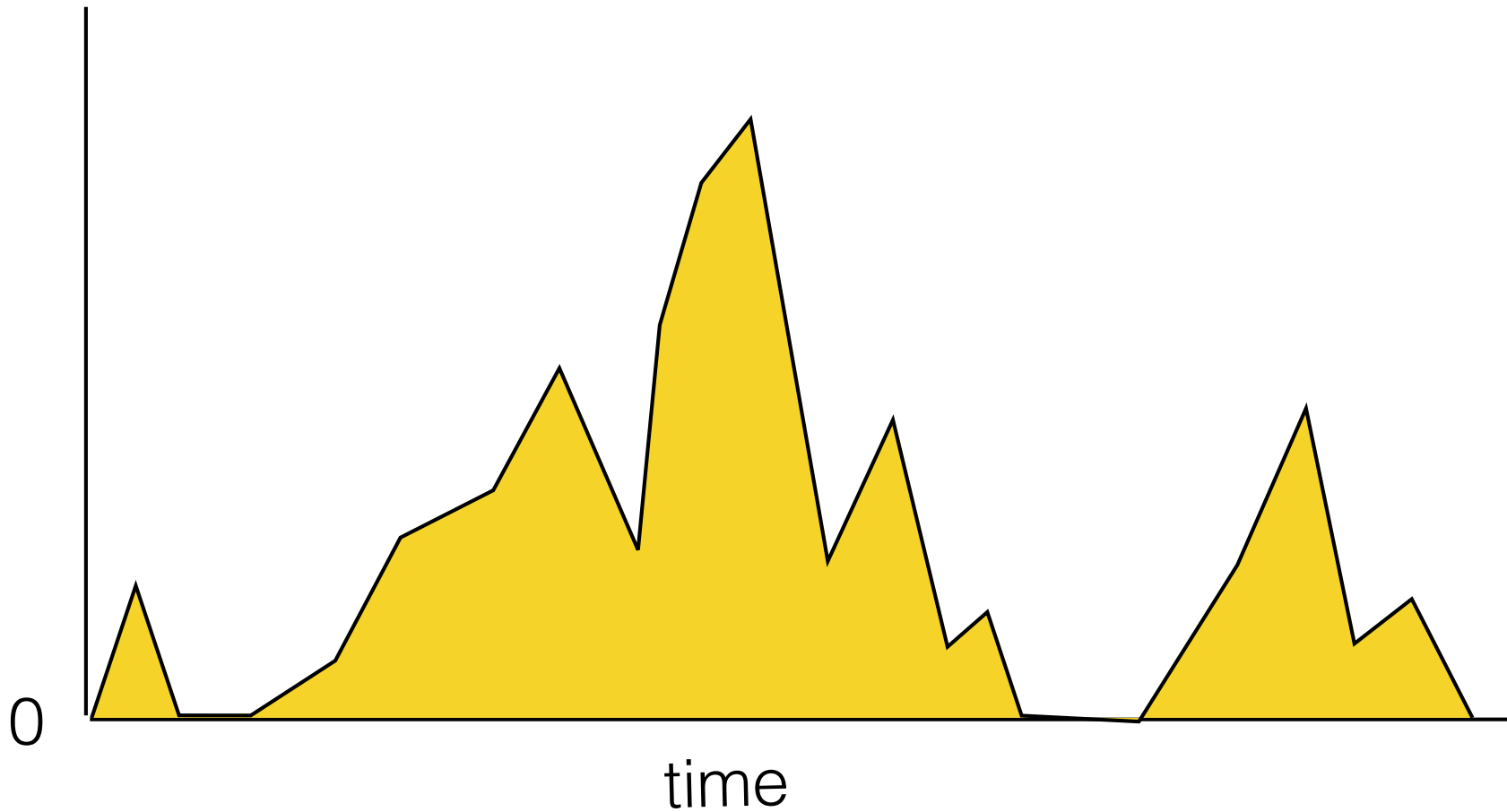
Model for game change

- A game is a **set of rules** that all agree to follow.
- The game changes when a **new set of rules** applies.
- A new set of rules is accepted when a **tipping point** of proponents is reached.
- A tipping point is reached after the **conversation** is **self-sustaining**.
- Conversation is self-sustaining when there are **enough memes**.
- Memes beget memes (modified).
- Memes spread proportional to the length of the **conversation**.
- **Good** memes keep the conversation going. **Bad** memes cut it short.
