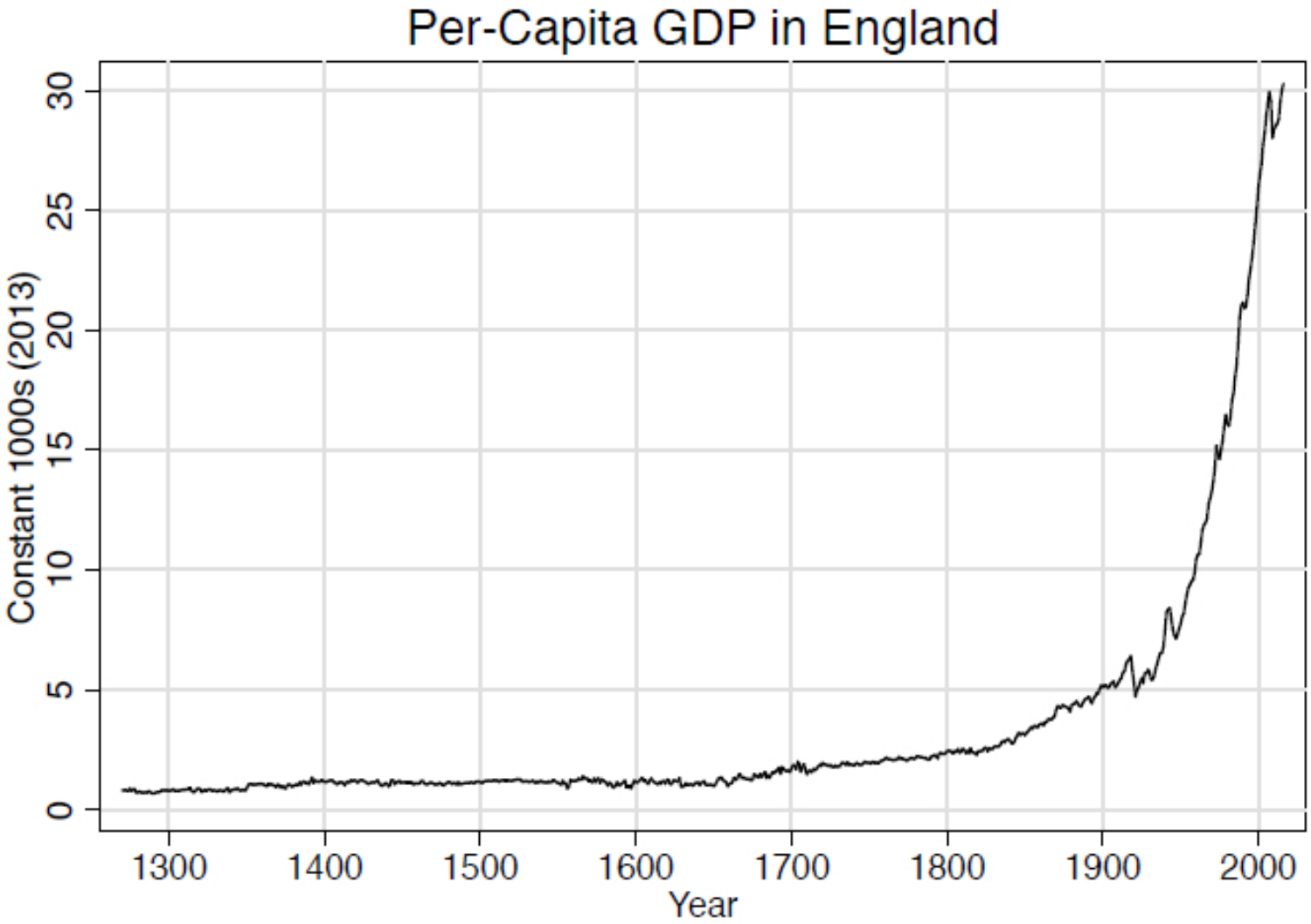
Censorship, Family Planning, and the Historical Fertility Transition

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Motivation



Source: Broadberry et al. (2015)

