

# A New Reality

HUMAN EVOLUTION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Jonas Salk and Jonathan Salk  
with David Dewane



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## FOREWORD

An inescapable reality is that there are now too many humans on Earth for us, or the planet, to handle well. Population growth, a burning topic some years ago, has somewhat faded from public prominence in recent years. This small but compelling book is a welcome and timely reminder of the issues of overpopulation, with a fresh look at the ways we can approach this reality.

The burgeoning world population of humans has commonly been framed in Malthusian terms, emphasizing Darwinism with its brutal selection of the “fittest” as an inevitable, and perhaps only, consequence of an overcrowded world. Jonas Salk took seriously, throughout his life, the overarching guideline called *Tikkun olam* (Hebrew: תיקון עולם) literally translated as “repair of the world,” alternatively meaning “construction for eternity”). *Tikkun olam* is a concept in Judaism that has been taken to mean aspiration towards actions and behaviors that are constructive and beneficial. Jonas Salk’s better-known life work, development of the polio vaccine that has been a life saver, literally, for millions around the globe, can be regarded as a remarkable exemplar of *Tikkun olam*. But Jonas Salk’s legacy should rightly be broadened beyond even this, because the way he thought about the looming human population problem was to envisage a new era to which humanity could aspire.

In short, as is elegantly unfolded in this book (co-authored by Jonas Salk and his son Jonathan Salk), Jonas Salk envisioned that an inflection point in human population growth—a transition from exponential rapid growth, to slower and, eventually, zero population growth—would also usher in an inflection point in human social behaviors and mores, leading to a much more collaborative ethos and way of doing things. Rather than our latter-day humanity’s central focus on competing in order to gain one’s own individual betterment and achievements (defining what Salk dubs “Epoch A”), individuals would evolve toward ways more attuned to

thinking beyond that, through expanding into wider and more generous frames of mind and spirit to encompass the needs, well-being, and attainment of many more, across more societies (“Epoch B”). Through use of simple diagrams and the building up of ideas, the book draws us gently but implacably into this vision.

Salk certainly is onto something here. While he was ahead of mainstream thinking at the time of the publication of the first edition of this book (1981), many of his ideas are already echoed much more commonly than they were then. As we look around us, in more recent years we see such trends at play in many arenas. Witness the evolving views of corporate leadership toward being more team- and participant-driven, rather than dictated by a sole top-dog figure. More and more academic learning and research are accomplished through fruitful interactions among multiple individuals, rather than solely through the lonely genius. And, *sine qua non*, we are realizing that to tackle shared world problems such as planetary climate challenges, individual, local, and national barriers get in the way. Thus, we will keep needing more worldwide, Paris Agreement-like, movements.

The extent of Jonas Salk’s legacy deserves to be appreciated in full. As this book presages, his help in ameliorating humankind’s scourges may yet turn out to be not confined to the near-eradication of polio. This elegant and hopeful book is small, but far from small in its vision and aspiration for humanity’s betterment. We will all be better off if we listen to it and heed it.

*Elizabeth H. Blackburn, PhD*  
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