- Conversation ends when it runs out of **good memes** or encounters enough **bad memes**.
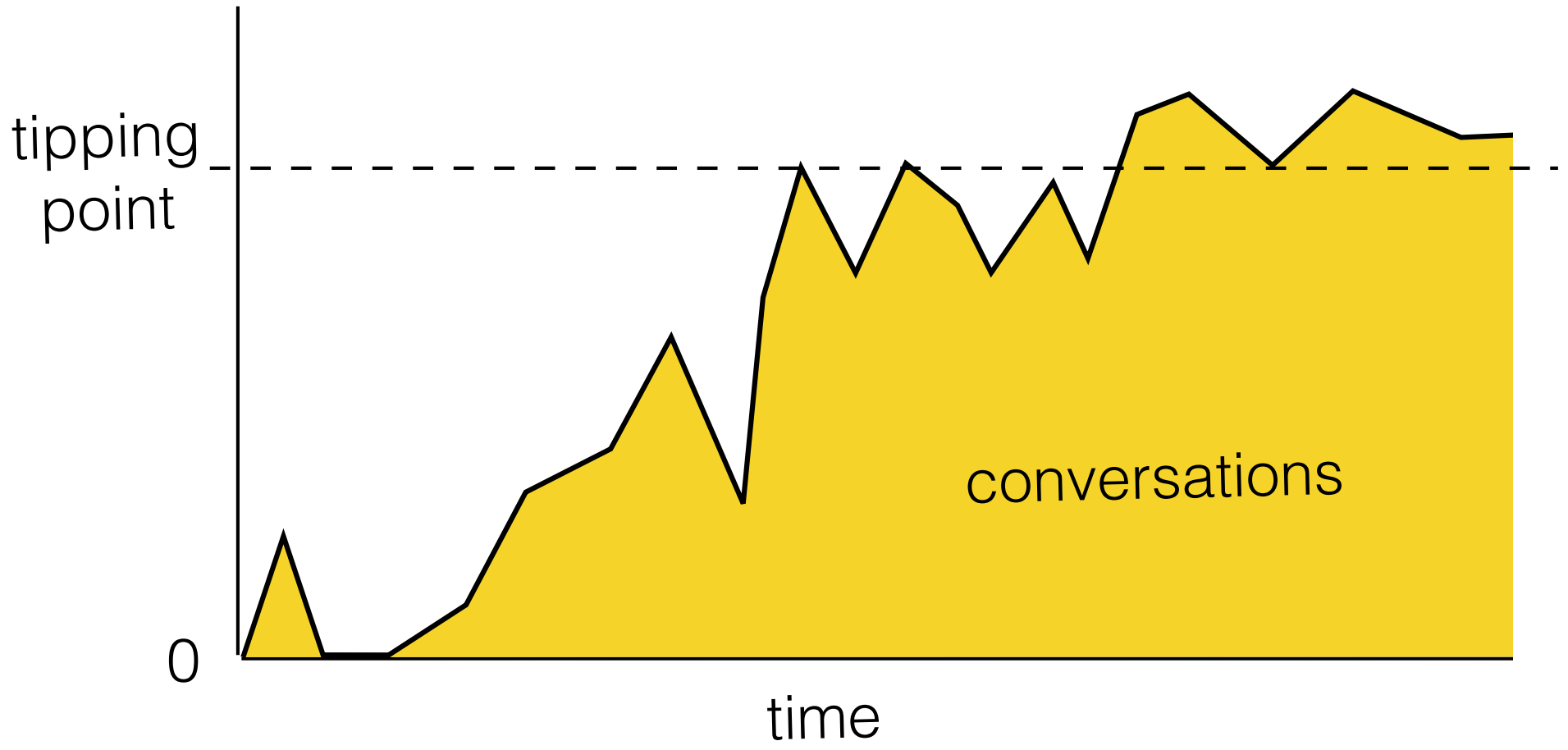
Sustained conversation

When the rate of starting the conversation exceeds the rate of ending the conversation, the conversation is **self-sustaining.**

Williams Jr, R. M. (1979). Change and stability in values and value systems: A sociological perspective. *Understanding human values*, *15*, 46.

conversations

0

time

Fad -- a temporary conversation that does not lead to
sustained cultural change.

tipping
point

0

conversations

time

a self-sustaining conversation that can lead to
cultural change.