The historical fertility transition

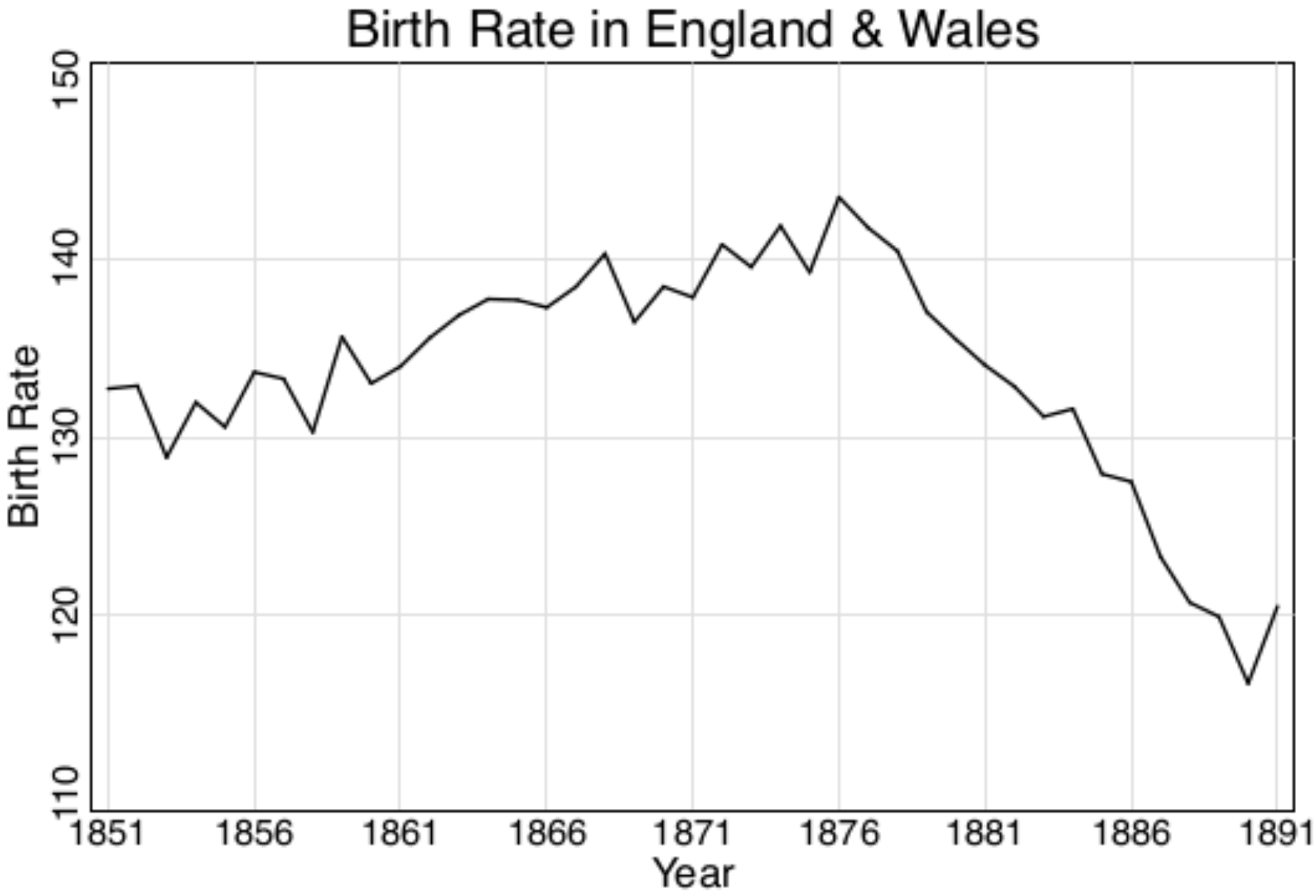
European Fertility Project in the 1970s led to Ansley Coale's "Ready, willing, able" model

1. "Ready" – Fertility control must be part of the "calculus of conscious choice"
2. "Willing" – Limiting family size must be perceived as advantageous
3. "Able" – Couples must have the knowledge and means to limit fertility

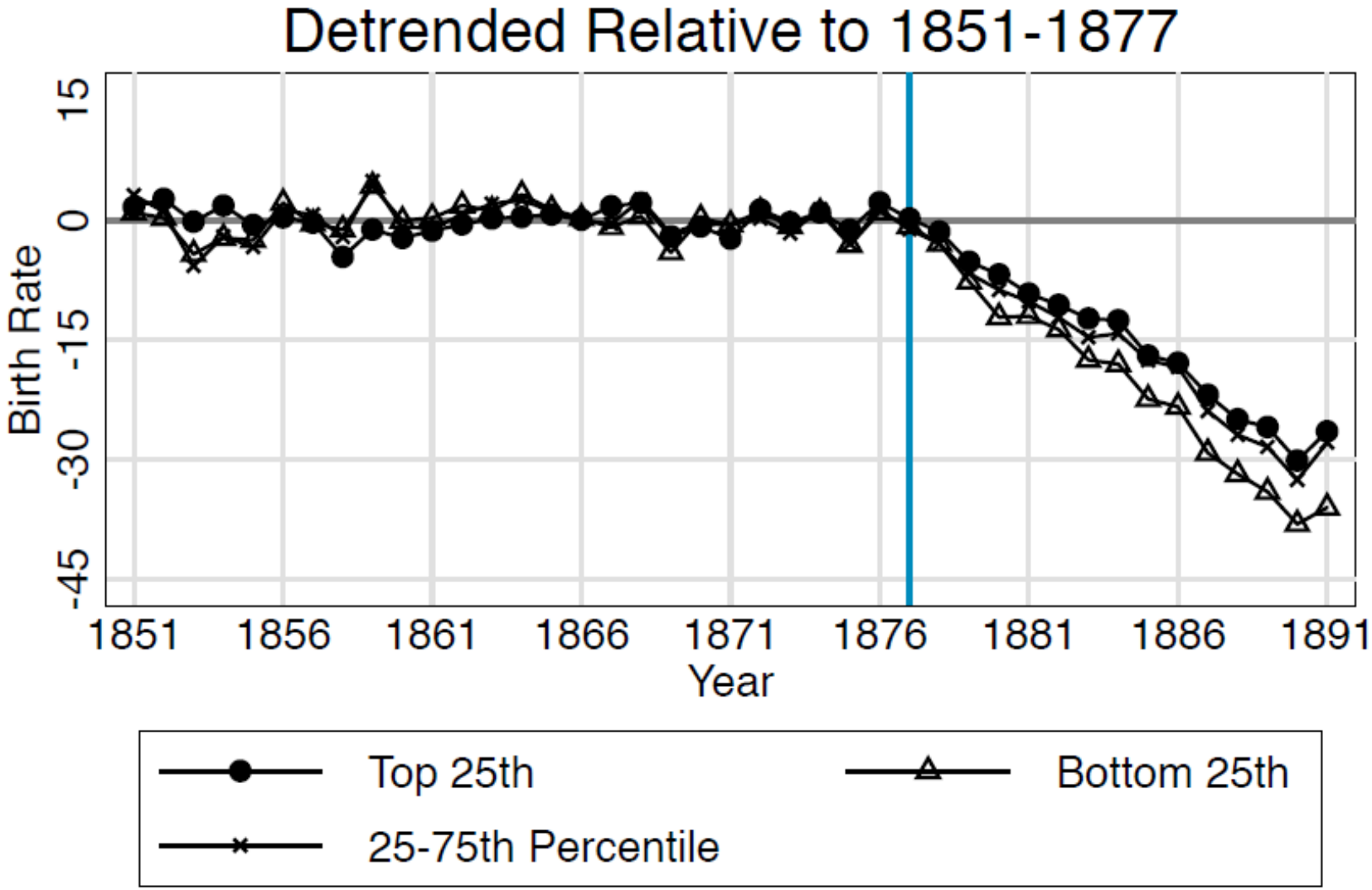
Recent work in economics has focused largely on the "willing" condition (Guinnane 2011)

