ANTI-NATALIST ETHICS AND THEIR BROADER MORAL SIGNIFICANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores key moral questions that are raised by anti-natalism. Collectively, thus far, most research on anti-natalism has focused on the arguments themselves, whether they are sound or unsound in demonstrating the moral impermissibility of reproducing. In this thesis, I explore how anti-natalism relates to our lives in other areas of moral significance, such as how anti-natalism relates to the value of death, the environment, food ethics (veganism), and extinction.

These explorations are important because, first, they can affect the viability of any anti-natalist theory. That is, even if we suppose that an anti-natalist theory is sound, how such a theory relates to, for example, the value of death or how one ought to value the environment can provide further reasons to accept or reject anti-natalism. Moreover, besides affecting the viability of such anti-natalist theories, these explorations connect areas of our moral lives that are prevalent and affect who we are, how we act, and what we value.

Moreover, the thesis does not focus on anti-natalism exclusively, and anti-natalism is not always the starting point in terms of argumentation. Instead, I also explore closely related concepts, such as death, in themselves and provide further context in terms of how such concepts can relate to anti-natalist theories. Thus, all things considered, I hope that this thesis provides original insights conducive to moral philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction and Theme

In this thesis, I present a novel exploration of how anti-natalism—generally, the moral view that we ought not to reproduce—intersects with other areas of ethical and axiological significance. This includes investigating how anti-natalism influences attitudes towards death, the anti-natalist approach to environmental preservation, and the desirability and permissibility of extinction within anti-natalist thought.

Such explorations lead to original philosophical contributions in anti-natalism and related areas of moral philosophy. For instance, reason might dictate that anti-natalists ought to treat a particular practice, such as environmental preservation, in an objectionable way. That is, anti-natalist values might correlate with an *anti*-environmentalist attitude. Consequently, anti-natalists might find this at odds with their environmentalist values, leading to either a rejection of the anti-natalist view or, at the very least, a serious reconsideration of what it ought to represent. Alternatively, anti-natalists might accept these newfound environmentalist values as a consequence of their anti-natalist beliefs.

Similarly, I will investigate other issues that relate to our moral lives for which anti-natalism may present some surprising implications. Thus, I explore and assess various moral implications surrounding anti-natalism, a relatively broad and unexplored frontier,[1] which can have practical, value-shifting consequences.

[1] Relatedly, Brown and Keefer (2020) have argued that more psychological assessments on anti-natalist beliefs are needed.

It is important to note that this thesis is a "PhD by Papers". This implies that, distinct from a traditional thesis format, each paper (or, traditionally, chapter) is independent, such that a paper can be read and understood in isolation from the other papers. With this, there are a few implications in the thesis that are worth noting. First, sometimes, there will be an overlap in material, such that some papers will discuss similar parts of the same topic. Moreover, there will be variations between the papers in terms of the structure and approach. For example, some anti-natalist theories will be more appropriately discussed in some papers than in others.

In fact, the thesis will not be about anti-natalism exclusively, and the focus, at times, may appear to move away from anti-natalism. This is because, though anti-natalism is the concept that most substantially unifies the theme of the thesis, related concepts and ideas present important and novel considerations in themselves, separate from anti-natalist application. Thus, anti-natalism will not always be the centre focus or the starting point from which a particular moral obligation is derived.[2] I will, however, aim to incorporate the (potential) application of anti-natalist thought when it is absent and when it is appropriate to do so.

As stated, anti-natalism is generally the moral view that we ought not to reproduce. However, precision can be challenging.[3] This is perhaps because formal definitions of "anti-natalism" are limited,[4] which only highlights its relative recency in academic

[2] This point is particularly notable with two of the papers—"Whose Death Is It, Anyway? Developing Subjective Evaluations of Death" and "The Unnecessary Harm Principle, Ethical Veganism, and the Case Against Reproduction". In the abstracts of these papers, as well as in the "Thesis Outline" section, I will qualify their (potential) role with relation to anti-natalism.

[3] In some instances, anti-natalism might not be a moral obligation but a moral or axiological *preference*. For example, it might be that never existing is (morally) preferable to or (axiologically) better than existence. A stronger moral conclusion can be drawn from such, but it is not necessary.

[4] There is, currently, one English-language dictionary definition of "anti-natalism", which is broadly defined as "the belief that it is morally wrong to have children or that people should be encouraged not to have children" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). This

contexts. Furthermore, there are conflicting interpretations of anti-natalism in philosophical discussions. For instance, anti-natalist values have been described in a localised manner, applying only to a specific group of people or certain cases (Brake and Millum, 2022). They have also been invoked temporarily, such as in the context of addressing overpopulation (Hedberg, 2020; Young, 2001). However, it has also been contended that anti-natalism, as a moral doctrine, must be universal and timeless, applicable to all people and at all times (Häyry and Sukenick, 2024). In this thesis, I'll discuss specific uses of the term, exceptions to the rule, and other relevant variations of anti-natalism appropriately.

Generally, we can trace anti-natalist thought to Ancient Greece (Häyry and Sukenick, 2024; Morioka, 2021).[5] However, it was not until the latter part of the twentieth century that moral arguments for anti-natalism started to spring up in academic philosophy, such as with David Benatar's (1997) article *Why It Is Better Never to Come into Existence*.[6] From the late twentieth century to the early twenty-first century, anti-natalist contributions were piecemeal, and they did not always explicitly endorse anti-natalism.[7] Then, in 2006, Benatar broke new ground with his seminal *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming Into Existence*. Benatar's manuscript ushered in a new era for anti-natalist thought, introducing extensive arguments and structure to the once-desolate academic

definition is limited to human procreation, among other things, which might be a reason to consider it too restricted. Also see Sukenick (2024).

[5] I believe these historical discussions of anti-natalism are better described as values that ground some anti-natalist arguments rather than as anti-natalist theories.

[6] Earlier works, such as Jan Narverson's (1967) *Utilitarianism and New Generations* and Matti Häyry's (1994) *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics*, can be seen as endorsing values that can ground anti-natalism. However, they do not explicitly advocate anti-natalism. Moreover, earlier "non-analytic" works have contributed to anti-natalist thought, such as Cioran and Howard (2020); Schopenhauer (2017); Zapffe (1993).

[7] For example, Seana Shiffrin (1999) provides an argument against procreation on the grounds that the procreated cannot provide consent. However, though Shiffrin's argument can imply anti-natalism, as Singh (2012) demonstrates by applying anti-natalism to Shiffrin's argument, Shiffrin does not necessarily endorse the argument or, ipso facto, anti-natalism as normative. On this basis, it would thus be inaccurate to consider Shiffrin an anti-natalist.

frontier. Since then, what has followed has been extensions of Benatar's arguments, rejections of his arguments, modifications to his arguments, criticisms of components of his arguments, new anti-natalist arguments, new pro-natalist arguments, and more.[8]

Given the pivotal role that I have just described, much of this thesis likewise engages, specifically, with Benatarian anti-natalism. On those grounds, I offer a chapter-length overview of his position. However, the thesis papers do not exclusively concern Benatarian anti-natalism. Notably, several of the papers discuss, at length, other anti-natalist theories. Moreover, in my penultimate paper, I set out a route to anti-natalist conclusions that depends not on Benatar's anti-natalism but rather on commitments characteristic of a certain sort of vegan.

Anti-natalism is undeniably controversial, both within and beyond academic philosophy. It is easy to understand why. For one, children offer parents a sense of meaning and value that is arguably irreplaceable. Children often shape much of the purpose in our lives and become a significant part of what we strive for. On this basis alone, one might find anti-natalism distasteful, potentially fostering a somewhat antagonistic view towards it.

Of course, personal values are not inherently sound reasons to reject a philosophical position. Yet, at the same time, it would be naïve to suggest that we are simply able to set aside personal values, even in academic discussions. In other words, we are not totally impartial beings, and if just one factor is to give rise to partiality, it is that which involves our children.[9] Nevertheless, these challenges can be overcome in academic philosophy, allowing for an honest and impartial debate. Consider that various honest and respectful

[8] I will attempt to capture many of these ideas in "Benatar's Anti-natalism".
[9] At the time of writing, I have no children. However, I do have parents, and I can perceive the meaning my life has bestowed on them.

contributions have already emerged from both sides of the discussion. Furthermore, speaking anecdotally, I have engaged in conversations with pro-natalists who are willing to discuss and sometimes sympathise with anti-natalist views.[10]

Discussions about anti-natalism can also be challenging because, I believe, anti-natalist arguments carry a substantial burden of proof. Of course, one could argue that the burden of proof applies to any opposing theory that challenges the status quo. However, anti-natalism holds a distinct position in this context since it challenges the deeply entrenched pro-natalist world we live in. Consider that our lives, as Samuel Scheffler (2013) argues, might be deeply structured around the continuation of humanity and the necessity of future generations. For example, how motivated would we be to do much of anything if we knew that humanity was on the brink of extinction and that there were no more future generations? Furthermore, consider the societies we inhabit and the states that govern us: nation-states *require* reproduction and propagation above all else—how else can they function, survive, and grow?[11] Such a requirement is often readily met by eager prospective parents who have their own reasons, perhaps partly conditioned by pro-natalist expectations, to procreate.[12]

Now, in making this point, I am not implying any particular merits or drawbacks of such pro-natalist foundations. Instead, I merely wish to convey that anti-natalist views encounter a significant challenge right from the start, opposing a pro-natalist status quo.

[10] Conversely, I've held conversations with those who prefer to reject it outright.
[11] One might argue that immigration could replace reproduction. However, it would not be possible for many nation-states to have low birth rates and liberal immigration policies and continue to grow.
[12] These points raise questions about how nation-states, even Western democracies, may restrict reproductive freedom if low fertility and population decline impact economic productivity (Eberstadt, 2024; Gu et al., 2021). Consequently, we may see increased "nudging" and incentives to reproduce, campaigns promoting traditional family values, and potential restrictions on abortion rights.

Thus, it may be beneficial to recognise this when discussions of anti-natalism provoke controversy.

Furthermore, it is not just pro-natalist views that anti-natalism challenges. Anti-natalism also challenges many other values that are important to most, if not all, of us, thus creating a deep lifestyle tension if one assumes an anti-natalist viewpoint. But that is the beauty of such a tension from a research standpoint, which I have sought to explore. The relatively young theory of anti-natalism, collectively speaking, has not been fully explored, and in some cases not at all, in terms of how it relates to other values that are essential to our lives. This includes how anti-natalism corresponds to our environmental attitudes, what we should (and should not) eat, and reflections on death. Thus, it is in this thesis that I have sought to provide original insights into anti-natalism and these other areas of ethical significance. To this end, I'll now outline the structure of the thesis.

2. Thesis Outline

In "Benatar's Anti-natalism", I provide an overview of David Benatar's anti-natalist arguments and related discussions in the literature. I focus on describing Benatar's views without attempting to defend or criticise them. I assess the arguments comprehensively to represent and highlight any challenges or criticisms that have been or might be made against them.

It is beneficial to provide this overview, as Benatar's anti-natalism involves three distinct arguments: two that are described as "philanthropic", and one that is "misanthropic". Thus, Benatar's anti-natalism can be confounding in terms of what, precisely, is being argued for. Therefore, I discuss each of these arguments separately but also in conjunction since Benatar's anti-natalism is stronger when the arguments are considered

together. This is particularly so when taking into account the objections and challenges directed at some of Benatar's arguments.

Another reason to provide this overview is that there are cases in the literature where the arguments have been interpreted differently. This is the case in what is arguably Benatar's most technical argument, the *Procreative Asymmetry* argument. Thus, I will disambiguate certain concepts within Benatar's arguments and, overall, instrumentally inform the reader when reading the rest of the thesis.

In "Answering the Pro-mortalist Question", I consider whether endorsing anti-natalism entails that it is *better to die* (pro-mortalism) than to continue living. This is an important question often raised in response to anti-natalism. That is, if never to exist is better than existence, is it not better to die than to continue living? Or, more brazenly put to anti-natalists, "If you wished you had never been born, then why not kill yourself?" One response, a means to deny that anti-natalism entails pro-mortalism, is to suggest that death itself is harmful. Indeed, anti-natalists might say, "Death is a harm that gives us a reason not to procreate", such that by never existing, one never has to confront death.

Thus, I will address the pro-mortalist question by assessing the (potential) pro-mortalist implications of Benatar's (2006; 2017) substantial anti-natalism.[13] Benatar suggests that his anti-natalism does not imply pro-mortalism since, despite his arguments for it being better not to come into existence, death is bad for two reasons: first, it *deprives* us of future good things, and second, it *annihilates* us.

[13] The two main text citations, *Better Never to Have Been* (2006) and *The Human Predicament: A Candid Guide to Life's Biggest Questions* (2017), are key to showcasing Benatar's anti-natalist and anti-pro-mortalist views. Other relevant texts by Benatar include (2012; 2013; 2022).

To answer the pro-mortalist question, I apply these two theories of the badness of death—deprivationism and annihilation—to Benatar's anti-natalist arguments. Contra Benatar, I argue that these theories of the badness of death fail to block pro-mortalism. This implies that if one accepts his anti-natalism, then it is better, as a statement of value, no longer to exist.

This paper and its findings are significant for several reasons. First, by addressing a crucial question within anti-natalism, the paper grounds future discussions in related areas, such as anti-natalist connections to suicide and extinction. Second, annihilation, as a theory pertaining to the badness of death (Benatar, 2017, 102-110), is rather rudimentary. Therefore, in this paper, I advance the concept of annihilation in terms of its understanding of death and forms of value. In doing so, I aim to contribute to the literature on the badness of death and facilitate further discussions.

In "Whose Death Is It, Anyway? Developing Subjective Evaluations of Death", I discuss how we ought to assess the badness of death for agents who make subjective evaluations of their deaths. In particular, I look at how we ought to assess an agent's death in cases where death seems good for them on other well-being measures, but the agent desires not to die. I argue that we ought to take such subjective evaluations seriously, as they are key to what it means to live the life in question.

To do this, first, I look at how we might evaluate death according to the Lifetime Comparative Account (LCA), which incorporates various well-being considerations, or what we can call *objective interests*. The LCA then determines the value of death based on the *deprivation* of interests. I then compare the LCA to one's subjective evaluation of death—what we can call *subjective interests*—which essentially refers to an individual's

evaluation of their death. At face value, it may seem the LCA can accommodate subjective evaluations of death. This is because if we try to incorporate various well-being elements to provide us with an accurate well-being framework, then we are likely to include interests that pertain to subjectivity, such as one's preferences or desires. Thus, we can take it as likely that any accurate framework of well-being will capture various aspects, *including one's subjectivity*, even if we proceed without a precise framework in mind.

However, I argue that there are instances where these two evaluations of death "come apart". That is, even if the LCA, whatever the well-being framework is precisely, captures elements of subjectivity, I argue that, in conflicting circumstances where one's subjective interests diverge from the broader assessment of the LCA, one's subjective interests should be viewed separately from the LCA.

Thus, if the two evaluations diverge, and we have reason to take them both seriously, then there may be circumstances in which the evaluations reach an impasse, as they might provide conflicting conclusions about the value of death. Therefore, I attempt to "reconcile" the evaluations to provide a singular evaluation in those challenging cases that initially led to an impasse. However, I caution that this reconciliation attempt is tentative, and we must remain vigilant against undermining the agent's subjective evaluation in such a manner that understates its significance.

Ultimately, the primary aim is to demonstrate the significance of subjective evaluations of death by discussing what it means to live the life in question. Furthermore, as part of the overarching theme of the thesis, these subjective evaluations might enhance the pro-mortalist discussion.

To see why, though I will provide a more detailed comparative discussion later, it is worth highlighting the potential connection between the two above papers on death. Though these papers are written independently, it might be suggested that the latter paper can modify the conclusions of the former, such that, for example, a Benatarian defence can pertain to the value of subjectivity to substantiate the deprivationist claim of the badness of death and avoid the pro-mortalist charge. However, an issue that arises from this reasoning is that leaning heavily on the value of subjectivity would likely undermine the claims behind Benatar's anti-natalism in the first instance. For example, Benatar purports to show the disvalue of existence—and to provide a moral argument for anti-natalism—via the legitimacy of *objective* measurements of the quality of life, where he restrains the influence of subjectivity. Thus, a Benatarian defence against pro-mortalism that is reliant on subjectivity causes issues for the anti-natalist argument.