meme spread is inherently exponential

Memes spread in proportion to the number of spreaders. Memes spread independently or in groups.
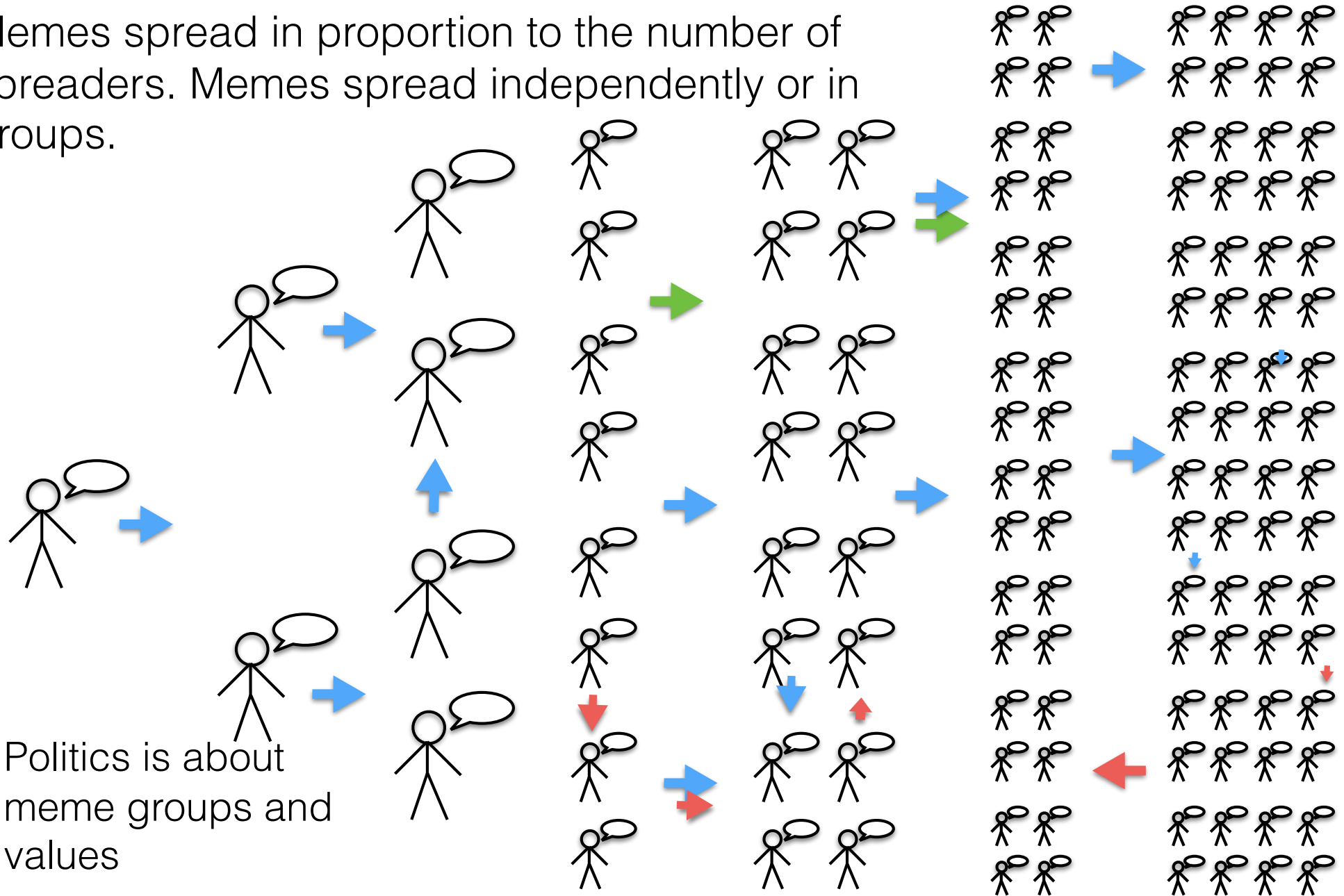
Politics is about meme groups and values

Do memes fill "space"?

Is culture a "zero-sum game"?

conversations

our finite collective bandwidth

If so, then the game is more complex.

Ideas **compete** for the social bandwidth.

A conversation has to grow over or displace other conservations.

strategies for playing the game change game

- **Mutually reenforcing** memes have more staying power, don't get modified.

- Memes delivered by **authority figures** carry more weight.

- Isolated conversations fail due to **competition for bandwidth**.

- Meme **modification** and **association** are required to lengthen the conversation, but...

- Meme modification and association increases the probability of **bad memes**.

- Game outcome depends staying power, which depends on the "**truth**", of the memes, and on the **authority** of the players.

- Meme "**truth**" is defined as degree of mutual reenforcement (see Charles S. Peirce, convergence of opinion)

Why care about models for game change?

- Because climate change marches on while we wait for voluntary changes to be enacted.
- Because delays mean problems are increasingly harder to solve.
- Because social media is one of the faster evolving of all technologies.

Just one of many examples of game change and delay.