- Quality-quantity trade off
- Opportunity cost of female time
- Decreasing demand for child labor

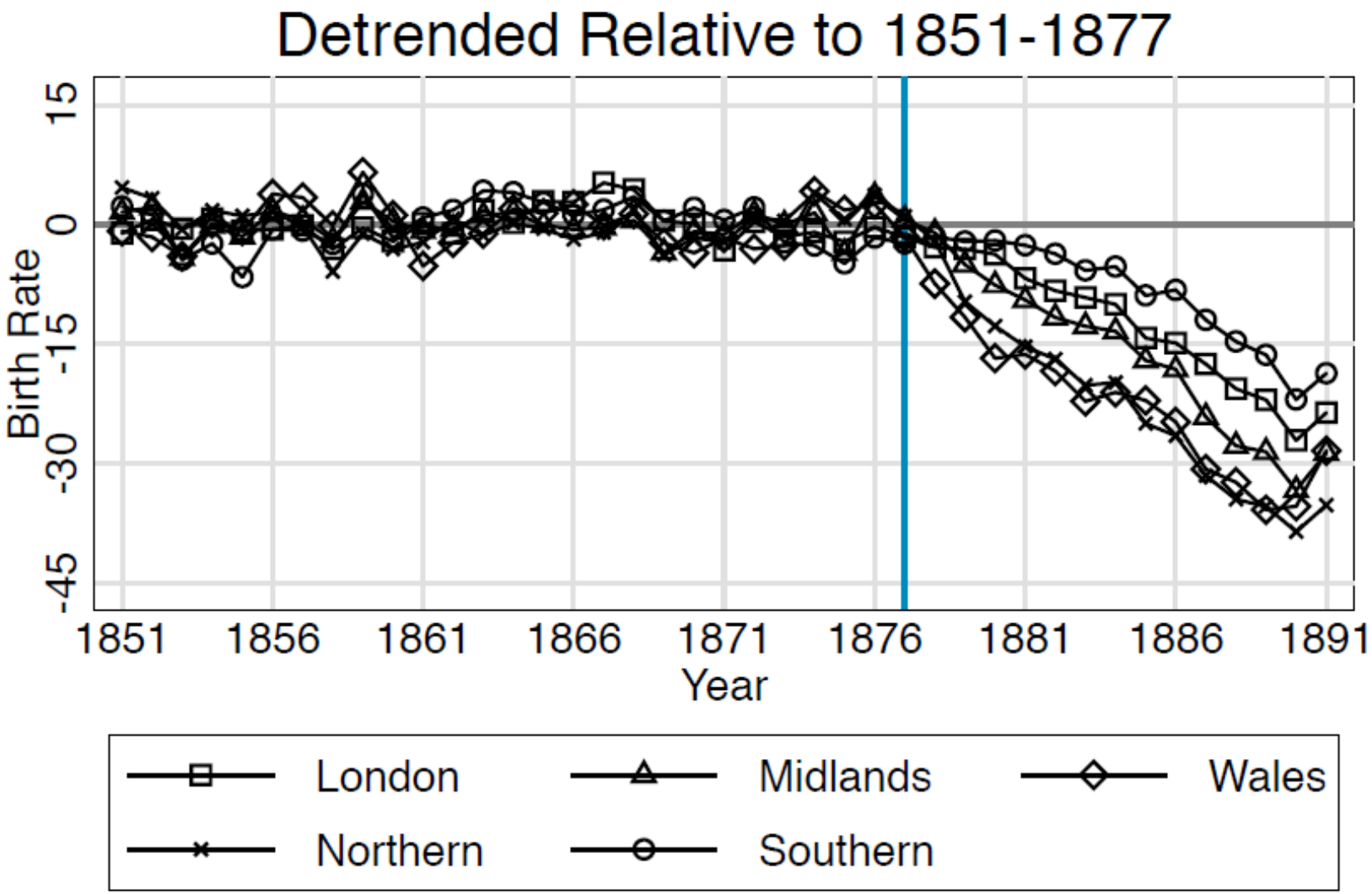
Number of births in England & Wales



In both high-density urban and low-density rural areas...