Still, these subjective evaluations of death might enhance the pro-mortalist discussion regarding Benatar's anti-natalism insofar as they supplement the debate and provide potential avenues for consideration. That is, the independent suggestion that subjective evaluations of death matter greatly can provide additional lines of reasoning and cover more ground in relation to the broader literature on the badness of death. Thus, the anti-natalist–pro-mortalist debate can be broadened through discussions about subjective evaluations of death, even if Benatar cannot refer to subjectivity to avoid a pro-mortalist outcome. To this end, though "Whose Death Is It, Anyway?" primarily aims to develop a value conception regarding the subjectivity of death, further exploration may demonstrate broader application to Benatar's anti-natalism and possibly other anti-natalist theories.

In “The Right Kinds of Environmental Attitudes”, I assess how anti-natalists should value the environment. Interestingly, it may appear that anti-natalists ought to have a prima facie concern for the environment and strive to protect it. Indeed, this concern for the environment underpins some of the misanthropic arguments (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015; Svoboda, 2022). However, I argue that environmental preservation, or holding a pro-environmental preservationist attitude, challenges some anti-natalist core values.

To demonstrate this, I first detail the practice of environmental preservation in terms of why we, collectively as humans, desire preservation and what it achieves in practice. Accordingly, I argue that the intention behind environmental preservation is primarily to ensure the existence of future generations. Thus, I contend that the practical consequences of environmental preservation conflict with anti-natalist values. In other words, if environmental preservation offers a stable environment for motivated potential child-bearers to create new life, then an anti-natalist advocating for environmental preservation (or possessing a pro-environmental attitude) is in tension with their anti-natalist principles in three ways: the pursuit of extinction, the avoidance of further suffering and harm, and the duty of non-procreation. Consequently, after detailing these value conflicts, I discuss how anti-natalists might adopt an alternative environmental stance that more accurately reflects their anti-natalist values. Such attitudes may be unsettling for anti-natalists.

The first attitude is *Destruction*, which, in short, is the active destruction of the environment to reduce habitability. However, I argue that anti-natalists can reject this attitude since it introduces new moral conundrums that conflict with their values. The second attitude is *Apathy*, which is, in a sense, for anti-natalists to live their life with no

concern for protecting or preserving the environment. This implies that it is permissible to use resources and materials that may be harmful to the environment without constraints. Barring further attitudinal variants that we might consider, I argue that anti-natalists ought to assume the attitude of *Apathy*.

Finally, I suggest that there may be practical limitations to the practice of *Apathy* due to its potential futility, which anti-natalists may find comforting. However, I note that this futility is a contingent factor, and should *Apathy* no longer be futile, then anti-natalists ought to practice it.

In "The Unnecessary Harm Principle, Ethical Veganism, and the Case Against Reproduction", I discuss the demandingness of a common argument for ethical veganism in other areas of life, including procreating. I employ the Unnecessary Harm Principle (UHP) for veganism, which states that a harmful practice (animal agriculture) is impermissible if there is a less harmful suitable alternative practice (plant agriculture) available.

Supposing the UHP is accurate, we can ask which other practices it extends to, thus detailing how the vegan ought to act in other areas of moral life. I discuss the vegan's UHP in relation to travelling, having, keeping, and breeding pets,[14] consuming alcohol, certain occupations, and procreating.

The most contentious discussions might be those related to pets and children.[15] On pets, I suggest that the UHP *does not* imply that it is wrong to adopt or keep pets. (In fact, I argue

[14] As detailed in the paper, I use "pets" for referential convenience.
[15] Pets and children are central to many people's lives in ways that the other practices are not; thus, imposing demands on them is highly controversial.

that one is likely to reduce harm by adopting pets. Moreover, I argue that, in most cases, giving up one's pet causes more harm. Thus, it is impermissible to do so in such cases.) However, I argue that the UHP *does* imply that breeding pets is impermissible. To this end, I suggest suitable alternatives to breeding.

In regard to procreating, I argue that the UHP *may* imply that it is impermissible to do so. The hedge ("may") is due to the availability of suitable alternative practices. The most suitable alternative practice, I argue, is to adopt existing children. However, I discuss the fact that this alternative is neither universal nor timeless—practically speaking, not every prospective parent can adopt a child.

Finally, I discuss how the UHP may be extremely demanding to the extent that it impacts our daily lives. One might take this demandingness as a reason to reject the UHP. However, I argue that its demandingness is a weak reason to reject it. Furthermore, I argue that it is not necessary to strive to meet its full demands. It is sufficient to meet the greatest demands, such as not procreating. Doing so ensures that, eventually, there will be no relevant harm-producers: Not procreating implies no new harm footprints. Thus, humanity's eventual extinction implies the total fulfilment of the UHP's demands.

This paper, instead of starting from an anti-natalist position and arguing for obligations in other areas of moral life, pertains to anti-natalism by starting at a common argument for veganism and showcasing how it, unexpectedly, leads to an anti-natalist duty.

Finally, in "Rethinking Extinction", I present a challenge to contemporary anti-natalist perspectives on how to pursue extinction. Many anti-natalists regard extinction as ultimately desirable, viewing it as a natural consequence of not reproducing. Moreover,

the sooner extinction occurs, the better, as a longer timeline to extinction results in more new lives, which is objectionable to anti-natalists.

I assess these existing positions and find them untenable for anti-natalists.[16] Firstly, simply refraining from procreation does not guarantee extinction. This is for two reasons. The first is that the anti-natalist arguments imply a desired extinction of *all sentient life*. The second is that extinction has not been adequately understood in the literature. While it may seem that extinction implies the non-existence of a species, there is more to it: For anti-natalists, the extinction of species must be *permanent*. This indicates that the mere act of not reproducing does not ensure extinction. This is because even if all species were eradicated through non-reproduction, a remaining habitable Earth could lead to the re-evolution of sentient life.

This leads to a second point. Instead of occurring "sooner rather than later", extinction can only occur on a much longer timeline due to, in part, the requirement of *kill mechanisms* capable of guaranteeing the permanent extinction of all sentient life. Essentially, the extinction endeavour requires something to ensure that sentient life, assuming it has all ceased to exist, cannot re-emerge through the evolution of ecosystems.

The upshots of my arguments necessitate some bullet-biting for anti-natalists. Since extinction cannot occur merely by not reproducing, and therefore not within a short timeframe, future generations, and consequently procreation, will be essential until humanity has attained the necessary kill mechanisms. Suppose anti-natalists wish to

[16] I mainly address the anti-natalist arguments of Belshaw (2012); Benatar (2006); Harrison (2012); Hereth and Ferrucci (2021); Svoboda (2022). However, my arguments may also apply to other anti-natalist arguments.

reject this implication. In that case, their arguments require changes so that they become less ambitious in the pursuit of extinction. However, as will be demonstrated, this poses difficulties for anti-natalists that are not easily surmountable.

I hope that these contributions are significant to anti-natalist ethics and ethics more generally. Firstly, regarding anti-natalism—a broad and relatively unexplored perspective—I aim for these contributions to relate anti-natalism to other areas of moral life and demonstrate an innate connectedness between different moral concepts, which can be important in subsequent normative discussions. Secondly, in doing so, I also hope these contributions provide additional perspectives in other areas of ethics, such as how we evaluate death, how we understand extinction and existential ethics more broadly, and how moral theories like veganism relate to procreative ethics and anti-natalism.

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BENATAR'S ANTI-NATALISM

David Benatar's anti-natalism is central to much of the anti-natalist discourse in philosophy. This overview offers a detailed analysis of Benatar's three anti-natalist arguments: the procreative asymmetry argument, the quality-of-life argument, and the misanthropic argument. I examine the reasoning behind the arguments, counter-arguments, their most accurate representations, and the anti-natalist outcomes (moral duties or preferences) they aim to promote. I discuss each anti-natalist argument separately as well as in conjunction, assessing whether certain anti-natalist arguments are stronger or better supported when combined. This overview is essential for understanding the complexities and intricacies of the literature (original text, responses, and counter-responses) on Benatar's anti-natalism and anti-natalism more broadly. Furthermore, this overview complements the discussions in other papers in the thesis, providing a supplementary foundation highly relevant to those conversations.

Though Benatar's anti-natalism is not the exclusive focus of this thesis, given his influence on anti-natalist thought, it undoubtedly forms a substantial part of the anti-natalist discussion in this thesis. Moreover, given the depth of his anti-natalism, this overview can serve to disambiguate some of his arguments and, going forward, provide a reference point for the reader when Benatar's anti-natalism takes centre focus.

1. Introduction

David Benatar's anti-natalism is central to the growing discussion of anti-natalism within academic philosophy. This does not imply that academic anti-natalist literature is merely footnotes to Benatar. However, his influence cannot be overstated. While we might recognise the originality of some of his arguments as underpinning this influence, it is also the breadth of his anti-natalism that has created significant room for consideration. For instance, he has produced numerous works, including both books and articles, on anti-natalism and provided what I identify as three distinct arguments for anti-natalism. He has also responded to various objections, which grants us deeper insight into his thoughts and theories. There is, therefore, much to contemplate.

Yet, there remains a cloudiness regarding what exactly his arguments advocate concerning the moral duties of non-procreation. This is a point reflected in the considerable disagreement surrounding his anti-natalism. Hence, in this overview, I aim to disambiguate some of the ideas surrounding Benatar's anti-natalism. By examining the literature—the original texts, the responses, and the counter-responses—I have endeavoured to develop a comprehensive picture of Benatar's anti-natalism.

The value of this overview is manifold. Firstly, I provide a clearer understanding of what can be an intricate topic. Secondly, this overview will supplement the other papers in the thesis, as Benatar's anti-natalism is integral to a significant portion of it. In other words, examining how Benatar's anti-natalism relates to other anti-natalist views, as well as other key moral concepts, will enrich the reader's perspective within this thesis and, hopefully, beyond it. More specifically, for this thesis, assessing Benatar's anti-natalism

will help us better understand its implications regarding death, extinction, the environment, and food ethics.

Benatar's anti-natalism consists of three distinct arguments: The procreative asymmetry argument (§2), the quality-of-life argument (§3), and the misanthropic argument (§4). The asymmetry and quality-of-life arguments are what we might call "philanthropic": they focus on what is in the potential person's interests and find that never existing is better than coming into existence.[1] The misanthropic argument states that since humans cause vast amounts of suffering, we must desist from creating more humans.[2]

I will discuss each argument in turn. I aim to provide a succinct yet comprehensive interpretation. I will critically examine several objections and present original statistics and arguments when doing is informative. However, I am neither seeking to refute nor confirm Benatar's anti-natalism. In fact, not refuting Benatar's anti-natalism reflects the deeper aims of this thesis, where I presuppose various anti-natalist arguments and explore their implications. For additional context, readers are encouraged to refer to the footnotes.

2. Procreative Asymmetry Argument[3]

The procreative asymmetry argument is the first philanthropic argument. The philanthropic arguments are concerned with whether it is in a potential person's interests

[1] For non-Benatarian philanthropic arguments that can be read to imply anti-natalism, see Belshaw (2012); Harrison (2012); Häyry (2024); Häyry and Sukenick (2024); Hereth and Ferrucci (2021); Licon (2012); Magnusson (2022); Shiffrin (1999); Singh (2012). (Note that not all of these authors endorse anti-natalism, and some (i.e., Shiffrin) do not endorse it at all.)
[2] For non-Benatarian misanthropic arguments, see Svoboda (2022) and, to an extent, Stoner (2024).
[3] Benatar states that the asymmetry argument on its own is "insufficient to yield the anti-natalist conclusion", but it does show "that it is better never to come into existence" (Benatar, 2012, 146). Thus, we might say that the asymmetry on its own finds the *axiological* conclusion that non-existence is better than existence, but we find a stronger *moral* argument that procreation is *wrong* when we supplement the asymmetry with the quality-of-life argument, as I will show.

to come into existence.[4] In regard to the asymmetry argument, Benatar argues that it is better never to exist—that existence is not in the potential person's interests—because existence is always harmful. Furthermore, non-existence implies there is no subject, and so even if there is good in life, there is no deprivation of the good. I will afford substantial space to disambiguate this claim. The asymmetry is as follows:

> 1. The presence of harm is bad; and
>
> 2. the presence of [a] benefit is good,
>
> an asymmetrical evaluation applies to the absence of harm and benefit:
>
> 3. The absence of harm is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone; but
>
> 4. the absence of [a] benefit is not bad unless there is somebody for whom this absence is a deprivation (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 23).[5]

Premises one and two are straightforward: For an existing person, the presence of harm is bad for them. Conversely, the presence of a benefit is good for them. However, premises three and four need more explaining.

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[4] It is not an impersonal valuation; it is a valuation *for* a particular person. The valuation thus pertains to value for the subject in question—i.e., whether the non-existent person is better off never existing. This value is also to be understood in a particular way, which we'll discuss.

Demonstrating value for a non-existent subject raises the non-identity problem—that a valuation *for* someone presupposes an existing subject, a person upon whom the good or bad of the valuation is construed. (For example, see (1) Overall (2012) and Benatar's (2019) reply. (2) Boonin (2012); Metz (2011); Weinberg (2012); and Benatar's (2012) reply. (3) Hauskeller (2022); Smyth (2022); and Benatar's (2022) reply.)

However, Benatar states that we can still make these comparative claims about good or bad for a non-existent person by considering and "comparing two possible worlds—one in which a person exists and one in which he does not" (Benatar, 2013, 125). We can then make a judgement about which world this person is better or worse off in. (For more on this, see Benatar (1997; 2006); Feinberg (1986); Parfit (1986).)

Regarding the practical comparison of two or more possible worlds, Benatar carried out an empirical study on people's preferences regarding being born. He states that the majority of people engaged in "defective reasoning", in which they ignored or misinterpreted the counterfactual of non-existence (Benatar, 2001, 264-265).

[5] At different instances, Benatar portrays the asymmetry with different axiological values, i.e., pleasure and pain in one instance, and harms and benefits in another. In Benatar's earlier work (1997; 2006), he presents the asymmetry with pleasure and pain, although he states that these are exemplars of benefits and harms (1997, 345; 2006, 30). However, Benatar believes using pleasure and pain has led to the misconception of his argument as hedonistic (2013, 122, fn. 6). Indeed, in an interview on *The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast*, Benatar states that he regrets using pleasure and pain, as opposed to harms and benefits, in *Better Never to Have Been* for this reason (Sukenick, 2020). In *Debating Procreation: Is It Wrong to Reproduce?*, Benatar (2015) uses harms and benefits to present the asymmetry. Thus, I have opted, in this work, to use Benatar's portrayal of the asymmetry with harms and benefits, instead of pleasure and pain, as it mitigates misunderstandings, as noted by Benatar.

Premise three states that the "absence of harm is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone". This has two key implications. First, for an existing person, it is good when one is free from harm. Now, this is not to say that it is good only if one is free from *all harm*. Instead, being free from particular harm, say, not experiencing any physical discomfort, is good. In other words, to be free from such harm does not simply imply a neutral value—it is not that it is neither good nor bad. Instead, being free from harm is of positive value. A supporting argument for this is to consider two different ways of measuring value. First, if we measure value *experientially*, then to be free from harm is a neutral value. That is, there is (typically) no pleasurable experience in being free from harm or pain. However, if we measure value *comparatively*, being free from harm is good compared to the converse, which is to experience harm (Benatar, 2013, 128; Kaposy, 2009).

Now, the asymmetry focuses on *comparative* evaluations. This is because, in part, we are making value judgements about the *non-experiential* state of non-existence, so experiential value judgements are not possible. Therefore, measured comparatively, there is a positive value due to the absence of harm, even when there is nobody for whom such an absence of harm can be appreciated. In other words, if we consider a non-existent "person" and whether they should come into existence, according to Benatar's asymmetry, it is comparatively good that the non-existent is free from harm in their current non-existent state because it is better than the harm in existence.