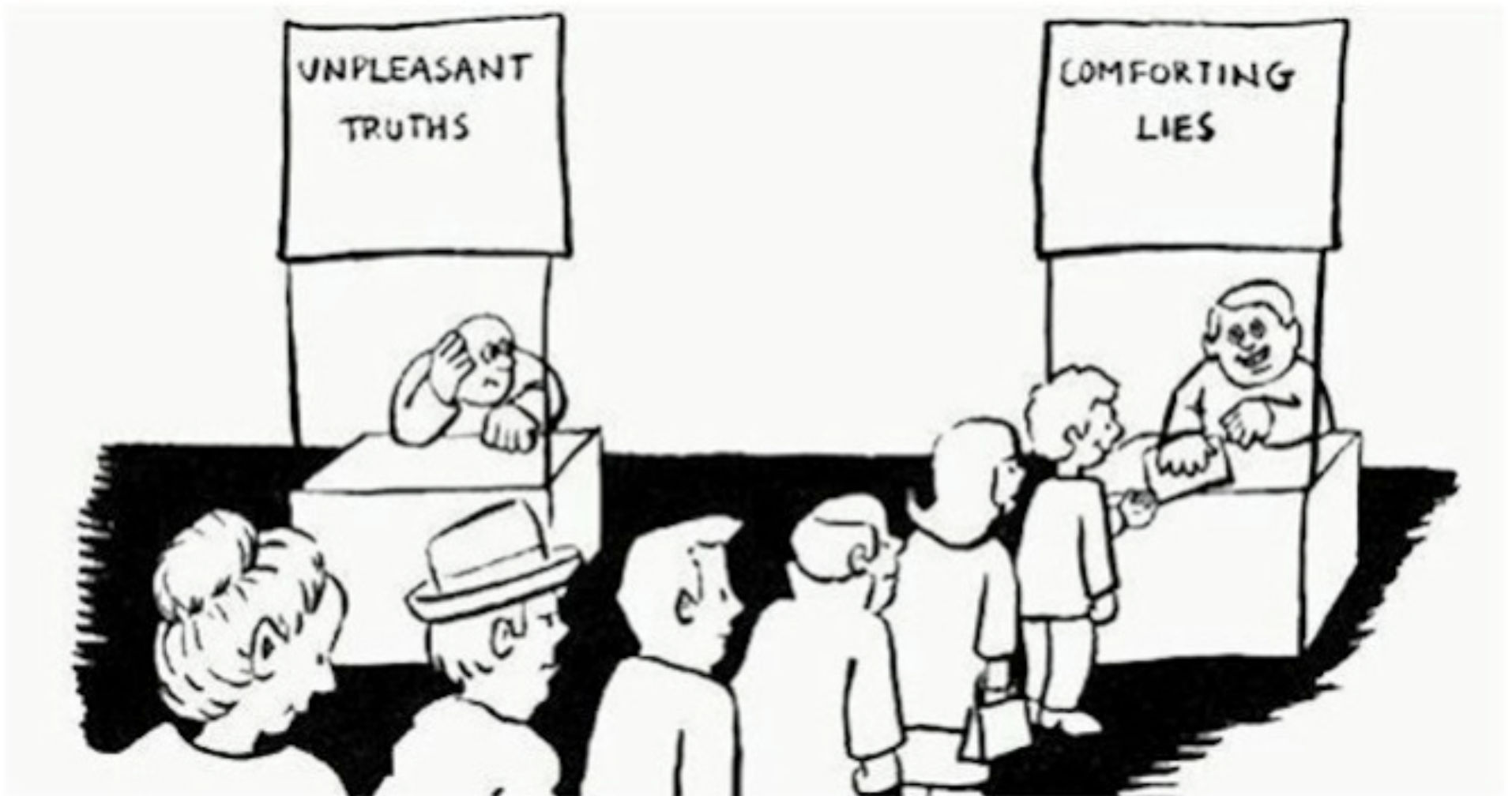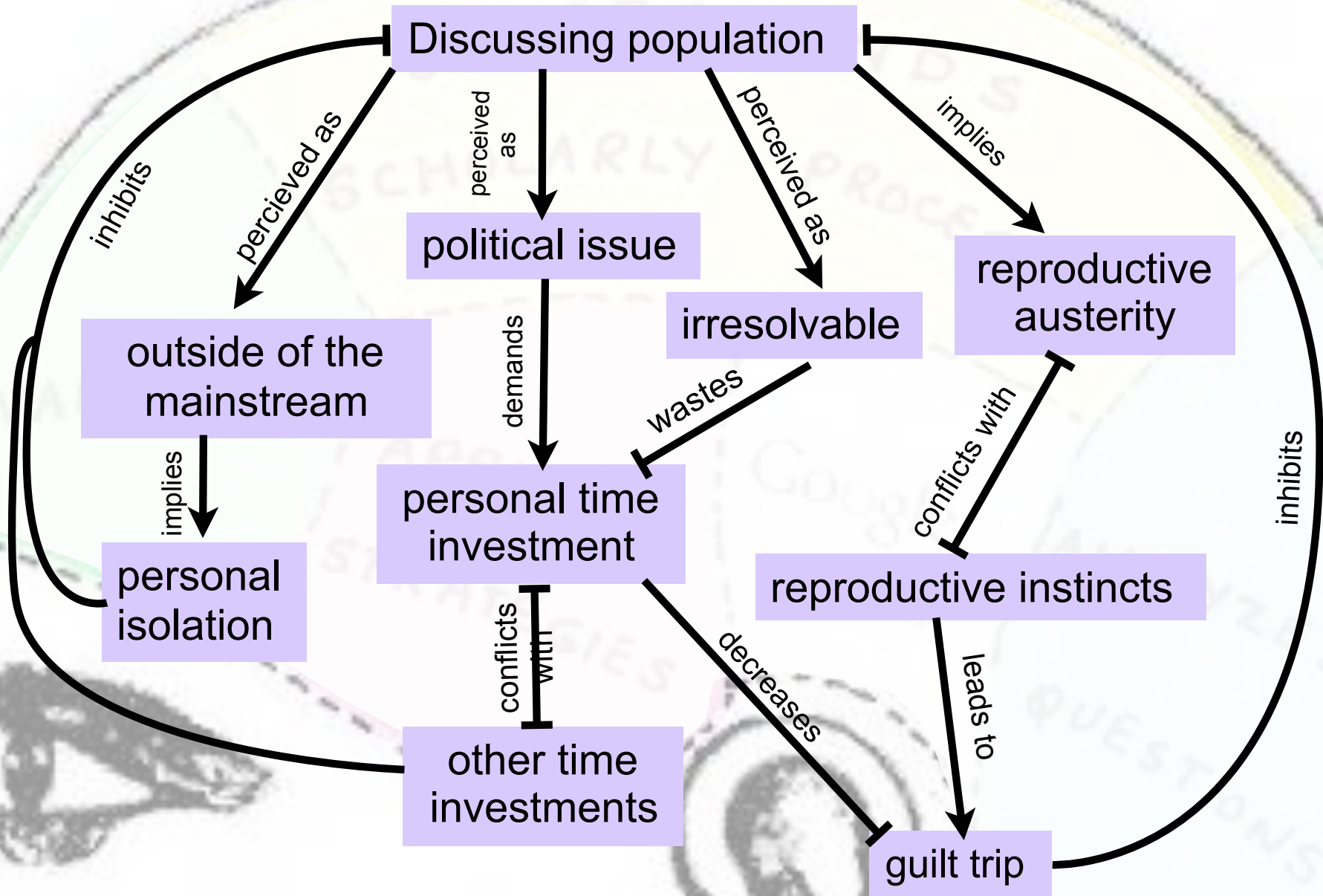Before the Media Lionized Martin Luther King Jr., They Denounced Him