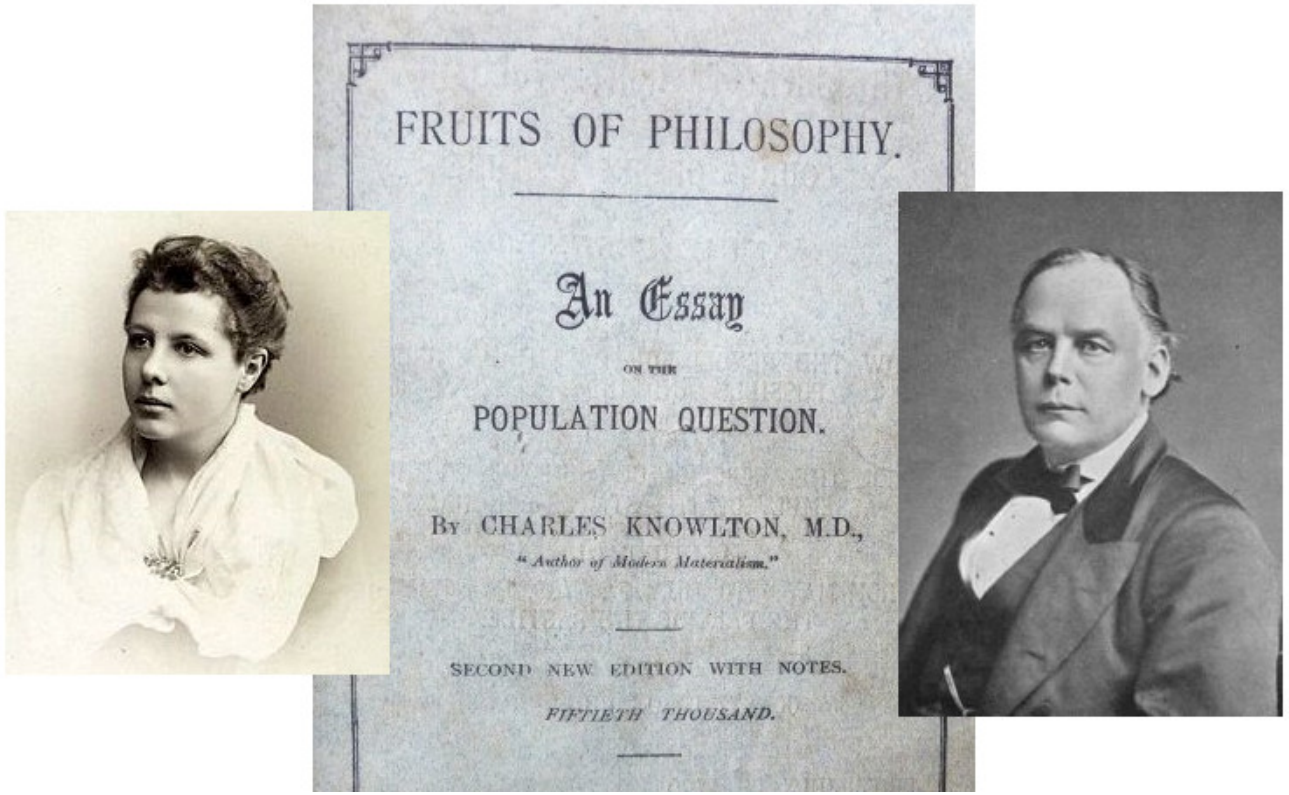


And in every region...



A change in social norms

Bradlaugh-Besant trial of 1877



"Their notion is that the population should be limited, that it would be a desirable thing that conception should be prevented. I say that this is contrary both to the law of God and the law of man..."
– Argument at trial by the Solicitor-General

Background on the trial

First hearing held at Guildhall in April, 1877

- Over 20,000 people gathered outside
- Trial at the Queen's Bench in June lasted five days
- Gave Bradlaugh and Besant a public forum for making the case for family planning and against censorship
- They were found guilty by the jury but the conviction was overturned on appeal in 1878