Premise four states, "the absence of [a] benefit is not bad unless there is somebody for whom this absence is a deprivation." In order to understand this, first, consider premise two: "the presence of [a] benefit is good" (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 23). While living and experiencing, the things that benefit us are good. But suppose that one foresees

potential benefits but cannot find a way to receive them. In such a case, one is being deprived of potential benefits—things that would make one's life go better were one to have them. Therefore, for living people, the absence of potential benefits is bad in relation to the good of having the benefits (Benatar, 2006, 41). However, consider again our hypothetical person in their non-existent state. That they do not exist and, therefore, do not receive any benefits from existing is *not bad*. This is because they do not exist as a person who can be deprived of potential benefits. Therefore, let us summarise premises three and four in relation to a potential being who does not yet exist. In their non-existent (pre-existent) state, it is (3) good that they're free from harm, and it is (4) not bad—neither good nor bad—that they're not receiving any benefits from living. Let us now visualise the asymmetry.

	Scenario A (X exists)	Scenario B (X never exists)
	(1) Presence of Harm (Bad)	(3) Absence of Harm (Good)
	(2) Presence of Benefit (Good)	(4) Absence of Benefit (Not Bad)

FIGURE 1. Benatar's Procreative Asymmetry (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 23).[6]

With this asymmetry, we compare the value outcomes for X in Scenario A (existence) with those in Scenario B (non-existence). In doing so, we can judge which is the better scenario for X (either existence or non-existence).

First, we compare the values of harm, which are (1) and (3). Here, we see that the absence of harm for X in (3) is good, whereas the presence of harm in (1) is bad. Further, we can realistically posit that there is or will be some harm in existence. Therefore, in regards to (1) and (3), Scenario B (non-existence) is better for X than Scenario A (existence).

Second, we compare the values of the benefits, which are (2) and (4). Now, even though, in (2), the presence of benefits is good, it is not an advantage over (4). This is because,

[6] For some criticisms of Benatar's asymmetry, see (1) Spurrett (2011) and Benatar's (2012) reply. (2) Bradley (2010); Brown (2011); and Benatar's (2013) reply. (3) Piller (2022). (4) Yoshizawa (2025).

recall, in (4), there is nobody for whom the absent benefits are a deprivation; thus, (2) is not better than (4) *for* X.[7]

In essence, for X in Scenario B (non-existence), nothing is lost. There is no living X for whom the absence of potential benefits is bad in a relational sense. Thus, overall, Scenario B (non-existence) has an advantage over Scenario A (existence), which is the avoidance of harm. Therefore, we can conclude from the asymmetry that non-existence is preferable to existence.[8]

We now understand Benatar's reasoning about the asymmetry. Of course, there are many challenges to the premises of Benatar's asymmetry. For example, is it true that (3) absent harm is good, or might it just be value-neutral? What about (4) absent benefits? For example, is there something to regret in non-existent beings not experiencing the benefits of life?[9]

In further support of the asymmetry and to somewhat ward off some of these challenges, Benatar puts across four intuitive cases, or what we might call commonly accepted asymmetries, which can be explained by premises three and four. These cases are not ironclad: one might reject the intuitions or seek alternative explanations for them.

[7] For further reasoning why (2) is not an advantage over (4), see Benatar's Sick and Healthy analogy (Benatar, 2006, 42-43). For an objection and reply to this reasoning, see Benatar (2012); Brill (2012).

[8] Benatar's conclusion *here* is an axiological one; it does not imply a duty or legal prohibition against procreation.

[9] One objection is that (3) applies comparative measures differently to (4). That is, ought (4) be stated as it is comparatively worse (and thus bad) for non-existent X not to attain the benefits of living? Put another way, there are both personal and impersonal considerations. Consider that (1) and (2) pertain to value personally, whereas (3) and (4) pertain to value impersonally. But if so, there is an argument that, if (4) is accurate, then (3) should read that the absence of harm is neither good nor bad unless there is somebody for whom the absence of harm is a benefit. Alternatively, if (3) is accurate, then there is an argument that (4) ought to read that the absence of benefits can be bad even if there is nobody for whom the absence is a deprivation.
For more, see (1) Overall (2012) and Benatar's (2019) reply. (2) Harman (2009) and Benatar's (2013) reply. (3) Hallich (2022) and Benatar's (2022) reply.

However, if one takes them to have strong explanatory power, then these arguments might strengthen the logic behind Benatar's asymmetry.

1. Asymmetry of Procreational Duties

The first asymmetry pertains to a duty to prioritise the avoidance of harm over the creation of benefits. In considering prima facie duties around (not) procreating, if one believes their future child shall lead an overall miserable life, then one has a duty not to bring the child into existence. (Generally speaking, there are degrees to which we can determine the suffering of a potential child. However, there are arguably those clearer cases, such as where the child will have a debilitating congenital disease, in which we can determine the duty not to bring them into existence imposed.) On the other hand, even if one believes the child shall have a happy and beneficial life, one has no duty to bring the child into existence (Benatar, 2012, 129).[10]

2. Prospective Beneficence Asymmetry

The second asymmetry pertains to one's reasoning for having a child. According to this asymmetry, it is unusual to state that one has a child to benefit the child. (Unusual: "I am bringing X into existence to benefit X".) Conversely, it is not unusual to state that one does not have a child to prevent the child from suffering. (Not unusual: "I can foresee that X will suffer; therefore, to prevent X from suffering, I am not bringing X into existence".) In other words, the asymmetry suggests that there is nothing unusual in stating that one is not having a child because it would be better for the child to avoid harm (Benatar, 2012, 129; Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 26).

[10] Duties to bring children into existence may be grounded in other considerations. For example, one may feel there is a duty to extend one's familial lineage and thus procreate. The question can, of course, be raised as to whether such duties are morally justifiable.

Moreover, suppose we're to cite as a reason for bringing a child into existence that they will benefit from existing. In that case, we're placing moral preferability on procreation to induce benefits. If this is the case, then, according to Benatar (2006, 34), absent benefits would be "bad irrespective of whether they [are] bad for anybody". If absent benefits are bad in the sense described, then procreating (so that the child can experience such benefits) might be viewed as the right thing to do, perhaps even *dutiful*. But this, one might argue, leads to objectionable conclusions.[11] Therefore, the argument goes, it cannot be correct that absent benefits for non-existent potential people are bad.

3. Retrospective Beneficence Asymmetry

In terms of retrospective value, one might reflect on whether past procreation choices were good or bad. If one has brought a suffering child into existence, it is regrettable. On the other hand, if one fails to bring a child into existence who would have been happy, there is nothing to regret—it is neither good nor bad (Benatar, 2012, 129; Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 26).[12]

4. Asymmetry of Distant Suffering and Happy People

Thinking once again of regret, we lament existing people who suffer. That is, we might look at people in certain situations, such as in areas of the world where there is a severely low quality of life, and regret that they came into existence if it is implausible that their situation could improve. On the other hand, we do not regret what might have been but

[11] If it is bad to deprive a non-existent person of benefits, there are moral reasons to create them, suggesting we should maximise happiness. However, this implies a duty to increase happiness at others' expense if it raises total happiness, as well as a preference for a larger but less individually happy population than a smaller but more individually happy one. See Derek Parfit's (1986) "repugnant conclusion".

[12] One might regret not having a child for personal reasons, such as missing the experience of raising children or having biological offspring. This differs from regretting what could have been a happy life for a child.

never was, such as in populating Mars (supposing it is habitable) with a colony of new, happy people (Benatar, 2012, 130; Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 25-26).[13]

Besides what has been noted, there have been further attempts to deny the equivalence of these asymmetries to Benatar's asymmetry, including suggestions that these asymmetries are defeasible or have alternative explanations than being explained by the asymmetry in premises (3) and (4).[14]

As mentioned, there are many objections to the asymmetry. However, there is an additional objection worth discussing here since it leads to Benatar's second anti-natalist argument. The objection is this: Without explaining the quantity or severity of the harm of existence, which the asymmetry does not do, we might be able to argue that the benefits of procreating will vastly outweigh the harm (Benatar, 2010, 182).[15] If so, then there might be good reasons to reject the asymmetry.

There are several responses to this objection. First, the asymmetry still has the advantage of having no value disadvantages in non-procreation: If the asymmetry is accurate, then there is no harm in non-existence, and the absence of benefits for the non-existent is not bad. In short, the asymmetry, without pertaining to the quantity or quality of harms and benefits of existence, implies an *axiological advantage* in never existing.[16]

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[13] Conversely, one might argue that we *do* regret the absence of happy people or people who could have good experiences. For example, if I am awestruck by a beautiful national park in British Columbia, might I not regret that more people cannot have such a pleasant experience?

[14] See (1) Boonin (2012); Metz (2011); Spurrett (2011); Weinberg (2012); and Benatar's (2012) reply. (2) Bayne (2010); DeGrazia (2010); Harman (2009); Kaposy (2009); and Benatar's (2013) reply. (3) Benatar and Wasserman (2015, 27-29). (4) Hallich (2022) and Benatar's (2022) reply.

[15] See Hallich (2022); Overall (2022); and Benatar's (2022) reply.

[16] This axiological advantage could be defeated, though, if the benefits of life, particularly those to others, outweighed the harm one endures in existing (Benatar, 2006, 48). For example, suppose the harm of life is but a pin-prick, but one's existence brings others so much joy and happiness. If so, this would suggest that, all things considered, it is axiologically preferable (and there is no strong moral reason not) to bring someone into existence.

Second, the objection faces the challenge of justifying non-consensual harm to obtain pure benefits, which are benefits not based on avoiding harm. Applied to procreation, one must be able to justify non-consensually bringing a child into existence so that they can obtain pure benefits.[17] To see why it might be difficult to justify such acts, consider a hypothetical case: Suppose a technologically advanced bionic arm becomes available and is more beneficial than a regular arm. Suppose I want a friend to have it, but the friend does not consent. It would be morally problematic for me to put a friend into a coma non-consensually and operate, even though the bionic arm is a greater (pure) benefit for them than a regular arm. Therefore, if the same conditions of consent apply to procreation, then one has to justify non-consensually causing harm to the child so that they obtain pure benefits.[18]

Perhaps, though, the original objection still has some support. For example, suppose the harm of life is but a pin-prick and has much good to offer. In that case, one might argue that the bestowment of (diminutive) harm and the violation of consent is justified, and thus so is procreation. In other words, if my friend stands to gain significant benefits from the bionic arm and incurs very little harm in the process, then it might be less challenging to justify the non-consensual operation.[19] This leads us to Benatar's second anti-natalist argument, which wards off the potential objection stated here—that the harm of life is small enough to be outweighed by the greater benefits. Benatar's second anti-natalist

[17] It could be argued that procreation is neither consensual nor non-consensual if it is a necessary condition that a subject exist before actions of (non-) consent can be imposed. See Benatar (1997, 351-352; 2006, 50-54); Benatar and Wasserman (2015, 70); Shiffrin (1999).

[18] This challenge can be bypassed via positive utilitarianism, or classic utilitarianism in some readings. These approaches invoke moral reasons to bring about the greatest amount of happiness or benefits, even if it causes an increase in harm (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2022). However, as mentioned in footnote 11, this presents some objectionable outcomes.

[19] This could be grounded in well-being considerations, which my friend would consent to if they were *rational*.

argument focuses on the quality of life of the living, for which, he states, the quality "of even the best lives … is actually very poor" (Benatar, 2017, 67).

3. Quality-of-Life Argument

Benatar's second anti-natalist argument focuses on the quality of life for many people. Though we can affirm in any case that some lives will be better than others, Benatar purports to demonstrate the wide array of harm that afflicts most, if not all, people. Where the asymmetry demonstrates that existence is always a harm, the quality-of-life argument demonstrates just how severe the harm is. I shall follow Benatar's reasoning and provide a sample of the suffering expected in human life.[20]

In 2022, approximately 67.1 million humans died (Ritchie and Mathieu, 2023). If we consider death a harm in itself,[21] then this figure is something to regret deeply. With habitation spread across the planet, humans are susceptible and succumb to catastrophic natural disasters, such as tsunamis, flooding, and earthquakes. For example, on February 6 2023, an earthquake 7.8 in magnitude struck the south-central Turkish province of Gaziantep. Several hours later, a second earthquake, which was 7.5 in magnitude, struck some 80 miles away from the first. As of September 11 2024, over 55,000 people have been killed and 110,000 injured due to these earthquakes. Over 23 million people, particularly those living in south-central Turkey and north-west Syria, have been directly impacted (British Red Cross, 2023).

[20] I provide updated statistics that reflect human suffering, broadly construed. For Benatar's original statistics, see Benatar (2006; 2017); Benatar and Wasserman (2015).
[21] Benatar (2006; 2017) argues that death can be bad for multiple reasons. These ideas will be discussed and challenged extensively in "Answering the Pro-mortalist Question".

Around nine per cent of the world's population—a staggering 697 million people—are severely food insecure, whereby they have an insufficient quantity of food to sustain themselves (Roser and Ritchie, 2019). Within this estimate, approximately 14 million children suffer from severe acute malnutrition, and 45 per cent of child deaths are due to hunger and related causes (Action Against Hunger, 2023).

Disease and viruses are persistent factors in the experiential suffering of humans (and non-human animals).[22] In the twentieth century, the 1918 flu epidemic killed approximately 50 million people (Benatar, 2006, 90). In recent years, and as of March 21 2023, COVID-19 has killed over 6.8 million people (WHO, 2023). This is just the official figure, so the actual death toll is likely higher due to unreported deaths or deaths for which COVID was a comorbidity. In regard to disease, in 2020, cancer, which typically causes severe harm and decrepitude, accounted for nearly ten million deaths, or nearly one in six deaths (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 60; WHO, 2022).

Apart from natural disasters, preventable diseases, viruses, hunger, and malnutrition, there is also the killing we do unto each other (Benatar, 2006, 90-91). In the twentieth century, conflict-related deaths were approximately 109.7 million (WHO, 2002). The First World War (1914—1918) resulted in approximately 8.5 million military deaths and 57.5 million military casualties. A further 13 million civilian deaths have been estimated (Royde-Smith, 2023). The so-called "war to end war", as described by H.G. Wells (2013), did not live up to its ideal; a few decades later, the Second World War (1939—1945) led to

[22] In the quality-of-life argument, Benatar primarily focuses on human suffering since that's the focus of his philanthropic anti-natalism. However, his philanthropic arguments are "zoophilic"—they apply to sentient non-human animals since "Bringing a[ny] sentient life into existence is a harm to the being whose life it is" (Benatar, 2006, 223). This will be important in "Rethinking Extinction".

around 35 to 65 million deaths (Royde-Smith and Hughes, 2023). The estimate varies, and the unaccounted-for casualties and resultant unmarked graves only augment the tragedy.

Between the Second World War and the present, countless conflicts and many more deaths have occurred.[23] At the time of writing, there is, once again, a major conflict in Europe. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine (February 2022—),[24] as of February 14 2025, has led to 12,605 civilians killed and 29,178 injured. It is worth noting that these are only verified deaths, and in terms of military casualties, both sides downplay their numbers. To this end, verified and impartial figures are difficult to obtain. However, a conservative estimate of Russian military losses in 2023 put the number at 29,500 and growing (Ivshina, 2023); and in December 2022, the Ukrainian government stated that over 13,000 of their soldiers had been killed in total (Koshiw, 2022). These figures are outdated and lack impartiality, so the official figure will likely be much higher.[25]

What of the non-fatal harms that befall many people? Most, if not all, people experience the daily discomforts of hunger, thirst, weariness, tiredness, itches, allergies, headaches, minor illnesses, and, for many women, menstrual pains and menopausal discomforts. Then there are the frequent non-physical harms we experience daily, such as frustrations and irritations, dissatisfaction at home or in the workplace, inconveniences, interpersonal strife, and unfulfilled desires.[26] Within ourselves, we experience self-

[23] Just some of the conflicts include the Rwandan genocide (1994), the First (1996–1997) and Second (1998–2003) Congo Wars, the continuing Global War on Terrorism (2001–), the invasion of Iraq and subsequent war (2003–2011), the continuing civil war in Syria (2011–), and the War in Iraq (2013–2017).