https://www.rollingstone.com/politics

"Too many bodies? The return and disavowal of the population question" Diana Coole

Discomfort checkpoints in the brain on overpopulation.

How did population become a taboo subject?

- Talk of population, widespread in 1970's, later became muted. **Why**?
    - Conflicts with religious beliefs about the sanctity of life.
    - Contrary to beliefs about the goodness of [economic] growth.
    - Conflicted with compassionate agenda of 1970's progressive movement.

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- ## Mechanisms of disavowal #1:
  - **Population-shaming**. Those who speak publically are portrayed as "misanthropic people-haters" with "heinous ulterior motives". Others are charged with racism, colonialism, eugenics, and the promotion of genocide. North/South.
    - Example: a subtle accusation from the book "Multitude" (Hardt and Negri, 2004, pp. 165–167) 'Most discussions of demographic explosions and population crises . . . are not really oriented toward either bettering the lives of the poor or maintaining a sustainable total global population in line with the capacities of the planet.
    - ... article in the New Statesman (2004) ..: 'We dare not discuss population growth lest we be called racist'.

http://mahb.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2012_Coole_TooManyBodies_EnviroPolitics.pdf

• **Population-shaming**

T. R. Malthus

"It is an obvious truth, which has been taken notice of by many writers, that population must always be kept down to the level of the means of subsistence; but no writer that the Author recollects has inquired particularly into the means by which this level is effected..."