Media coverage

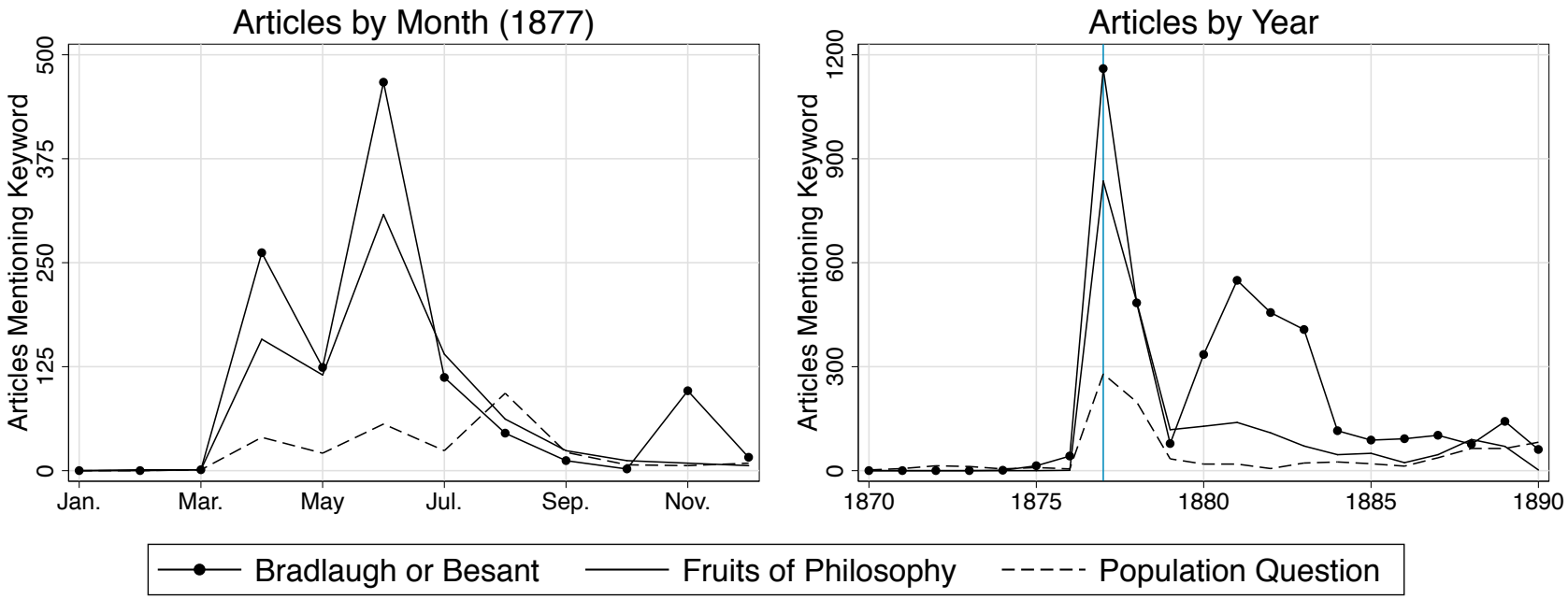
Trial was covered in national media and local papers around the country

- National press including: *Times, Daily Telegraph*
- Local papers such as: *Exeter & Plymouth Gazette, Leeds Mercury, Blackburn Times, Birmingham Daily Gazette* and many others

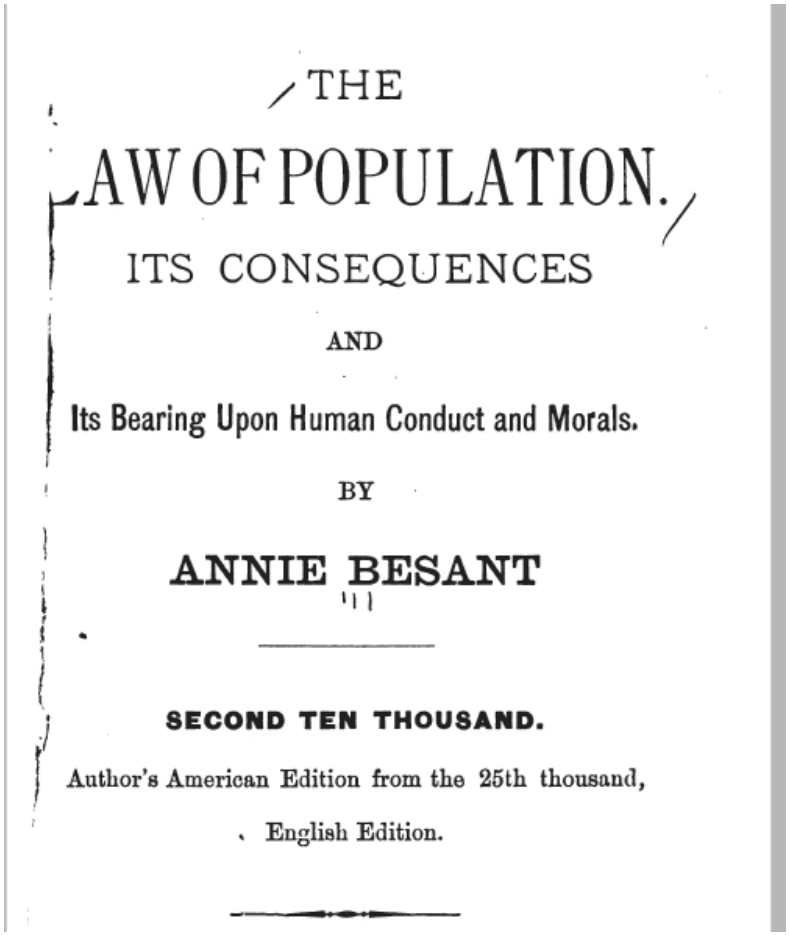
"Many journalists–with the Times at their head–have seen fit to reproduce long extracts from it in their reports of the trial...The moral ordure served up in the case of Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant has been spread out upon the breakfast table of thousands of English families."