[24] I state "full-scale" since Russia invaded and annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea in 2014.

[25] The United States government's leaked documents state that the casualties are likely staggeringly higher than those officially stated (Adams, 2023). Thus, the figures stated in the main text are very conservative. A BBC Russia news correspondent stated in February 2025 that a staggering 95,000 Russian military personnel had been killed (Ivshina, 2025).

[26] Benatar discusses these characteristics in relation to three popular theories of well-being—hedonism, desire-satisfactionism, and objective list theory—and how our lives go badly under all of them (Benatar, 2006, 69-88). Further, see DeGrazia (2010) and Benatar's (2013) reply.

deprecation and false acclamation, grief from the loss of others, things, or bad experiences, and anxiety and depression (Benatar, 2006, 90; Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 45-47). In 2017, approximately 10.7 per cent of the population—around 792 million people—were suffering from a mental health disorder, with anxiety and depression being the most prevalent (Roser et al., 2021). And even though the internet has led to a new paradigm in online interconnectivity, it has given rise to the growing presence of cyberbullying, trolling, humiliation, and shaming, whereby people are abused, blackmailed, and threatened by anonymous users.

Now, what I've noted here are the "lesser" non-fatal harms that most people experience. To call them "lesser" harms might be misleading, for they can be seriously harmful. But there are even more serious harms that humans perform on each other that are physically and psychologically tormenting. These include robbery, assault, rape, and torture.

Finally, to live to old age is to have likely endured serious harm in life. However, it is old age where most people experience degrading, "insulting", and eventually fatal harm through physical and mental decrepitude. Among other things, this includes the deterioration of capabilities and self-reliance through things such as physical decline, dementia, and advancing cancers, which often impose a corresponding loss of dignity (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 47-50).[27]

The described suffering portrays existence as a dismal endeavour.[28] In response, many prospective parents will state that they are confident their child shall avoid the more

[27] Frances Kamm (1998, 64) describes the "Insult Factor" of death, where "death takes away what we think of as already ours and emphasizes our vulnerability".

[28] I have not discussed a further component that affects the quality of life: meaning in life. For our purposes, the discussion is sufficient (see chapters 2 and 3 of *The Human Predicament* (Benatar, 2006, 82-86; 2017, 13-63)).

serious harm described. For example, they can almost guarantee that their child shall not go to war, be vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition, or be susceptible to natural disasters. Still, there is nevertheless great potential for serious physical and psychological harm for which prospective parents cannot guarantee security. For example, even though parents can mitigate their child's succumbing to violence, sexual assault, or psychological torment, a fundamental risk remains.[29] Moreover, the digital frontier, a factor that has contributed to rising levels of anxiety and depression, can be difficult to predict and safeguard against.

Therefore, even if we proceed with the more lenient argument that procreation poses a *risk* of serious harm to the potential person, it might lead to the conclusion that not procreating is a practical and safe decision (Benatar, 2022, 127). As Benatar states, procreation is "a kind of Russian roulette, but one in which the 'gun' is aimed not at oneself but instead at one's offspring" (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 62-68).[30]

One might respond that we can accept that procreation imposes the risk of serious harm to the potential person, but even so, most people seem glad they were born.[31] If this is the case, we can state that the potential person shall also likely be glad to have been born. If the future child shall be happy in this regard, it is a justification for procreation (Benatar, 2006, 99).

[29] The chances of such serious harm occurring are, of course, context-dependent. But even in the safest societies, sexual assault still occurs. Likewise, healthy, conscientious people living in a clean, low-pollution environment are still susceptible to cancer.

[30] See Magnusson (2022) and Benatar's (2022) reply.

[31] For discussions of subjective assessments in relation to Benatar's quality-of-life argument, see (1) Smilansky (2012) and Benatar's (2012) reply. (2) Hauskeller (2022); Overall (2022); Smyth (2022); and Benatar's (2022) reply.

There are a few different responses to this line of reasoning. First, there is still the risk that the potential person shall be an outlier, unhappy and wishing they'd never been born. Given this risk, and even if it is of low probability, we might posit that it is a risk not worth taking, especially given that, in recalling the asymmetry, nothing is lost in never having existed—nobody is deprived.

Second, according to Benatar, the notion that the future child shall be glad to be born is based on a subjective, biased appraisal of the quality of life. That is, when we evaluate our own lives, we do not do so objectively. Instead, we typically gravitate towards an optimistic outlook via psychological biases, whereby we emphasise the good and under-emphasise the bad. In turn, Benatar argues that we ought not to rely on our subjective appraisals when evaluating the quality of another's life; for the potential person, we should evaluate things objectively—we should not lean on our subjectivity.[32] Therefore, accordingly, it is erroneous to consider one's own happiness at being born when appraising the potential person's welfare; an objective appraisal leads to a very different conclusion: the harms vastly outweigh the benefits (Benatar, 2006, 100).

The psychological biases Benatar discusses are worth overviewing briefly since they supplement his quality-of-life argument and address attempted rebuttals. Consider first the Pollyanna Principle, which is "a tendency towards optimism" (Benatar, 2006, 64-65).[33] For example, consider the many daily discomforts we experience, as previously

[32] Despite Benatar's view, psychological biases may be influential or determinative of one's quality of life. For example, objectively, my life is much better than a Plebeian's living in 50 BC. Yet, if the Plebian is happier than I am, and they determine their life to be good, *more so than I do regarding my life*, then whose life is going better and, ipso facto, who has the better quality of life?

[33] For discussions of Benatar's use of psychological biases in his quality-of-life argument, see (1) Trisel (2012) and Benatar's (2012) reply. (2) Hauskeller (2022) and Benatar's (2022) reply.
For further reading on the Pollyanna effect, see Benatar and Wasserman (2015); Boucher and Osgood (1969); Colman (2009); Matlin (2016).

mentioned. One might believe that just as there are itches and irritations, there are subsequent pleasures in relieving them. For example, just as there is the discomfort of having a full bladder, there is ephemeral pleasure in its relief. However, it is a challenge to see these temporary reliefs from reoccurring discomforts as possessing anything beyond a small amount of instrumental value, for they are simply reliefs from harm. Indeed, it would be unusual to justify procreation by citing the potential benefits the child shall obtain from alleviating harm. More generally, these experiences of relief from discomfort are unlikely the values that we desire to live for.

Consider next the psychology of adaptation and the fulfilment of desires (Benatar, 1997, 352-353; 2006, 67-72; Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 42-43).[34] We adapt our desires to suit our circumstances. For example, if one lives in extreme poverty with very low life prospects, one is unlikely to desire much beyond the means for survival. Such a person might continue to get by, thus achieving their rudimentary desires, but this does not imply that they are living a good life. Likewise, even if one is relatively affluent with more expansive desires, it does not imply an objectively good life. All desires are adapted and thus limited to circumstances and the capabilities that we can reasonably obtain.

Similarly, consider the psychology of comparison (Benatar, 2006, 68-69; Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 43-54).[35] One might evaluate one's life quality in relation to others. Thus, one might believe that since they're free from the most serious of evils, they're living one of the good lives. However, such an argument only tells us the quality of one's life relative to other lives. Indeed, those in affluent regions tend to have a better quality of life

[34] For further reading on the psychology of adaptation, see Fiddick and Barrett (2001); Gittleman (2022); Lyubomirsky (2010); Schmitt and Pilcher (2004).
[35] For further reading on social comparison theory, see Goethals (1986); Suls and Wheeler (2013); Wood (1996).

than those in poorer regions, and the former might thus consider themselves fortunate in such regard. However, this does not imply that even those in affluent regions are living good lives *simpliciter*. Such an evaluation of the quality of one's life is a relative appraisal. On the other hand, an objective appraisal is to look at the good and bad in one's life *in isolation*, not *in comparison*. In doing so, one might note plentiful harms, such as those we all experience daily, that are neglected in comparative assessments.

There is one final set of objections worth considering to demonstrate the quality-of-life argument fully: We can accept the facts of suffering and recognise the presence of biases in appraising life, and yet we might still find justification for procreation. First, we might consider the good in life; just as there are serious harms, are there also great benefits?[36] There are, indeed, great benefits that people say make their lives worth living. These great benefits might be monumental achievements or the presence of reciprocated love. Such benefits, one might say, make the suffering worthwhile.

However, it might first be argued that such beliefs about the great benefits of life are susceptible to the aforementioned psychological biases. That is, in stating that the presence of a good makes the suffering worthwhile, one is arguably adapting to their experience optimistically to find the good in the more prevalent bad. It is an outlook that might suffice to render one glad to be born (and alive), but it is not an objective fact about the overall value of life. To see why, in the first instance, we might return to the statistics on the small and great harms of life to see their abundance and, equally, how many of the

[36] See Harman (2009) and Benatar's (2013) reply.

benefits that result from relieving such harms are short-lived and serve only this instrumental purpose.

Second, even the greatest pure benefits are susceptible to harms of equal or greater magnitude. For example, the feeling of a great accomplishment is short-lived and replaced by the desire to accomplish more, which is often characterised by dissatisfaction, constant striving, and unfulfillment.[37] Likewise, those with the pure benefit of reciprocated love deeply desire not to lose what shall inevitably be lost (Benatar, 2006, 74-75).[38]

A second objection is that harm is necessary since anything worth striving for requires harm in the process.[39] For example, the achieved writer finds the writing process challenging but necessary. The resulting output of a fine novel would have little value without the challenging process, such as if the writer was able to produce the work without the necessary time and effort. Likewise, the enjoyment of satiation and a pleasurable meal is enhanced by the extended hunger and anticipation that precedes it. Thus, one might argue it is worth enduring hunger to enhance the prospect of a fine meal.

Of course, some harm in this regard is instrumental. However, we can question to what extent the harm is merely instrumental, for we often pass the threshold of instrumental harm and experience harms that are merely unwanted by-products. For example, the

[37] Further, this point assumes that the accomplishment of a desire is a pure benefit. Contrarily, the benefits of satisfying a desire might only be instrumental in warding off the natural tendencies of dissatisfaction and striving, or the ceaseless will (Schopenhauer, 2017).

[38] Benatar also discusses the asymmetry between harms and benefits when calculating the good and bad in life. Benatar states that there is a threshold for badness for which no quantity of good can outweigh it. Certain harms are thus incommensurable with the pleasures of life. In other words, there are some bad things in life—torture, rape, mutilation, etc.—which cannot be outweighed by greater benefits, no matter how many and how great the benefits. This asymmetry between the greatest harms and the greatest benefits is intuitive when we consider that the majority of people would not endure one hour of the worst torture to obtain one hour of the greatest pleasure (Benatar, 2006, 63; 2017, 77).

[39] See Smilansky (2012); Trisel (2012); Weinberg (2012); and Benatar's (2012) reply.

writer does not need writer's block, and the meal-goer does not need or benefit from being irritable due to hunger. Such harms seem to serve little instrumental purpose. Furthermore, there are experiences of great benefits, preceded by great harms, which it would be better never to have experienced. For example, being incarcerated, longing for freedom, and finally attaining freedom might intensify the pleasure and appreciation of freedom. However, it is arguably better never to have to desire and be deprived of freedom. Likewise, beating cancer is a special moment—perhaps making one mentally stronger—but it is arguably better never to have experienced it (Benatar, 2006, 78-79).

Finally, one might argue that a life without suffering is simply inconceivable, and it implies striving for perfection or a utopia that negates what it means to be human.[40] In response, Benatar believes this is an appeal to emotional attachment, a fetishisation of human life that states "it is more important to be human than to have a better quality of life" (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 57-58). Therefore, even if we cannot obtain a drastically better quality of life, or if doing so requires a form of trans- or posthumanism, it does not imply that human life as we know it is sufficiently good.[41]

In sum, the asymmetry (if accurate) shows us that existence is always harmful, and the quality-of-life argument (if accurate) tells us just how severe that harm is. These two arguments are independent, but combined, they go beyond the preferred value of non-existence and provide us with a strong moral reason not to procreate. In essence, given

[40] See (1) Trisel (2012) and Benatar's (2012) reply. (2) Overall (2022) and Benatar's (2022) reply.
[41] For more on Benatar's response to "secular theodicies", see Benatar and Wasserman (2015, 54-62).
Ideals of trans- or posthumanism could serve as additional objections to the argument that suffering is important to who we are as humans. If suffering is important to us, then we might question the value of the endeavours, such as trans- or posthumanism, that seek to eradicate it.

that existence is harmful, and given the (risk of the) magnitude of the harm, it is the morally right course of action not to reproduce.

4. Misanthropic Argument

As previously mentioned, the asymmetry and quality-of-life arguments are philanthropic. That is, they endorse never coming into existence since, they argue, it is in the interests of the potential person never to do so.

The misanthropic argument makes an argument for anti-natalism based on the suffering that humans *cause*.[42] Thus, it is best understood as distinct from the philanthropic arguments. The misanthropic argument argues that it is morally dutiful to desist from procreating and propagating the human species since humans cause significant harm. I will start by discussing the various instances in which humans cause suffering, according to the argument.[43]

1. Human–Human Suffering[44]

Some of the human-to-human destruction was summarised during the quality-of-life argument. For example, genocides and mass killings are historical and present facts of human-to-human destruction. The killing involved is often deliberately inhumane, inspired by ideological hate. Acts such as genocide also involve non-killing violence that, at times, might leave the victims wishing they had been killed. Pillaging, rape, physical

[42] Benatar discusses briefly some of the ideas of the misanthropic argument in *Better Never to Have Been* (2006). However, they're discussed in application to the philanthropic quality-of-life argument. Benatar showcases the misanthropic argument as a standalone, third argument for his anti-natalism in *Debating Procreation* (2015). It is also reproduced in *Permissible Progeny?: The Morality of Procreation and Parenting* (Hannan et al., 2015) as the first chapter (Benatar, 2015).
For further discussions of Benatar's misanthropic argument, see (1) Hauskeller (2022); Smyth (2022); and Benatar's (2022) reply. (2) Lougheed (2022).

[43] Similar to the quality-of-life argument, I provide contemporary statistics and new case studies. For Benatar's original discussion, see Benatar and Wasserman (2015, 85-100).

[44] See Benatar and Wasserman (2015, 85-93).

torture, and psychological torment are just some such acts (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 88). Whereas examples of such cases in the philanthropic quality-of-life argument were designed to showcase one's potential quality of life, regarding the misanthropic argument, they are designed to demonstrate issues with propagating a violent species.

Still, to this, one might object that it is a minority of humans who perform such horrific acts and that, in more civilised societies, such horrors are less likely. However, historically, so-called civilised societies provided widespread support for slavery. Moreover, today and in recent history, many people in civilised societies are complicit in or "facilitate the atrocities committed by others" (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 89).

Detailing contemporary cases of complicity in or the facilitating of wrongful acts is a thorny issue. The contentiousness of such cases is best demonstrated in the case of interstate conflicts, where we might deliberate on whether the invasion of "X" is a just cause—in contrast, the occupation of "Y" is unjust oppression. Still, in my view, there are practices that much of society is complicit in that are recognisably wrong. For example, consider "fast fashion" companies and their encroachment on human rights. In 2020, the National Crime Agency launched an investigation into the online fashion giant Boohoo.com Plc. Group and its suppliers due to allegations of modern slavery (Brunt, 2021; Duncan, 2020; Pegden, 2021). Still, despite national, "front page" coverage of the scandal, consumers have not been dissuaded by the Group's unethical practices, for the Group's revenues have continued to rise each year, reaching approximately 945 million GBP in 2020/21 and growing to approximately 1.2 billion GBP in 2021/22 (Smith, 2022).

Moreover, there are many daily harms we cause that we often overlook or disregard. Yet, these harms can still be very damaging. For example, humans cheat, steal, lie, take

advantage of others, deceive, undermine, ignore, break promises, violate privacy, act ungratefully, and speak hurtfully, among other things (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 91).