-- Thomas Robert Malthus, 1798
An Essay on the Principle of Population
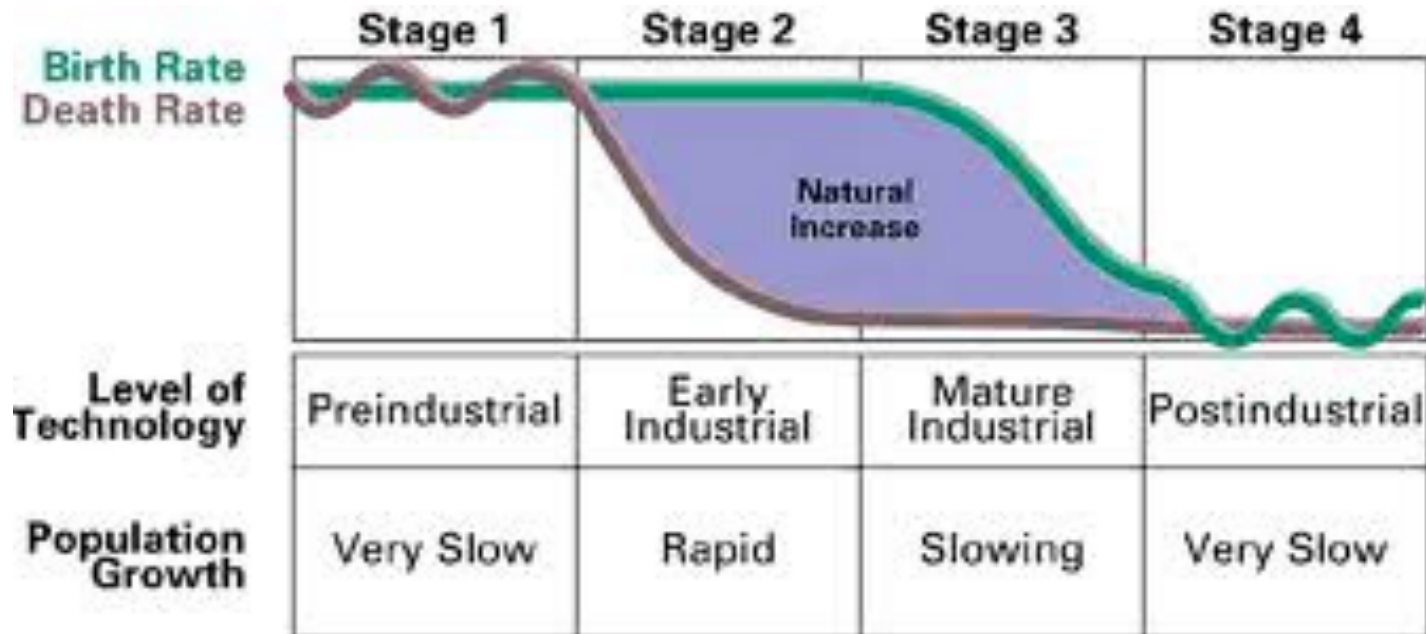
– Analysis of Population-Shaming:

» Broad claims of motives *are hypotheses*, not facts, but treated as facts.

» Claims are supported by anecdotal data, but are then applied broadly.

» Claim of anti-poor motive makes no sense!

» Silence rather than deliberation makes no sense!

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- ## Mechanisms of disavowal #2:

  - **Population-scepticism.** *Population is not a problem because*...

  - Dominant reasoning is <u>Demographic Transition Theory</u> (DTT), 4 stages, DT1:death rate, birth rate both high, DT2: death rate drops, DT3: birth rate drops, DT4: equilibrium.

  - Belief that growth favors economic development, leads to lower birth rate. (prompted by Ronald Reagan, economist Julian Simon)