– Exeter & Plymouth Gazette, 23 June, 1877

Coverage of the trial



Family planning literature



THE

LAW OF POPULATION.

ITS CONSEQUENCES

AND

Its Bearing Upon Human Conduct and Morals.

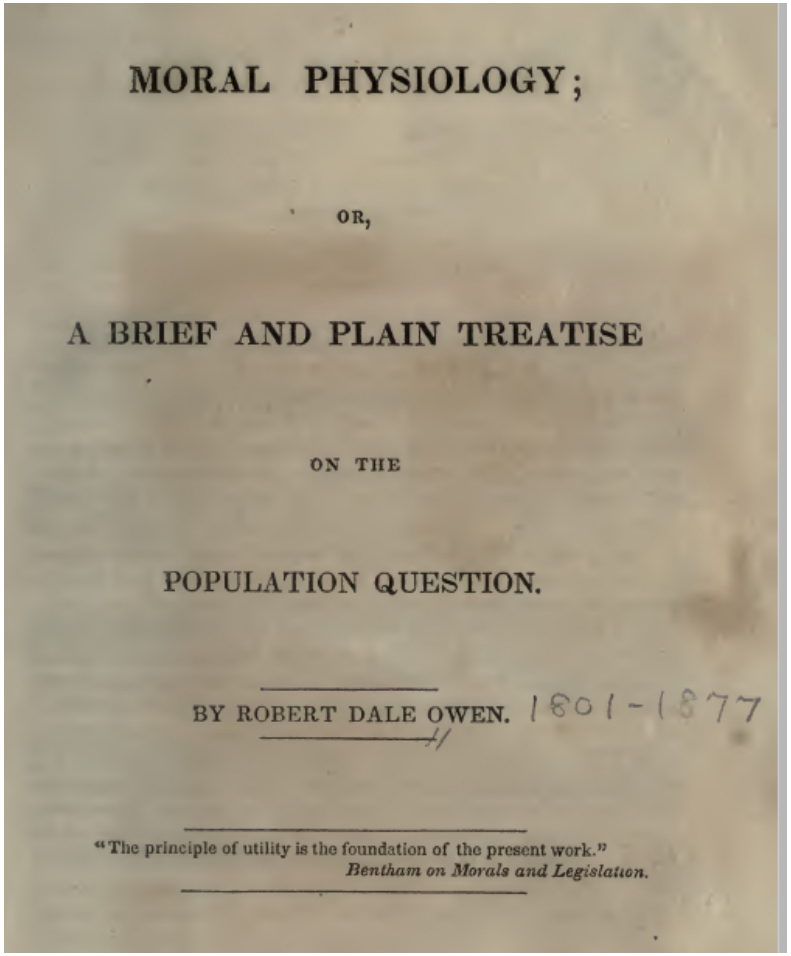
BY

ANNIE BESANT

SECOND TEN THOUSAND.

Author's American Edition from the 25th thousand,

English Edition.



MORAL PHYSIOLOGY;

OR,

A BRIEF AND PLAIN TREATISE

ON THE

POPULATION QUESTION.

BY ROBERT DALE OWEN. 1801-1877

"The principle of utility is the foundation of the present work."
Bentham on Morals and Legislation.

"Probably not less than a million tracts...were sold in England between 1876 and 1891." – Himes (1970)

Literature focused on the morality of family planning

Books were aimed at young married couples

Mainly devoted to arguing that couples had a moral right, and a responsibility to limit the size of their family

Contraception was discussed, but only briefly

- Rudimentary and sometimes dead wrong

Did the trial change fertility behavior?

Part 1: Evidence from England & Wales

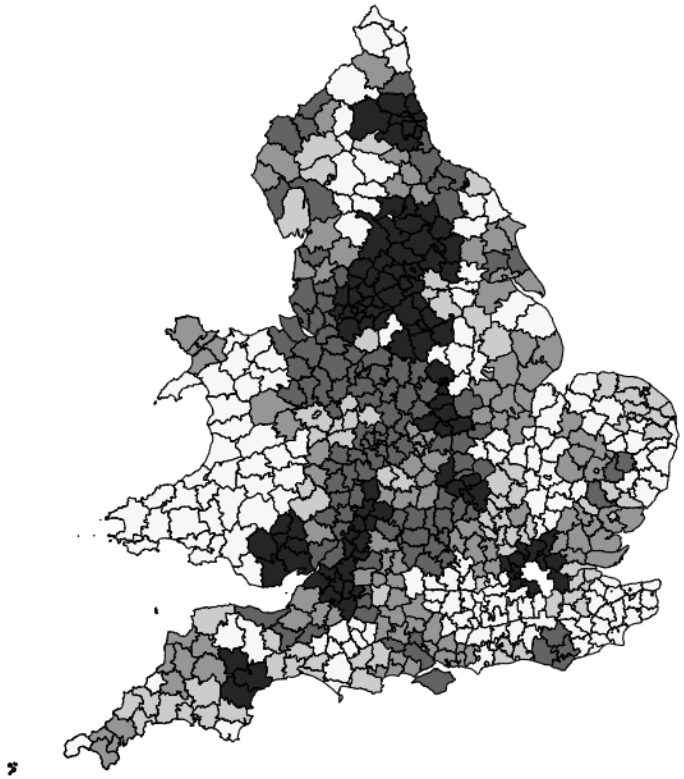
- Exploit variation in exposure to the trial based on articles published about the trial in local papers
- D-in-D analysis compares fertlity before/after 1877 in locations more vs. less exposed to news about the trial