A response to this might be that we also do plenty of daily good and try not to engage in these daily harms. Further, many people work tirelessly to bring about justice for the bigger injustices in the world. Yet, doing these things is hard work, and one can rarely succeed in daily living without causing harm, even if the harm is relatively minor. Most, if not all, people tell small lies, conceal the truth, take advantage of others, and make unassured promises. Now, this does not imply that the do-gooder is a bad person, but it demonstrates one's immanent potential to cause harm and how hard one must work to mitigate it. Further, of the bigger injustices of the world, many go unresolved. For example, many rapes and murders go without justice, and "most of the perpetrators of human history's worst atrocities lived out their natural lives without penalty" (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 92).[45]

2. Human–Non-human-animal Suffering

Next, consider the suffering we cause non-human animals (hereon simply "animals" when it suffices). Over 166 billion land and sea animals are killed annually for human consumption. During the process of breeding and killing, many animals "unsuitable" for farming, such as male chicks, male calves, and marine animal by-catch, are slaughtered and discarded. Those land animals designated for farming and human consumption are confined, socially deprived, and separated from their parents before being beaten,

[45] Thomas Nagel describes the irreconcilability of the subjective and objective standpoints. Objectively, we *know* that many people die and massacres occur, but often we do not have a strong emotional response to such events, such as we would if it were our own lives or the life of someone with whom we have a greater psychological connection. Arguably, the fact that we do not feel a strong emotional response to the world's greatest injustices is because "sheer emotional overload prevents it" (Nagel, 1986, 229-230). This, of course, does not negate the misanthropic facts but perhaps provides a partial explanation for why many injustices go unresolved: we are objectively aware of them, but we are subjectively indifferent.

shocked, and slaughtered, often without anaesthesia (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 93-95).

Chickens are one of the most consumed animals in the world. In rearing chickens for consumption (and hens for eggs), they are typically confined to extremely tight spaces in battery cages. For example, egg-laying hens are deprived of the space required to fulfil natural behaviours, such as foraging whilst walking (Rodenburg et al., 2022, 2). This leads to increased stress and frustration, so their beaks are trimmed to prevent feather pecking. It wasn't until 2012 that the European Union (EU) enforced a ban on battery cage systems.[46] However, battery cage systems are still legal in most states in the United States and non-EU countries (Mench et al., 2011, 229-230).[47] For example, from 2007 to 2021, approximately 70 per cent of egg production in the United States involved caged hens (Mendez, 2021, 6). Moreover, modified caged systems, or so-called "enriched" cages, are still permitted in most EU countries. In such cages, chickens are still confined to small spaces, thus limiting natural behaviours such as dustbathing, foraging, and elevated perching (Rodenburg et al., 2022, 2).

Approximately each year, over 100 million animals are used in scientific experiments. Ascertaining a precise figure is difficult since most countries do not keep (public) records (Lewis, 2019). However, the United Kingdom maintains a record of domestic use. In 2021, 3.06 million scientific experiments involving animals were carried out, an increase of six per cent compared to the previous year (Home Office, 2022). Many medical experiments involve genetically engineering wild-type genes of animals such as rats and mice so that

[46] There remain concerns that EU countries lack sufficient regulation of the battery cage ban (Scrinis et al., 2017, 791).
[47] In the United States, battery cage systems are legal at the federal level, although "the following states have passed legislation that either bans or requires the phasing-out of battery cages": California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Washington, and Nevada (Block, 2021; THL, 2020).

they develop neurogenerative diseases or cancer. After the experiments conclude, typically, the animals are euthanised.

Some experiments test for behavioural changes, and to do so, they cause severe distress by, for example, depriving an infant and mother of essential contact (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 96-97). One might argue that scientific experiments that involve animals are often for the greater good. There may be good arguments for such experiments and testing, but this does not negate what constitutes a tragic predicament: in order to improve our own lives and, often, what we see as improving the world we live in, we have to cause significant harm by subjecting many animals to unpleasant and often fatal experiments.

Quite often, animals are physically and psychologically tormented in the name of sports and entertainment. For example, bullfighting, cockfighting, and dogfighting are prohibited in many parts of the world but still occur. Moreover, despite a downward trend in horse-race betting turnover, in the United Kingdom in 2022, revenue from horse-race betting was approximately three billion GBP (Statista, 2023).

Horses designated for racing are put at serious risk and often experience severe harm, partly driven by the run-for-profit sport's competitive nature. For example, the speed at which horses run in races far exceeds natural galloping in the wild, so one miscalculation can result in serious injury or death (for both the horse and rider). Further, horses are conditioned to maximise their speed potential and run with discipline via whipping and performance-enhancing "technologies" such as electric shocks. Performance-enhancing drugs are also common and are typically used for the reasons mentioned as

well as to mask pain the horse might be experiencing (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 97; McManus et al., 2013, 138-140).

Finally, many animals, most commonly cats and dogs, are bred and modified for aesthetic preferences, often in poor conditions, to maximise profit. As a result of modifications and intentional designs, some animals, particularly dogs, experience congenital issues such as breathing problems and heart, eye, and skeletal defects. Moreover, each year, many pets are abandoned (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 98). In the United Kingdom, during the first COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, "animal shelter adoption figures rose exponentially" (Warner, 2022). However, many of these "pandemic pets" were only temporary, for the RSPCA reported a 17 per cent increase in pet abandonment from 2020 to 2021 and a 24 per cent increase in 2022 (RSPCA, 2022).

3. Human–Environmental Destruction

An increasing global population, increasing negative environmental effects per capita, and industrialisation and increased consumption have, according to the UN, led to "unprecedented levels of pollution". River, lake, and sea pollution affects the health of nearby humans and non-human animals. Further, global climate patterns are changing, leading to the extinction of certain species and increasing uninhabitable zones (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 99-100). Despite the obvious signs of catastrophe, humanity, collectively, is not doing enough. The UN estimates that current commitments to

reversing global warming are insufficient to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels (United Nations, 2022).[48]

Given the vast amounts of suffering that humans cause, Benatar puts forth the following normative premise:

> We have a (presumptive) duty to desist from bringing into existence new members of species that cause (and will likely continue to cause) vast amounts of pain, suffering, and death (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 101).

In essence, since humans cause vast amounts of pain, suffering, and death, we have a duty to desist from creating more humans. With Benatar's presumptive duty, there are a couple of things to note. First, it is not a duty to prevent others from procreating; the duty only implies that "one should oneself desist from [procreating]".[49] Second, for the duty to be presumptive, not *every* human needs to cause suffering overall. For example, consider that we have a duty not to drive through a red traffic light since it is dangerous, even if not every act would result in harm. Third, the premise derives support from its (potential) application to other species. Consider, for example, the moral duty we would have to prevent the propagation of another species if it was as destructive as humans (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 101-102).

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[48] Jonathan Safran Foer (2019) states that the reason most people are apathetic to acting on climate change sufficiently is that even though we *know* of its disastrous facts, we do not *believe* them. This is perhaps a similar point to Nagel's objective–subjective irreconcilability (footnote 45), in that were we to feel a subjective, emotional attachment to the effects of climate change, then we would be overcome with dread at its disastrous facts (Nagel, 1986, 229-230).
Benatar notes that those who deny climate change facts, thus eliminating them from the misanthropic considerations, still have to contend with human-to-human and human-to-non-human-animal suffering (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 100).

[49] To prevent others from procreating might raise further ethical issues. Such issues include that (i) we should not deny the right to autonomy (although Benatar rejects a *legal* right to procreate predicated on autonomy since it causes serious harm; see Benatar (2006, 104)); (ii) prohibiting procreation would be futile since people would do it anyway, and it would lead to unregulated pregnancies, abortions, and increased mortality rates (see Benatar (2006, 105-106)); (iii) the fact there is still reasonable disagreement about the harm of existence might justify the legal protection of procreative freedom (see Benatar (2006, 106-113)).

We now have a developed understanding of Benatar's misanthropic argument. Namely, we have a description of the suffering humans cause and, therefore, a presumptive duty to desist from creating more humans. I will now focus briefly on some objections to the presumptive duty.

The first objection is that the presumptive duty leads to a paradox and a conflict between Benatar's philanthropic and misanthropic arguments. That is, one might suggest that there is "something odd about citing the harm caused to humans by humans as a reason to desist from creating humans". Therefore, (a) "If humans are worth protecting from harm then they are not so bad that we should not replicate the species". On the other hand, (b) if they are as bad as has been suggested, "then we should not count the harm done to them as relevant" (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 102).

This objection fails for the following reasons. First, we might note that, regarding (a), it mistakenly presumes that if it is worth preventing harm to humans, then we have reason to bring more humans into existence, or at least no defeating reason not to. But this is not always the case. For example, we might say that it is wrong to bring into existence someone who we know has Tay-Sachs disease—a rare inherited disease that destroys cells in the brain and spinal cord and significantly reduces life expectancy. Still, insofar as such a person comes into existence, then they are worth protecting from harm.

Second, regarding (b), humans can be as destructive as described but still worth protecting (and relevant in the moral sense). For example, the worst kinds of perpetrators are punished but still recognised, in most countries, as moral agents. This is why there are limits to punishing even the worst offenders, where justice is often served with "humanity" (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 102-103). Third, even if we grant the points

of the objection and state that we cannot consider human-to-human harm in the presumptive duty, “the argument could still be carried on the strength of the harm that humans do to [non-human] animals” (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 102).

A second objection is that the duty can be defeated by the good that humans do. That is, though humans cause lots of suffering, there is also plenty of altruism. In response, consider that, in terms of quantity, humans produce more harm than good. For example, whilst there are indeed individuals, communities, and organisations that work selflessly for animal welfare, this good is heavily outweighed by the harm we cause to non-human animals, even if we’re considering the consumption factor only (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 105).

Second, we can refer back to the asymmetry of harms and benefits to see why no amount of good might offset certain harms. For example, consider the Rwandan genocide. Is there any number or quality of goods that humans can produce to outweigh the harm caused? Or do certain bad things, such as the Rwandan genocide, surpass a threshold for which “no quantity of good can outweigh it, because no amount of good could be worth that badness” (Benatar, 2006, 63; Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 106)?

Perhaps a form of utilitarianism can provide a case against a threshold of badness. For example, suppose that one util of good and bad are equal in value. The Rwandan genocide has many negative utils. But even so, we can potentially aggregate more positive utils to outweigh the negative through accumulating positive events.

This utilitarian line of reasoning might be unsuccessful for several reasons. First, even if we accept the utilitarian view described, it is unlikely that we can do more good to

outweigh the many harms of the past and those to come. Second, the utilitarian view described is a rudimentary form that runs into many issues, such as a duty to maximise benefits, even if this harms others. Such issues can be solved by an alternative form of utilitarianism, such as negative utilitarianism. For example, negative utilitarianism primarily focuses on reducing suffering (preventing negative utils), thus warding off a duty to maximise benefits. However, from a negative utilitarian view, we cannot justify potential future harms akin to the Rwandan genocide by appealing to a greater number of future benefits. Furthermore, from any utilitarian view, it might be stipulated that we should focus on existing lives only in order to avoid the undesirable conclusion that we should procreate out of a duty to maximise utility (Benatar, 2006, 36-37). Therefore, even if we accept that there is no threshold of badness, the good we promote might exclude appealing to the creation of new lives.

A third and final objection is to say that the duty can *sometimes* be defeated, depending on the circumstances. That is, some people, more than others, can reason that their potential offspring will produce more good than bad overall. Indeed, a small number of people might produce "net-positive" children. In theory, this is possible. However, in practice, net-positive children will likely come from a small minority of people, of which plenty more people will mistakenly believe they are a part.

To see why, we can consider the psychological biases previously discussed: One is likely confident that their child shall have a pleasant life for which they are glad to be born. This is likely true, and the child may even grow to be selfless. However, many potential parents pay little attention to the harmful costs of raising the child. For example, unless one is

vegan, the extra mouth(s) to feed shall contribute to the suffering and deaths of the animals used.[50]

Moreover, each new child contributes to environmental harm. For example, in the United Kingdom, the average carbon dioxide emissions per capita are approximately 5.2 tonnes. In the United States, it is nearly three-fold at approximately 14.7 tonnes per capita. In developing countries such as Pakistan, the emissions are much lower, at approximately 0.9 tonnes per capita. However, overall emissions in Pakistan are still staggeringly high (approximately 190 million tonnes per year) because of its large population (Climate Watch, 2020). Therefore, on an all-things-considered evaluation, it is difficult to argue that the child shall do more good than harm simply on the good it might do for others. That is unless one is of the minor few for whom net-positive children are a real possibility.

5. Conclusion

Benatar's anti-natalism comprises three key arguments: the asymmetry and quality-of-life arguments, which are philanthropic, and the misanthropic argument. Each of these arguments is independent. Independently, however, they are weaker in generating a case for anti-natalism. For example, if we consider the asymmetry argument on its own, we might accept that existence is always harmful. However, without an indication of *how* harmful life is, and if we can envisage a life where the benefits vastly outweigh the harms, then the case against procreation might be weak (e.g., see footnote 16). Thus, the quality-of-life argument, for example, provides cogency to the asymmetry.

[50] They will likely contribute to suffering even if they are a conscientious vegan (Gruen and Jones, 2015). I discuss these ideas in "The Unnecessary Harm Principle, Ethical Veganism, and the Case Against Reproduction".

Out of the three arguments, one might consider the misanthropic argument the strongest independent argument. In contrast, the philanthropic arguments are more effective in synergy.[51] But regardless of the independent potential of the three arguments, when they are combined, the case for anti-natalism is much stronger; as Benatar states,

> When the misanthropic argument is considered in conjunction with the philanthropic ones we find that the case against procreation, and especially in our current circumstances, is almost always overdetermined (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 112).

So, what is the precise conclusion of Benatar's anti-natalist arguments? I believe that Benatar is tentative with his overall conclusion. One hypothesis, which is textually supported, is that Benatar recognises that his anti-natalist arguments are highly counter-intuitive, challenging a powerful evolutionary pro-natalist bias (Benatar, 2006, 8). Thus, to conclude, for example, that one has a duty not to procreate *simpliciter* might lead to the (even greater) belief that Benatar's anti-natalist ideology is altogether absurd and should be rejected.[52]

Still, regarding the conclusion of the philanthropic arguments, Benatar states that a duty not to procreate is not too demanding if one accepts the argument that coming into existence is great harm. However, Benatar does not go so far as to state that a duty not to procreate is *the* conclusion of his philanthropic arguments. He falls back on the possibility that if one rejects the idea that existence is always a great harm, it is still "preferable" and "morally desirable" not to procreate (Benatar, 2006, 101-102).

[51] Still, the misanthropic argument on its own might be insufficient because, even if we acknowledge the suffering humans cause, we should take other measures to reduce the negative impact of humans before taking the drastic step to anti-natalism (although Benatar rejects this possibility as idealistic, given the nature of humans (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 103-104)).
[52] To this end, I can provide anecdotal evidence that discussions of anti-natalism, even within serious philosophical settings, still arouse, in some cases, contempt.

Regarding the misanthropic argument, Benatar is more explicit in stating that it leads to a presumptive duty to desist from procreating and might only be defeated on very few occasions. Yet, even if it should be defeated, the philanthropic arguments would still hold. Hence, the case against procreation is always overdetermined.

Therefore, we can conclude from Benatar's anti-natalism that procreation raises serious moral concerns. To this end, Benatar's contributions are important to philosophy, whether or not one agrees with them, finds them plausible, rejects them, or sees them as pessimistic incoherence. Moreover, if they are accurate, then the burden of proof is, quite arguably, in the hands of the procreator. Therefore, if everything (or enough of the arguments) follows, then not procreating avoids any act of wrongdoing, even if we do not go so far as to state that it is always a moral duty not to procreate.