Demographic Transition Theory

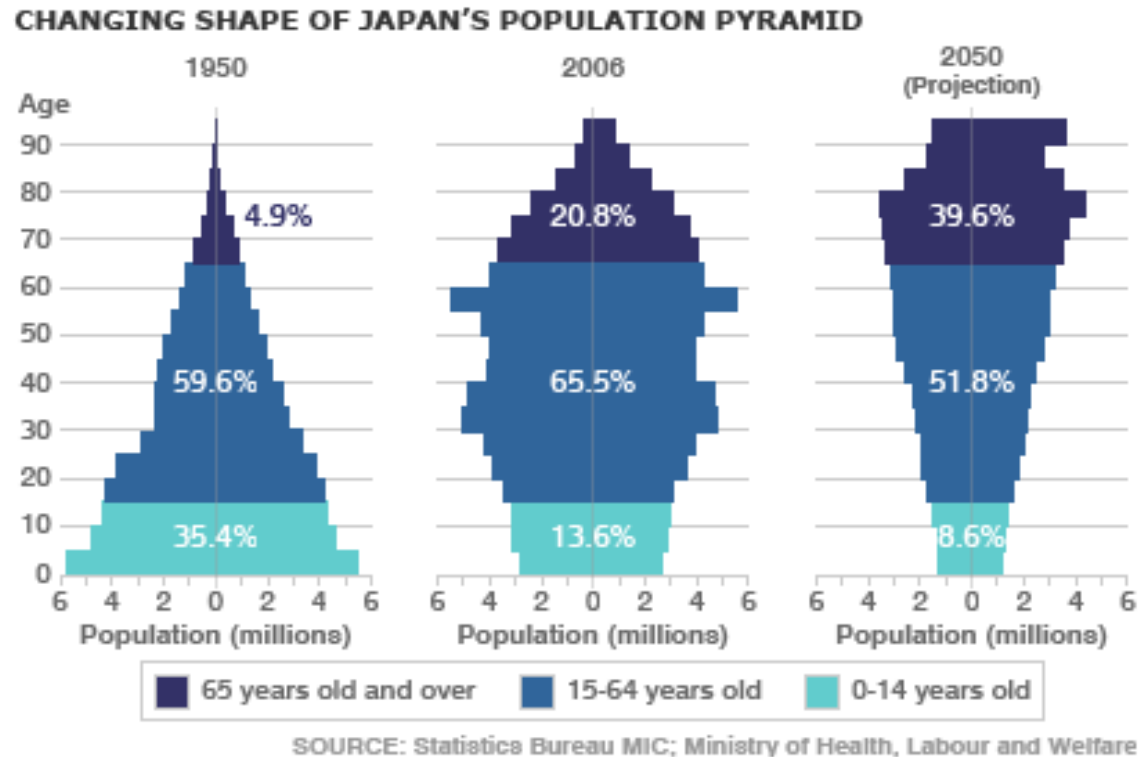|	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Birth Rate / Death Rate			Natural Increase	
Level of Technology	Preindustrial	Early Industrial	Mature Industrial	Postindustrial
Population Growth	Very Slow	Rapid	Slowing	Very Slow

- Analysis: DTT
  - » Contextualizes. Forces discussion to stay within the context.
  - » Based on European 20th c. history, but assumed to apply universally.
  - » Assumes economic development. Ignores population-to-poverty track.
  - » *Projections* often confused with *reality*, muting alarm.
  - » Caters to social conservatism.

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- ## Mechanisms of disavowal #3:
  - ### **Population-declinism**. Corollary to population-scepticism. Focused on ageing population.
    - Lower birth rate combined with high life-expectancy leads to high elderly/youth ratio.
    - Eldery require a youthful workforce.
    - Young populations will out-compete old populations.
    - Advocate for higher fertility as the solution.

Inverted demographic pyramid

CHANGING SHAPE OF JAPAN'S POPULATION PYRAMID

1950 — 4.9%, 59.6%, 35.4%

2006 — 20.8%, 65.5%, 13.6%

2050 (Projection) — 39.6%, 51.8%, 8.6%

Age / Population (millions)

65 years old and over — 15-64 years old — 0-14 years old

SOURCE: Statistics Bureau MIC; Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

– Analysis of Population Declinism
  – Promoting higher birthrate exascerbates problem.
  » Assumes elderly will be dependent.
  » Age imbalance would be temporary anyway.

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- ## Mechanisms of disavowal #4:
    - **Population-decomposing**. Treats the population issue as one of <u>individual decisions</u>, women's rights, child health. Talking about global population is a "numbers game" and is regarded as "crude", discussing population viewed as politically incorrect because it is "disadvantageous to women".

- **Population-decomposing**

$$I = P \ A \ T$$

– Analysis of Population-decomposing
  – **Focus on women is *not wrong*, but not <u>complete</u>.**
  » Those who focus on consumption, or equitable food distribution over population are "decomposing" the problem.
  » Fosters the illusion that population doesn't matter.
  » Favors micro- rather than macro- approach.
  » A case of "Can't see the forest for the trees."
  » Disavows the *multiplicative* (not additive) nature of the components of environmental impact.

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- **Mechanisms of disavowal #5:**
    - **Population-fatalism**. treats population growth and consequences as a given, powerless to change, therefore reluctant to address. Neglectful concern.