Quantifying exposure to the trial

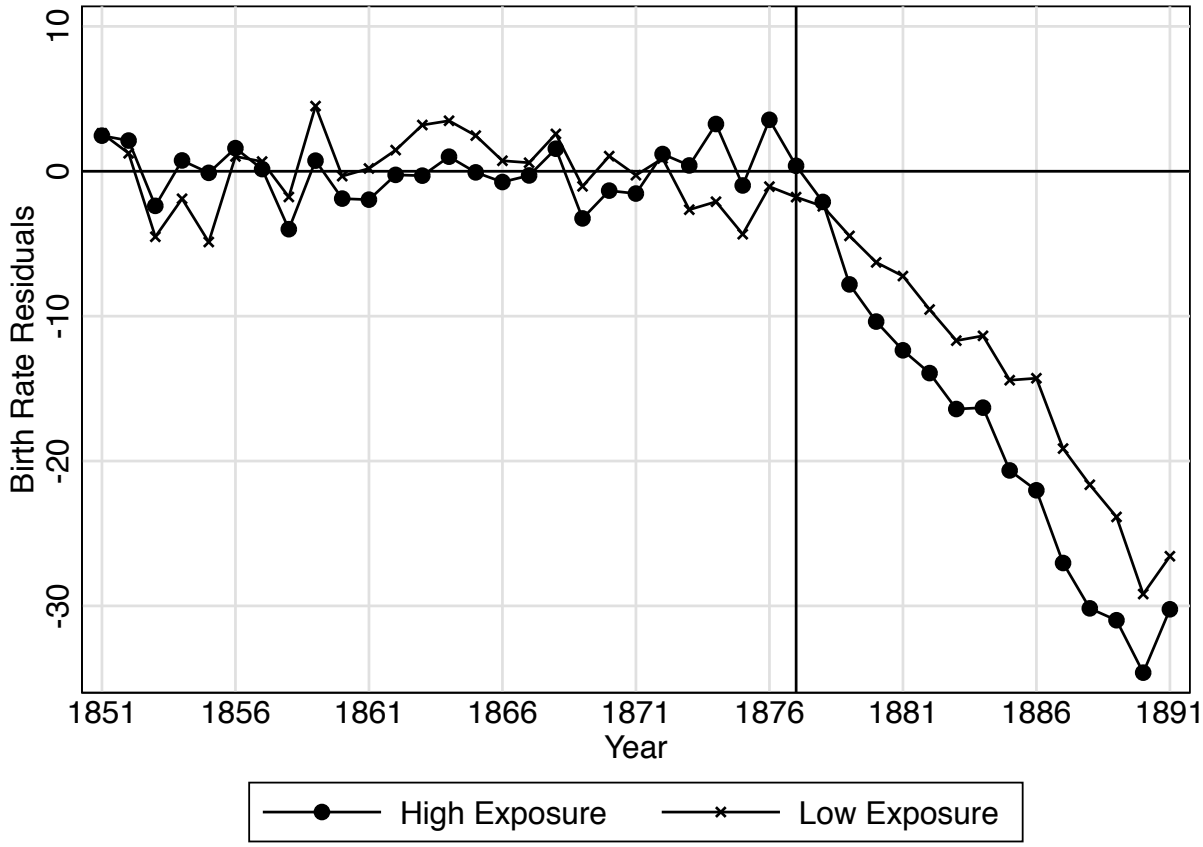
Rich newspaper data from britishnewspaperarchive.org

- Partnership between the British Library and findmypast.org that has digitized over 30 million newspaper pages

- Identify all articles mentioning Bradlaugh or Besant in 1877
- Over 1200 articles in total
- Vast majority were factual reports about the trial
- Consider exposure in districts within 25km of where the article was published



Graphical evidence



- Residual fertility rates after regressing on location fixed effects and region time trends