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ANSWERING THE PRO-MORTALIST QUESTION

Does anti-natalism—the moral view that we should not reproduce—imply that death is better than continued living? This is known as the *pro-mortalist question*, a compelling, unresolved question surrounding anti-natalist discourse. In order to answer this question, I analyse two theories about the badness of death used to argue *against* the idea that anti-natalism entails pro-mortalism. The first is that death *deprives* one of the good things in life. The second is that death *annihilates* the person. However, I argue that these theories fail to block pro-mortalism, such that anti-natalism entails pro-mortalism. This implies that if anti-natalism is sound, then it is better to die than continue living. I discuss the importance of answering the pro-mortalist question and how doing so sets up future debates regarding anti-natalism, suicide, extinction, and other related areas of ethical significance.

In this paper, I shall address the pro-mortalist relation to Benatar's anti-natalism exclusively. This is because Benatar's anti-natalism provides various arguments for consideration that can modify the value of death and thus warrants a comprehensive assessment. Thus, this paper relates to the overall theme of the thesis by drawing on discussions about the badness of death and tying them in with the most significant theory of anti-natalism—that of David Benatar's.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

If it is better never to have been, then is it better to cease to be? This question arises from the anti-natalist notion that it is better never to have existed. On immediate reflection, the answer may seem intuitive: if life is so bad as to suggest it is better not to experience it in the first place, then why not "return" to that more desirable state of non-existence? Yet, once alive, perhaps there is good reason to stay alive, if only to delay an even worse fate—as 11th Century philosopher–poet al-Ma'arri states, "Refrain from procreation, for its consequence is death" (Häyry and Sukenick, 2024, 17).

This paper undertakes a rigorous analysis of the relationship between anti-natalism—the moral view that we should not reproduce—and pro-mortalism—the view that death is preferable to continued living. In essence, I explore the profound and weighty question of whether anti-natalism leads to the conclusion that death is better than continued living.

Anti-natalism takes many forms.[1] In academic philosophy, the most prominent and substantiated version is David Benatar's (2006) anti-natalism. Benatar argues that it is better never to have been and, therefore, that procreation is morally impermissible due to (i) an asymmetry in value between never having existed and existing and (ii) an awful quality of life for most people.[2] Benatar's framework is fruitful for exploring the connection between anti-natalism and pro-mortalism since it provides much to consider.

If anti-natalism implies that it is better to cease existing, does this have further implications, such as suicide? The (limited) debate on anti-natalism–pro-mortalism has

[1] See Häyry and Sukenick (2024); Morioka (2021).
[2] Also see the misanthropic argument (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 78-112) and further discussions: (1) Hauskeller (2022); Smyth (2022); and Benatar's (2022) reply. (2) Lougheed (2022). Similarly, see Svoboda (2022).

framed pro-mortalism as a call to suicide, equating it "*being better for one not to exist* [with] *it being better to end one's life*" (Sullivan-Bissett, 2022, 86).[3] However, I focus on pro-mortalism as a value statement: whether death is *better for* the individual than continued existence. The potential implications of suicide raise additional ethical questions, such as the impact on loved ones or obligations to others, which require a separate analysis.

Still, it is important to note that anti-natalism intersects with several other significant ethical topics. Thus, answering the pro-mortalist question sets the stage for future discussions in euthanasia, extinction, suicide, and decision theory.[4] For example, if anti-natalism leads to pro-mortalism, one might explore whether anti-natalism entails the rationality of suicide or whether euthanasia policies ought to be more liberal.

Additionally, scholars may debate whether an endeavour toward extinction, which is often desired in anti-natalism (Benatar, 2006; Häyry and Sukenick, 2024; Leak, 2024; Torres, 2023), is *dutiful* if death is better than continued existence. For example, the idea of a "speciecide" suggests that anti-natalists ought to be coercive in achieving extinction (Hauskeller, 2022; Packer, 2011, 228-230), and a speciecide might be implied, as a duty, if death is better than continued existence. Relatedly, a pro-mortalist outcome would challenge the general anti-natalist defence against killing existing humans (as a means of

[3] Ema Sullivan-Bissett (2022, 86) argues that there is the possibility of exploiting the gap between pro-mortalism and a *particular route* to non-existence, such as suicide. Hence, their equivocation stated above is appropriately understood as a "benign" equivocation, such that, even if it's better to end one's life, it does not produce an obligation. In other words, according to their understanding of pro-mortalism, it does not imply it is morally or rationally required to end one's life.
For more, see Benatar (2006, 211-221; 2012; 2013; 2017, 92-198; 2022); Harman (2009); McGregor and Sullivan-Bissett (2012); Sullivan-Bissett (2022).

[4] Consider a case that presents a moral dilemma, in which anti-natalism implies pro-mortalism: "Suppose … a situation where [one] could either save a 20-year-old man from falling from a ledge to his certain death or convince a friend not to have a child. Benatar's [anti-natalism implies one] should talk her or his friend out of childbirth and leave the 20 year old to die" (Packer, 2011, 231). The key implication here is that, if it is better never to exist and it is also better to die than continue living, then, given the choice, one ought to prevent new births rather than prevent someone from dying.

extinction) due to death being a harm (Räsänen and Häyry, 2023) since such deaths would no longer be bad if anti-natalism entailed pro-mortalism.[5] Moreover, that a pro-mortalist outcome might lead to these implications could provide a reason to reject anti-natalism, such that its pro-mortalist implications lead to a reductio ad absurdum of anti-natalism (Piller, 2022).

1.2 Structure

This paper has two parts. Each part focuses on a theory of the value (goodness or badness) of death that Benatar employs to argue that anti-natalism *does not* imply pro-mortalism.

Part I examines *deprivationism*, which pertains to the value of death based on whether it deprives one of a good life overall. This section not only explores the anti-natalist–pro-mortalist link but also draws connections between deprivationism and meaninglessness or theories that espouse a pessimistic outlook. Thus, the pro-mortalist conclusions reached here may have applications beyond anti-natalism.

Part II focuses on *annihilation*, which holds that death is bad because it signifies the end of one's life in a particular sense (to be elaborated later). This section develops the relatively underexplored theory of annihilation by examining its value form, its similarities to deprivationism, its treatment in existing literature, and its implications for anti-natalist arguments. Thus, Part II contributes beyond anti-natalism and introduces novel findings to the badness of death.

[5] Joseph Packer (2011), without reaching a pro-mortalist conclusion, makes the argument that anti-natalists ought not prevent deaths based on minimising suffering through utilitarianism. Besides rejecting the implication that anti-natalists desire to maximise utility, one might invoke autonomy or interests to challenge Packer's argument. However, these challenges are weakened if anti-natalism entails pro-mortalism since the preference for death would have an axiological grounding.

To begin, I'll lay out relevant components of Benatar's anti-natalist arguments and the two theories of death's badness—deprivationism and annihilation—used to argue against pro-mortalism. Throughout, I'll provide the benefit of the doubt, aiming to maximise the chances that anti-natalism does not imply pro-mortalism. Ultimately, however, I'll demonstrate that it does—that anti-natalism, as discussed, renders death most of the time for most people, if not always and for all, good overall.

2. Part I—Deprivationism (Instrumental Value)

2.1 (A)symmetry

In this part, through the anti-natalist lens, I'll assess the instrumental value of death with reference to deprivationism. How deprivationism pertains to the instrumental value of death will become evident as we detail deprivationism. To do so, it is necessary to provide some background to the debate.

First, observe the Lucretius symmetry argument, which suggests that pre-natal non-existence (before birth) and posthumous non-existence (beginning at death) are equal. In other words, the state before one is born and once one dies are equal states of non-existence. If so, the argument goes, we should value them equally. Therefore, if we value them equally, this leads anti-natalists to pro-mortalism because, since it is better never to have been—if pre-natal non-existence is better than existence—then, by symmetry, posthumous non-existence is also better than existence.

Other issues with Lucretian symmetry aside (see Rosenbaum (1989)), one can deny symmetry between pre-natal and posthumous non-existence by arguing that death,

unlike pre-natal non-existence, uniquely *deprives* one of interests or goods in life.[6] In other words, before one is born, one cannot be deprived of good things in life since one does not exist as a subject who can be deprived. In contrast, once one is born and exists as a subject with interests, death can deprive one of good things in life. If this argument holds, then it creates an *asymmetry* between the two states of non-existence, aligning with the popular *deprivationist* view of death's badness. Thus, in such a case, anti-natalism does not necessarily entail pro-mortalism.

Before further exploring deprivationism, let us briefly turn to Benatar's asymmetry argument for anti-natalism, which will frame this discussion. Benatar's asymmetry argument (Figure 1) details how, in never being born, there is no subject for whom life's positive value, such as pleasurable experiences, is a deprivation. Another way to put it is that, whereas we might talk of someone who died prematurely as "missing out" on life, we do not think this is the case for "someone" who has never existed.[7] Thus, in never existing, one is not deprived of good things in life. Therefore, never existing is neither good nor bad—it is a neutral value—in this regard.

Yet, what is *good* about never existing, according to the asymmetry argument, is that harm is avoided—harm that would have transpired had one existed. That is, should one exist, one will experience harm, even if it is minimal. Thus, in never being born, it is good that such harm is avoided, not for a particular subject—since a subject never exists—but

[6] Moreover, that we can possibly live longer but not possibly exist much earlier than we did demonstrates another asymmetry between pre-natal and posthumous non-existence (Benatar, 2006, 215).

[7] One might argue that we ought to regret instances of those who never exist and do not experience good lives. Benatar discusses and denies similar reasoning via various asymmetry intuitions. See Benatar (2012, 129); Benatar and Wasserman (2015, 26). For further discussions, see (1) Boonin (2012); Metz (2011); Spurrett (2011); Weinberg (2012); and Benatar's (2012) reply. (2) Bayne (2010); DeGrazia (2010); Harman (2009); Kaposy (2009); and Benatar's (2013) reply. (3) Benatar and Wasserman (2015, 27-29). (4) Hallich (2022) and Benatar's (2022) reply.

simply in itself. Thus, in never existing, it is good that harm is avoided, even if there is nobody who benefits from this avoidance of harm.

Thus, in sum, never existing does not harm anyone since there is no subject (recall, neutral value). However, it *does* provide positive value *impersonally* by avoiding the creation of new harm (recall, good value). Therefore, as the asymmetry goes, it is axiologically, as an assessment between different value outcomes (never existing versus existing), better not to come into existence.

Importantly, the asymmetry argument is one of Benatar's three arguments for anti-natalism. It has received the most attention and debate.[8] I will not focus on whether it is accurate (see footnote 8 for discussions and footnote 9 for a key criticism) but only on its implications concerning pro-mortalism. I will thus assume it is sound for argument's sake.

[8] For discussions on the asymmetry argument, see (1) Spurrett (2011) and Benatar's (2012) reply. (2) Bradley (2010); Brown (2011); and Benatar's (2013) reply. (3) Yoshizawa (2021; 2025). (4) Piller (2022). (5) Draper (2023).

	Scenario A (B exists)	Scenario B (B never exists)
	(1) Presence of Harm (Bad)	(3) Absence of Harm (Good)
	(2) Presence of Benefit (Good)	(4) Absence of Benefit (Not Bad—Neutral)

FIGURE 1. Benatar's Procreative Asymmetry (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 23).[9]

As noted, Benatar's procreative asymmetry is one of his key arguments for anti-natalism. Besides the table form, Benatar also provides a useful summary of the asymmetry in text:

> 1. The presence of harm is bad; and
>
> 2. the presence of [a] benefit is good,
>
> an asymmetrical evaluation applies to the absence of harm and benefit:
>
> 3. The absence of harm is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone; but

[9] In separate instances, Benatar has portrayed the asymmetry with, first, pleasure and pain or, second, harms and benefits. Here, I use Benatar's portrayal of the asymmetry with benefits and harms, instead of pleasure and pain, respectively, since, as Benatar describes, they are more inclusive and avoid hedonistic labelling (see Benatar (2013, 122, footnote 6)). Benatar (2012) presents four asymmetry cases to support his anti-natalist asymmetry.
Asymmetry criticism: Demonstrating the asymmetry arguably creates inconsistencies in value assignments, such that there are both personal and impersonal considerations. Consider that (1) and (2) pertain to value personally, whereas (3) and (4) pertain to value impersonally. But if so, there is an argument that, if (4) is accurate, then (3) should read that the absence of harm is neither good nor bad unless there is somebody for whom the absence of the harm is a benefit. Alternatively, if (3) is accurate, then (4) should read that the absence of benefits can be bad even if there is nobody for whom the absence is a deprivation.

> 4. the absence of [a] benefit is not bad unless there is somebody for whom this absence is a deprivation (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 23).

For its pro-mortalist and deprivationist implications, examine (2) and (4). The asymmetry pertains to a subject. Let us call them "B". First, if B exists, the (2) presence of benefits is good. For example, the benefit of having friends—something that improves life—is good for B. If B is *deprived* of this benefit and lives friendless, then their life is worse than it could be.

Now consider (4). In B's existence, the absence of friends is bad. But if B never exists, is the absence of friends bad?[10] According to the asymmetry, not existing means having no interests or desires, as no agent is deprived or frustrated. Therefore, it is only if an agent comes into existence and develops interests that depriving or frustrating their interests is bad.

This reveals the asymmetry that challenges the Lucretian path to pro-mortalism: Before B exists (pre-natal non-existence), there is no agent deprived of life's benefits. However, once B exists, they develop interests, so being deprived of them is bad. (Conversely, obtaining them is good.) Death (posthumous non-existence) deprives B of the benefits they had or might have had. Therefore, death plays a depriving role and is, therefore, asymmetrical to pre-natal non-existence.

[10] This raises the "non-identity" problem—can we reasonably talk of a subject if "they" never exist? See Benatar (1997; 2006); Feinberg (1986); Parfit (1986).

2.2 The Metaphysics of Deprivationism

The viability and accuracy of deprivationism remain debated despite its prominence in explaining death's badness. Therefore, it is worth mentioning objections to deprivationism and why I'm assuming it to be true.

First, what is good or bad for someone usually pertains to a subject that can be affected. But if someone dies, and we say the loss of future goods is bad for them, then *how* and *when*, exactly, is it bad for them? One response is that deprivationism is false, often invoking the Epicurean view: harm must be *experiential*, which is not possible in death.[11] However, another response, answering the "how" question, suggests we can be harmed *non-experientially*. For example, Thomas Nagel (2012, 5) discusses betrayal as harmful not only in its discovery but also in itself, even if the person never experiences it.

Supposing this answers the "how" question, we must consider the "when": *When* are non-experiential harms, such as death, bad for the agent? Different possibilities include *atemporalism* (death's badness is not time-bound), *priorism* (death is bad before death), *subsequentism* (death is bad after death), *concurrentism* (death is bad at the moment of death), and *eternalism* (death is always bad for the person) (Bradley, 2009, 84).[12]

Thus, the arguments regarding deprivationism and death's badness remain open. Importantly, as discussed, deprivationism is used to deny the anti-natalism–pro-mortalism connection. Those who deny the connection must refute challenges like the Epicurean account and defend deprivationism. Indeed, this has been the main focus of

[11] Assuming a secular, non-spiritual account of death.
[12] These time-related conceptions extend to other theories of death's badness.
Benatar (2017, 117) suggests that his accounts (deprivationism and annihilation) invoke subsequentism.

the anti-natalist–pro-mortalist debate so far (McGregor and Sullivan-Bissett, 2012; Sullivan-Bissett, 2022).

However, I'll bypass this debate and assume deprivationism is true, as even if it is, it still does not prevent a pro-mortalist outcome under Benatar's anti-natalism. If it is better never to have been, and granting that death deprives us of goods, it is still better that we cease to be.

To demonstrate this, we need to do two things. The first is to describe how we assess the deprivation of value when evaluating death. The second is to describe Benatar's second anti-natalist argument—the quality-of-life (QoL) argument—to see whether the benefits of life are enough to show that death is an overall deprivation rather than an instrumental blessing.