Stern, N., 2006. The Stern review: the economics of climate change [online].
http://mudancasclimaticas.cptec.inpe.br/~rmclima/pdfs/destaques/sternreview_report_complete.pdf

http://mahb.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2012_Coole_TooManyBodies_EnviroPolitics.pdf

• **Population-fatalism**
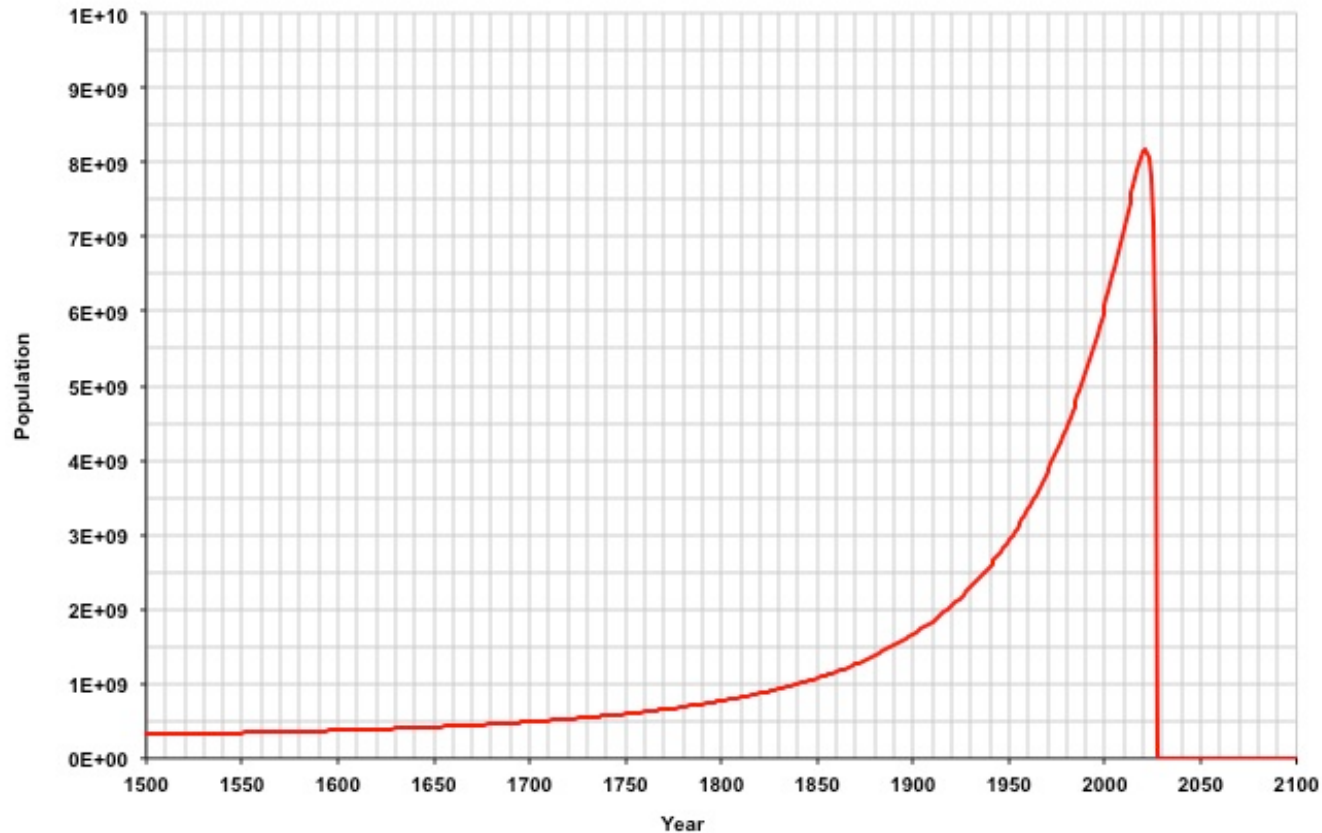
– Analysis, Population-fatalism:

   » Surrender to doom-and-gloom.

   » Probably wrapped up with population-shaming.

   » Is this a case of "extreme dissonance"?

   » "Why bother trying.... let's party instead."

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"...there is currently no politically acceptable framework within which population numbers can be problematised or remedial action commended."

-- Diana Coole, Department of Politics, Birkbeck , University of London , UK

The overpopulation conversation occupies zero bandwidth!

http://mahb.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2012_Coole_TooManyBodies_EnviroPolitics.pdf

...<u>almost</u> zero bandwidth

Despite disavowal, many population-focused groups exist!