Summary of England & Wales results

1. Fertility fell in locations with more exposure to the trial

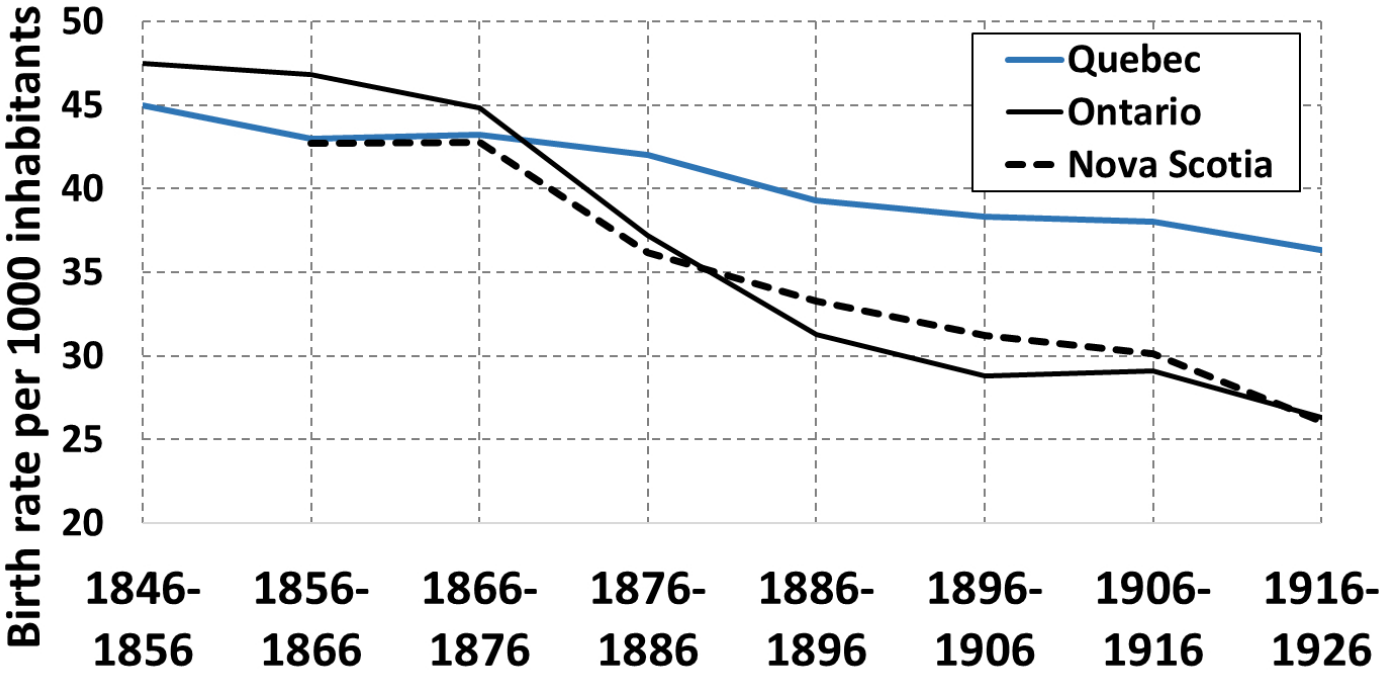
2. Use microdata from the 1881 census to look at mechanisms
   - Use age of children to infer fertility patterns before vs. after 1877 in locations with more vs. less exposure to news of the trial
   - Find fertility reductions in more exposed locations at parities above two

Evidence from culturally similar populations abroad

Part 2a: Evidence from Canada

- Exploit the fact that some parts of Canada (Ontario, Maritimes) were culturally and linguistically linked to Britain while others were not (Quebec)
- Document that the trial was covered in Canadian English-language papers, but not in the French press
- **Part 1:** Compare fertility before and after the trial in locations with stronger vs. weaker ties to Britain
- **Part 2:** Use microdata from the 1881 census to analyze the mechanisms behind the fertility change

Aggregate patterns



Calculations from Henripin (1968) using Census data

Summary of Canadian analysis

- County-level Dif-in-Dif analysis confirms that locations with a greater British-origin population share experience relative fertility declines after 1877
- Microdata results using 1881 census show the relative decline is true even when comparing British-origin to Francophone households **within the same county**
- Also find similar mechanisms: reduced fertility at higher parities

Evidence from South Africa and the U.S.

South Africa

- Compare fertility before vs. after the trial for the British-origin population vs. the Dutch-origin Afrikaners using census data
- Find larger fertility declines after 1877 in locations with a greater British-origin population share

United States

- Using microdata from the 1880 census, we compare fertility changes among first and second-generation British immigrants to first and second-generation immigrants from other European countries
- Find similar results to what we see in the England/Wales and Canada
- Stronger effects for first generation than second generation British immigrants

Summary and contributions

Changes in cultural norms related to family planning played an important role in the historical fertility transition

- Information that altered social norms around fertility can explain the synchronized fertility reduction across locations with widely varying socioeconomic conditions
- Of course, this does not mean fundamental economic drivers did not matter, only that culture/norms also played an important role

Contribute to a growing economics literature on cultural norms: e.g., Alesina, Giuliano, & Nunn, 2013

- Show that culture can act as a vector of change, not just persistence

Relative to literature on contraception (e.g., Bailey (2010, 2012)) we show that the idea of family planning can also have large effects

- Even when contraceptive techniques are rudimentary

"CENSORSHIP OF THE PRESS IN ENGLAND – The recent trial of Charles Bradlaugh and Mrs. Annie Besant...has excited a great deal of interest on both sides of the Atlantic...where a single copy [of Fruits of Philosophy] was sold previous to the trial, a thousand are sold now."

– The Hawaiian Gazette, Wednesday, August 29, 1877

"Many people, perfectly good-hearted, but somewhat narrow-minded, object strongly to the idea of conjugal prudence, and regard scientific checks to population as 'a violation of nature's laws, and a frustration of nature's ends."'

–Annie Besant, *The Law of Population*, 1877