Deprivationism, which began as a means to demonstrate non-experiential harms and benefits (Feldman, 1991; Nagel, 2012), has developed into a systematic method for evaluating life and death. Thus, more technically, the deprivationist argument of the badness of death can be understood as a *comparativist* method of evaluation based on comparing two or more states of value.[13] (For clarity, I'll stick to the term deprivationism.) Such comparisons can be intra- or interpersonal. Since I'm focusing on the badness of the death of a particular agent *for* the particular agent—say, the badness of B's death *for* B—I'll discuss intrapersonal deprivationism only.

To understand whether B's death would be bad for them, first, take B's life at a particular point in time, *t*. Then, compare two scenarios: (i) B's life continues, as expected, after *t*,

[13] Also termed the Lifetime Comparative Account (LCA) or Counterfactual Comparative Account (CCA).

versus, (ii) in a counterfactual scenario, B dies at *t*, and their life does not continue thereafter.[14] In scenario (ii), we assess whether B's death is overall good or bad based on the value—good and bad things in life—they would have had in (i) had they not died.

For example, assume death has a well-being value of zero, so a life with an overall value above zero is good, and a life with an overall value below zero is bad.[15] Suppose the value B expects after *t*, if their life continues in (i), is negative (say, –100 units). In this case, B's death in (ii) would be good overall, preventing negative value from transpiring. In other words, death denies B experiencing overall negative value in the future; therefore, their life is *not* worth continuing after *t*. Conversely, if B's future value after *t* is positive (say, 100 units), their death in (ii) would be bad overall, as it deprives them of positive value overall; therefore, their life is worth continuing after *t*.

With the deprivationist method explained, we can move on to the Benatarian QoL argument, which details the value of people's lives and shows how some lives are better than others. Despite some lives being better than others, I'll argue that no life is worth continuing under the Benatarian QoL argument. Therefore, this implies that the deprivationist defence does not avoid a pro-mortalist outcome.

2.3 Quality of Life and Subjective Appraisals

Benatar (2006, 92; 2017, 67) has little optimism regarding the quality of people's lives, claiming that the quality "of even the best lives … is actually very poor", and a "charmed life is so rare that for every one such life there are millions of wretched lives". For example, it is likely that we all experience daily harm. That is, we all experience regular discomfort,

[14] On counterfactual worlds and deprivationism, see Belshaw (2014, 100-110); Bradley (2009, 48-60); Feit (2002, 377-381); McMahan (1988); Wareham (2009, 250-252).
[15] This assumption is suitable for this paper. For more, see Bradley (2009, 98).

whether it be hunger, thirst, weariness, tiredness, or a headache. Moreover, we regularly experience frustration and irritation. Besides frustration and irritation, many people experience self-deprecation, false acclamation, grief, anxiety, and depression. For example, in 2017, approximately 10.7 per cent of people suffered from some form of a mental health disorder (Roser et al., 2021).

Finally, diseases and viruses are widespread. In 2020, cancer caused nearly ten million deaths, which was about one in six deaths (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 60; WHO, 2022). Such ailments are rarely instantaneous, sometimes inducing severe harm and decrepitude before eventual death. Many will find this outlook pessimistic. I shall not assess whether Benatar's assessment is accurate; I will only illustrate that, assuming it is accurate, it follows that death must be good for the person who dies.

Hereon, the route to pro-mortalism will not necessarily be straightforward. As shall be shown, in attempting to grant the benefit of the doubt, there will be cases where death *might* be bad. However, these cases, as shall be shown, will be based on seriously improbable lives, such that it is unlikely any such lives exist. As such, it is likely that all lives under the QoL argument are subject to pro-mortalism.

Thus, let us provide an assessment of the pro-mortalist implications of Benatar's anti-natalism. First, recall death's role in deprivationist calculations: it is instrumentally good if life after *t* is overall bad and instrumentally bad if life after *t* is overall good. Consider B as living a typical life through the QoL argument. The not-so-rosy assessment, alongside the claim that even the best lives are very poor (Benatar, 2017, 67), means that unless B is one of the rare outliers for whom life *is not* very poor, their quality of life is quite terrible, corresponding to a life with an overall negative value after *t*. Of course, B will have fulfilled

desires, moments of achievement, and perhaps love. But, equally, such goodness is exceeded by respective counterparts[16]—unfulfilled desires, failure, and heartbreak, respectively (Benatar, 2006, 70-71). Thus, the quality of B's life and the anticipated value after *t* is negative overall, and not just mildly negative. As a result, death would not deprive B of a good life but would instead spare them from a bad one.

However, we should aim to identify the strongest case for a good life under the QoL argument. Such a life might have overall positive value after *t* and thus be worth continuing. Whether such a life is possible under the QoL argument is another question. Still, let us first identify the best life. To do so, we must identify the value of death when it occurs *at the worst possible time*.

Benatar (2017, 130) states, "as one ages beyond one's prime, the badness of death gradually diminishes … because death deprives one of less".[17] So, there is a prime in one's life at which point death would be the worst it can be because it deprives one the most. In old age, one has passed one's prime. This is because those in old age are more likely to suffer from decline, decrepitude, and various age-related ailments (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 50-69). Such ailments subtract from the goods of life and reduce the goods one is deprived of in death. Therefore, one's prime is before old age when one has sufficient interests, is most likely free from physical ailments, and has a greater capacity to fulfil desires. Thus, this prime is when death is worst.

[16] "the most intense pleasures are short-lived whereas the worst pains can be much more enduring … Chronic pain is rampant, but there is no such thing as chronic pleasure" (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 48-49).

[17] Benatar (2017, 129) employs Jeff McMahan's (2002) time-relative interests account.
Further, McMahan and Benatar argue that infant deaths are less bad than adult deaths, generally speaking, since infants lack psychological connectedness and, therefore, have fewer interests. (Similar reasoning is provided by Christopher Belshaw (2012b), who argues that the deaths of infants and non-human animals are not bad for them.) See Bradley (2009, 113-154) for objections.

However, that dying in one's prime is the worst time to die does not demonstrate that death would be bad overall. It only suggests that some deaths are worse than others. Further, it's all relative to the conception that *even the best lives* are very poor (Benatar, 2017, 67). Thus, though one's prime is when one has the best possible life, it does not negate the magnitude of harm one still has to confront, such as illness, daily hunger, irritation, frustration, and potential psychological issues that are prime-indiscriminative.

Still, perhaps we can strengthen the prime case further in favour of death being bad overall by idealising a prime life with *even less* harm after *t*. That is, envision a prime life also free from age-indiscriminative harms, such as chronic conditions, interpersonal strife, mental health issues, and limitations to the pursuit of desires. Could we suggest that such a life has it good enough for death to be bad overall?

On the one hand, such a prime and harm-free life has the best chance of being worth continuing. However, examine the stringent criteria that got us to this point: we've focused on a very narrow subgroup—those in their prime—for which life is *relatively* better, and we've also removed nearly unavoidable harms of life. Such lives are extraordinarily rare, if they exist at all. Thus, whilst we can say it is *worse* to die in one's prime than in old age, the kind of prime life we're searching for to demonstrate a bad death overall is (i) not clearly a life worth continuing given the significant number and severity of harms and, in its even narrower form, (ii) unrealistic under the QoL argument.[18]

[18] The argument here addresses an important question: Is it true of a reasonable number of people that at some point in their lives, enough bad things are behind them and enough good things are to come, such that death would be bad overall, even if their lives hold more harm than good overall?
Essentially, my argument demonstrates that, *under the QoL argument*, there are *no* people with enough bad things behind them and enough good things to come for their lives to be worth continuing. In attempting to identify such people with lives worth continuing, we modified the prime life to have *even less* harm. In doing so, it simply became infeasible, *under the QoL argument*, that such lives are reasonably possible.

At this point, it may seem that all lives are not worth continuing under Benatar's QoL. However, there are further considerations that might make a difference. Plausibly, when we consider personal value, we might differentiate between how we *perceive* things as going and how things are *actually* going. That is, one can feel a particular way about something despite an all-things-considered assessment yielding a different conclusion, for better or worse.

The QoL argument we discussed above is what Benatar describes as an "objective" assessment of life—how things *actually* are.[19] However, the fact that we can perceive things differently can affect how things actually are. In other words, if we *perceive* life as better than it actually is, then life will actually be better.

> Thinking that one's life is better than it actually is can make it better than it would otherwise be … whereby a positive subjective assessment actually improves one's objective wellbeing (Benatar, 2017, 70; Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 44).

These perceptions that modify the actual quality of life are "subjective appraisals". I'll now focus on their role since they might improve one's quality of life. If so, it might be possible that they can improve one's quality of life to such an extent that death would become bad overall.

Subjective appraisals can be more optimistically or pessimistically biased. For example, consider a tendency towards optimism. Many readers will disagree with the QoL argument, believing their lives to be much better. This, too, is what Benatar predicts, stating it is the result of psychological biases that gear us towards a more positive

[19] Benatar (2006, 69-88) discusses three accounts of well-being—hedonism, desire-satisfactionism, and objective list theories—and how life goes badly on all of them, which might support his claim of objectivity.

outlook.[20] They include (1) the Pollyanna Principle, which is "a tendency towards optimism" (Benatar, 2006, 64-65).[21] (2) Adaptation and fulfilment of desires, such that if one's life is going poorly, one will lower their expectations to more feasibly obtainable goods (Benatar, 1997, 352-353; 2006, 67-72; Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 42-43).[22] And (3) comparison, where one evaluates one's life quality vis-à-vis others (Benatar, 2006, 68-69; Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 43-54).[23]

Whether these biases are actually present in quality-of-life assessments is beside the point.[24] The key question is whether these biases, as positive subjective appraisals, *could* make a sufficient difference to one's quality of life and imply that death would be an overall deprivation despite the "objective" quality-of-life assessment. For example, if one's value after *t* is, say, –20 units in quality, but a positive subjective appraisal provides the value of 30 units, then, based on the positive subjective appraisal, one's value after *t* would now be 10 units in quality overall and, thus, worth continuing.

This possibility of subjective appraisals influencing one's quality-of-life and, ipso facto, relationship to death warrants further exploration. This exploration is made possible by Benatar's discussion of a *threshold* for a life worth continuing. There are, Benatar claims, three ways in which one can stand in relation to the threshold. I will lay these out below and discuss their implications for pro-mortalism.

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[20] Benatar (2017, 69) states that these biases have an important evolutionary role: "They militate against suicide and [are] in favour of reproduction".

[21] See Benatar and Wasserman (2015); Boucher and Osgood (1969); Colman (2009); Matlin (2016).

[22] Living in extreme poverty, people may only desire basic survival needs. In fulfilling such needs, one might view one's life positively, even if outsiders see it as impoverished. See Fiddick and Barrett (2001); Gittleman (2022); Lyubomirsky (2010); Schmitt and Pilcher (2004).

[23] For example, one might have a good life compared to others, but it can still be bad, all things considered. On social comparison theory, see Goethals (1986); Suls and Wheeler (2013); Wood (1996).

[24] For discussions, see (1) Trisel (2012) and Benatar's (2012) reply. (2) Hauskeller (2022) and Benatar's (2022) reply.

> i) Those that even in the absence of the [subjective appraisal] feedback loop, are above the threshold that renders a life prudentially worth continuing.
>
> ii) Those sufficiently beneath this threshold that the [subjective appraisal] feedback loop does not render life prudentially worth continuing (even if one cannot see that oneself).
>
> iii) Those whose objective quality, absent the subjective over-estimation, is just below the threshold. In these cases, the effect of the subjective assessment on the objective quality might be sufficient for death not (yet) to be in one's interests (Benatar, 2022, 148).[25]

If life is worth continuing, its quality suggests it is overall good; thus, death would be a deprivation (instrumentally bad). On the other hand, if life is not worth continuing, then its quality suggests it is overall bad, and death would not, all things considered, be a deprivation (instrumentally good). Therefore, we can deem the threshold to be that if one is above it, their life is overall good, and if one is below it, their life is overall bad. The question now is, in which category do people find themselves?

Since most, if not all, people have very poor lives, according to the QoL argument, this suggests that bad things outweigh good things significantly. If so, then most people fall below the threshold for a life worth continuing, and as such, death would be good. In turn, this rules out i). Thus, most people are either in ii) or iii).

In paying special attention to iii), we get a greater sense of the role of subjective appraisals. First of all, subjective appraisals play an influencing role, albeit a limited one.[26] That is, if one's life is *really* bad, such that they fall into ii), then a cheery outlook will not

[25] Matej Sušnik (2020, 289) argues that Benatar's threshold for a life worth continuing is too low vis-à-vis his "objective" quality-of-life assessment: If life's quality is measured *sub specie aeternitatis*—from the perspective of the universe—for which all human lives are awful, then why is the worth-continuing threshold relativised to human standards? One might argue it's the elevating role of subjective appraisals. However, such appraisals are likely trivial compared to *sub specie aeternitatis* standards.

[26] This is important for Benatar as influential subjective appraisals could undermine his anti-natalist arguments. If these appraisals are crucial to the quality of life and continued living, they might also make procreation desirable (Sullivan-Bissett, 2022, 97).

make a significant difference to whether they would be better off dead. However, if we can say most people fall into iii), then should such people have a positive outlook, they *might* rise above the threshold. If this were the case, we could say their deaths would be bad.

However, the overwhelming impression from the QoL argument is that most lives are markedly poor. Indeed, part of the reason Benatar argues that most, if not all, people should not procreate is not because life is slightly worse than good enough but rather because it is much worse than we generally (wish to) believe. If so, it is implausible to suggest that the quality of peoples' lives is anything but ii). And even more so, no matter how happy one is about life, it will not change the fact that one's death would be instrumentally good.

Still, we should provide the benefit of the doubt and suggest that some lives are in iii). To do so, we might suggest that those just below the threshold are in their prime. Thus, should those in their prime positively evaluate their life, they *might* breach the threshold, and so their deaths *might* be bad.

Pay special attention to "might"; for even granting this point, for one's death to be an overall deprivation and bad under the QoL argument, there needs to be several conditions. This includes that one is in one's prime, one is unrealistically free from many likely harms, and one is sufficiently biased towards a positive outlook. Thus, we're once again narrowing the scope significantly, this time not just regarding the ideal-yet-unrealistic prime life but also the optimistic requirement of subjective appraisals. Moreover, even in taking this generous view, it still seems that one would be *barely* above the threshold and, as such, would have a life *barely* worth continuing. In other words, on this extremely generous view, death would only be a slight deprivation.

A potential objection to this conclusion is that when evaluating death based on its instrumental value, we should err on the side of caution, perceiving death as worse than it might actually be. After all, death is final, and to evaluate a death as less bad than it actually is could be a fatal and irreversible error. This objection carries some practical sensibility. It is more applicable when the pro-mortalist conclusion entails suicide, such that if one determines death as good, then one is either morally or rationally led to suicide (Benatar, 2006, 216). However, as noted, that is not my use of pro-mortalism. Recall that I'm setting aside the discussion of suicide. Therefore, this argument provides little reason to be cautious in our axiological evaluations of death.

There is an additional problem with erring on the side of caution. According to Benatar, people are more prone to an overly optimistic rather than pessimistic outlook, as the subjective appraisals demonstrate. Thus, people are more likely to *over*estimate the badness of their deaths *without* erring on the side of caution. As Benatar (2017, 186) states, "self-*under*estimates of life's quality are actually much less common than self-*over*estimates of the quality of one's life". Thus, one is much more likely to believe their life is going better (and for death to be worse) than one is to believe their life is going worse (and for death to be better).[27] Therefore, if anything, this tells us we should err on the side of caution by being more pessimistic and sceptical about evaluations from those who believe their life to be good. This only augments the difficulty of finding a bad death under the QoL argument.

[27] "Many of those who are pessimistic, depressed, or otherwise unhappy may actually have a much more accurate view of the quality of their lives than the cheery optimists who constitute the bulk of humanity" (Benatar, 2017, 187).

A final response to block pro-mortalism might be to suggest that subjective appraisals play an additional role that provides one with *reasons* to avoid death based on preferences or attitudes. That is, if B has a dispreference to pursue or obtain X despite X being good for B, then B has a reason not to pursue its obtainment based on their interests. In other words, even if death is good for B, B's subjective preference to continue living is a reason to suggest death is not in B's interests and thus provides them with a reason to avoid it.[28] However, this does not amount to much of an objection against the pro-mortalist charge. B's death is still better for B than continued living on the basis that death would put an end to an overall awful quality of life. Adding this particular interest—the desire to avoid death—does not do much to change the value. Thus, subjective appraisals might provide a reason to continue living. However, these will face counter-reasons, all the more substantiated and overshadowed by the fact that life is awful. As Benatar (2006, 219) admits, "it may be an irrational love for life that keeps many people alive when their lives have become so bad that ceasing to exist would be better".

For Benatar, in an attempt to block the pro-mortalist charge, a potential workaround here might be to inflate the role of such subjective appraisals, such that they, more so than the objective measures, determine the actual quality of life. If so—if one's quality of life is determined by one's subjective appraisals, rather than Benatar's described objective measures—then, should one subjectively perceive one's life as good, death would be bad. Thus, a pro-mortalist outcome would be avoided.

[28] Belshaw (2012a, 274) provides a similar theory, stating that "desires [are a] necessary condition of death's being bad [and] that the degree to which death is bad bears a close relation to the number and strength of those desires".

However, a fundamental issue with this line of reasoning, as alluded to (see footnote 26), is that inflating the role of subjective appraisals would undermine Benatar's original anti-natalist reasoning, particularly regarding the QoL argument. That is, the QoL argument draws its anti-natalist conclusion from the indication that *objective* measures of the quality of life are what matter, and that, measured objectively, most, if not all, lives are awful. Thus, inflating the role of subjective appraisals to avoid a pro-mortalist outcome would, for Benatar's anti-natalism, be self-defeating because, if life were generally perceived as good, there would be fewer moral reasons not to procreate.[29]

Therefore, if life is as bad as suggested in the QoL argument as Benatar frames it, then death is good for most, if not all, of us. The scenario in which death might be bad relies on several contingencies unlikely to be realised by many people, if any. That is, one must be in one's prime with heightened positive values and an unrealistic lack of negative ones, and one's subjective appraisals must also be sufficiently positive. Even then, it still seems a life barely worth continuing.

2.4 A Return to Asymmetry

The discussion so far has mainly focused on how the QoL argument relates to the badness of death. However, the implications of the discussion also extend to Benatar's anti-asymmetry argument, showing that both his asymmetry and QoL argument lead to pro-mortalism. Recall again the asymmetry argument:

1. The presence of harm is bad; and
2. the presence of [a] benefit is good,

[29] This is not to suggest that subjective appraisals or evaluations of death do not matter *simpliciter*, or that they are necessarily subjugated to so-called objective measures. Rather, the argument made here is that, prima facie, such subjective appraisals cannot be inflated *under Benatar's anti-natalism* without causing fundamental issues for the anti-natalist argument itself.

an asymmetrical evaluation applies to the absence of harm and benefit:

> 3. The absence of harm is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone; but
>
> 4. the absence of [a] benefit is not bad unless there is somebody for whom this absence is a deprivation (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 23).

Existence necessitates harm, so it is better never to have been. The question, then, becomes if existence is harmful, why not cease to be and return to the harmless state of non-existence? Recall why: there is a difference in value between the two states of (pre-natal and posthumous) non-existence. And that difference is because death deprives one of interests.

At first glance, one might interpret this to mean that the deprivation of interests due to death, *regardless* of the size or significance of the interests, is sufficient for the asymmetry to avoid a pro-mortalist outcome. In other words, the very fact that death serves a depriving role demonstrates that it is bad for us. Now, there is a case to suggest that the asymmetry argument alone implies that death is a deprivation. However, this is a weak argument to block pro-mortalism. It is weak for two reasons.

First of all, for the asymmetry to avoid a pro-mortalist outcome here, we must use a form of deprivationism that is overly simplistic, in which we do not refer to good and bad values *overall*. That is, all we're doing is assessing whether any single deprivation exists. However, this doesn't capture the essence of deprivationism, which requires that we assess more broadly the good and bad values, or harms and benefits, *overall*. Indeed, suppose the benefits of life were shallow compared to its harms, such that one had a nice meal once a week but walked on hot coals for the rest of the week. In that case, we would surely focus on whether death would be a deprivation overall, not just the simple fact that

death would deprive one of a nice weekly meal. Therefore, we have to apply a more comprehensive version of deprivationism, such that we pertain to good and bad values overall. In the context of the discussion, this is achieved by supplementing the asymmetry with the QoL argument. When we do so, we can see that the asymmetry also implies pro-mortalism.

Second, it is also weak because the asymmetry argument alone is, in Benatar's (2012, 146) words, "insufficient to yield the anti-natalist conclusion". That is, the argument for anti-natalism is stronger when the asymmetry and QoL arguments are combined. Without the QoL argument, the asymmetry argument only demonstrates that to exist is to experience harm. However, the argument against coming into existence is weak without the qualification of *just how harmful existence is*. Thus, for a stronger anti-natalist view, the asymmetry has to be supplemented with the QoL argument. And when it is, as stated, we attain a pro-mortalist outcome.

3. Part II—Annihilation (Final Value)

3.1 Introduction

> It is entirely possible that death is bad for more than one reason. It could be that the badness of death is, at least sometimes, *overdetermined*.
>
> One possibility we should consider is that death is bad in large part because it *annihilates* the being who dies (Benatar, 2017, 102, italics added).

Thus far, we have considered death's badness regarding its deprivationist role. In this regard, I've argued that death is overall good through the lens of Benatar's anti-natalism, thus implying pro-mortalism. However, this is not an unconditional conclusion if we take seriously the claim that the badness of death can be overdetermined. In doing so, we

must move from the *instrumental* value of death to the *final* value of death. In other words, we move from the theory of *deprivationism* to the theory of *annihilation*.

Philosophically, annihilation, as a demonstration of the badness of death, is a concept far less developed than deprivationism. However, annihilation hits on an intuitive feeling about death's badness. For one, the fact that we must die and that it entails the end of the self brings about existential feelings that are difficult to negate. But whether these feelings amount to something worthy of special consideration, a true reflection of its badness, remains to be seen. In what follows, I'll explore annihilation as an idea about the badness of death and analyse it in relation to anti-natalism. I'll argue that, through the lens of anti-natalism, annihilation ultimately fails to block a pro-mortalist conclusion.

Before assessing the arguments for annihilation's badness, we must understand what annihilation is.[30] According to Benatar, in its simplest terms, annihilation is death. However, more specifically, it is best understood as a particular conception of death. Consider two possible conceptions: psychological death and biological death. Psychological death refers to the irreversible end of "personal conscious experience", including the permanent cessation of "memories, consciousness, attachments, values, beliefs, desires, goals, and perspectives" (Benatar, 2017, 120). Biological death is what we technically call *clinical death*, the cessation of vital biological functions.[31] Thus, importantly, psychological death can occur prior to biological death, such as in a

[30] Similar to Part I, I'll bypass metaphysical concerns, such as the timing problem, the missing subject problem, and counter-arguments like the Epicurean response.

[31] Frederik Kaufman (1999) similarly describes these as "thick" (psychological) conceptions of the self—one's personal conscious experience—and "thin" (biological) conceptions of the self—one's metaphysical essence.

permanent comatose state, where one's conscious self has permanently ceased, but one remains alive biologically.

Benatar (2017, 109) describes annihilation as psychological death: "The irreversible cessation of consciousness *is* annihilation of the conscious being". Moreover, we can extend this definition to include the broader spectrum of personal consciousness, such as one's memories, beliefs, desires, and attachments.

There is good reason for defining annihilation as psychological death, particularly when attempting to understand why it might be bad. For one reason, if fear and regret track bad things, it is usually (with exceptions to discuss later on) the case that we regret and fear psychological death over biological death, where the latter is primarily feared when it also causes the former (Benatar, 2017, 135). Moreover, consider a couple of general views about death's badness to support the above-stated conception of annihilation as psychological death.

First, the death of a young child or an adult is often perceived as worse than that of an infant, whose personal conscious experience is either non-existent or not yet developed enough to render their death a severe loss (Benatar, 2017, 131).[32] Second, consider diseases like dementia or conditions such as irreversible persistent vegetative states (PVSs). Such states might well be described as worse than biological death, reducing one to an undignified living. Furthermore, in both cases, there has been some form of psychological death—an annihilation of one's psychological biography in dementia and an annihilation of one's total conscious experience in a PVS—but not yet biological death.

[32] Ben Bradley (2009, 113-154) has argued otherwise, stating that a baby's death is worse than a 23-year-old's death. Bradley's argument also affects, as they discuss, the badness of death for non-human animals.

This reinforces the idea that annihilation, as the irreversible termination of personal consciousness, is best understood as psychological death rather than biological death.

3.2 Badness and Value

In understanding annihilation, the key question is whether, and to what extent, it is bad. To many, it might seem obviously bad. However, beyond intuition, we must be precise about the value of annihilation, for the aim here is not just to detail whether and, if so, to what extent it is bad but also its badness in relation to the anti-natalist arguments. In turn, we will be able to describe whether anti-natalism leads to pro-mortalism *absolutely* or whether annihilation, as a fate worse than continued living, provides a backstop to an absolute pro-mortalist outcome.

To answer this, we must understand the axiological status of annihilation. In Part I, death vis-à-vis deprivationism was described as *instrumental* value—its value is related and a means to other forms of value. But how should we conceptualise annihilation's value? Is annihilation bad "in itself" as an *intrinsic* bad? Or is annihilation's badness extrinsic, deriving its badness from its relationship to other values? Here, there is some ambiguity, not just in the discussion of annihilation but also in the literature on value. I'll attempt to untangle some value concepts and provide a plausible understanding of the value form of annihilation.

Intrinsic value is value in itself, independent of circumstances, desires, or interests. For example, suppose the experience of pleasure is intrinsically good. Thus, whether or not I desire such pleasure does not alter the intrinsic value of the pleasure itself. Extrinsic value, in contrast, "is derived from or dependent upon the circumstances". For example,

a water container has no intrinsic value, for its value comes from its utility and use in carrying water, making its value circumstantial, or extrinsic (Korsgaard, 1983, 170-171).

Is annihilation's value intrinsic or extrinsic? Benatar frames annihilation as distinct from deprivationism, suggesting that death's badness can be overdetermined even when death is not a deprivation.[33] This would give us reason to consider the value form of annihilation different from deprivationism, such that the former, unlike the latter, is intrinsic. However, Benatar's work is ambiguous, and in reading his discussion of annihilation, one can get mixed impressions. For example, at one point, Benatar (2017, 108) seems to imply annihilation has intrinsic disvalue,[34] while elsewhere, he suggests it makes no difference "whether we see [annihilation] as the *deprivation* of an additional good or as a further loss over and above any deprivations it may cause" (Benatar, 2017, 110).

Contra Benatar, we now know that it does make a difference how we understand the value of annihilation. This is because if annihilation is simply another deprivation of an additional good, then it collapses into deprivationism. And given that deprivationism failed to prevent pro-mortalism, annihilation would not alter the conclusion. Thus, we should provide the benefit of the doubt and explore the possibility of annihilation as a bad *independent of* deprivationism or, at the very least, whether it represents a deprivation of extraordinary consideration and value.

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[33] Consider a cavalry officer who, were he not killed by a first bullet, would have been killed by a second bullet moments later, which demonstrates there was no substantial deprivation resulting from his death by the first bullet. However, annihilation can demonstrate that the officer's death was still bad (Benatar, 2017, 132-133).

[34] This refers to a case of mourning, in which Benatar (2017, 108) states the reasons for mourning can be explained if "the loss of the person *himself* counted for something" (italics added). By itself, this statement might not directly pertain to intrinsic value. However, Benatar begins the next paragraph by stating "Those resistant to the idea that annihilation can be bad *in itself* for the one who dies might retort that we mourn the dead (for their sake)" (italics added), thus suggesting that the antecedent paragraph was an argument for the intrinsic (dis)value of death.

To do so, let us provide a more detailed description of how annihilation possesses value. I'll put forward suggestions (my own and from the literature, which I, in turn, expand on) that annihilation possesses *extrinsic* (dis)value, which implies that its disvalue derives from the value of something else.[35] In this case, its badness derives from its relationship to personal conscious experience, specifically from destroying what is important about it. This relationship can take different forms. For example, it could be based on taking away the intrinsic value of the *properties* of personal conscious experience, its value as a *state of affairs*, or as a *fact* in the world—that personal conscious experience exists (Zimmerman and Bradley, 2019, 22-23).[36] I'll expand on these potential conceptions shortly (next section). However, the fundamental point is that I'll put forward cases that suggest that annihilation *derives* its value from personal conscious experience and is, therefore, extrinsic.

What does this mean for its pro-mortalist implications? If annihilation is extrinsic, like deprivationism, in that they both derive their (dis)value from something else, can we combine them? In other words, is it suitable to perceive annihilation as the deprivation of an additional good(s)? On the one hand, both of their value forms are circumstantial; however, there is another subtle form of value that distinguishes them, and so it is unsuitable to equivocate the two. This other form of value distinguishes between *instrumental* value and *final* value. As has been discussed, instrumental value is value as

[35] This conception is more evident when Benatar says that annihilation is bad because it "thwarts the interest we have in continuing to exist" (Benatar, 2017, 123).
This point is a mere footnote for two reasons. First, this loose definition of annihilation confounds its actual definition. Second, defining annihilation as thwarting one's interest in continued living assimilates it with the deprivation account. Thus, describing annihilation as psychological death provides the benefit of the doubt.
[36] On these three value conceptions, see Butchvarov (1989), Chisholm (1981), and Ross (2002), respectively.

a means to an end, whereas final value, as I'll discuss, is value for its own sake, not as a means to an end.

As discussed, deprivationism is tied to instrumental value: Death is a means to more or less value, depending on one's circumstances. This also showcases its extrinsic value. Yet, *something being extrinsic does not necessarily imply instrumentality*. This is an oft-mistaken equivocation.[37] Instead, intrinsic and extrinsic value should be understood as *explanations* of value, describing *how* something possesses value—in itself or in relation to another property. On the other hand, final and instrumental values detail a *fittingness*, or an *attitude*, that corresponds to the value (Garcia and Braun, 2022, 7).

To see this distinction more clearly, consider a sunset. According to Christine Korsgaard (1983, 172), it is *fitting* to value a sunset for its own sake, such that it has final value. It would be odd to value it instrumentally, purely as a means to something else, such as happiness. Yet, valuing it for its own sake does not imply it has intrinsic value, for if you had an intense migraine, you might not be able to enjoy the sunset. This demonstrates that watching a sunset is valuable depending on the circumstances, so its explanatory value is extrinsic, but being extrinsic does not, as demonstrated, imply it is instrumental.[38]

Returning to annihilation, I've stated it has extrinsic (dis)value, like deprivationism. However, annihilation does not have instrumental value, or, at least, not merely.[39] With examples to come shortly, I'll put forward arguments to suggest annihilation has final

[37] One example comes from Bradley (2009, 3), who seemingly conflates extrinsic and instrumental value.
[38] Different values of fittingness are possible. Consider that "Excellence in practical arts and paper clips both have their uses" (Garcia and Braun, 2022, 10)—they're both extrinsic and instrumental. However, excellence in practical arts also possesses final value. Absent its role as a means to an end, it demonstrates desirable qualities, such as commitment and dedication—qualities fitting to appreciate beyond instrumental use.
[39] Annihilation may have other forms of disvalue, such as moral disvalue (e.g., by annihilating a moral agent) or "sentimental" disvalue (e.g., by denying "the capacity to invoke our sentiments" through the annihilation of personal conscious experience (Tucker, 2016, 1921)).

(dis)value, meaning it is fitting to value it as bad for its own sake, not merely as a means to another end.

It is important to note that these suggestions about annihilation's value are preliminary. For one, the debate on value rages on, and there are many competing understandings.[40] I cannot provide an exhaustive analysis here. However, on a preliminary account, it is most charitable to describe annihilation as having a distinct value form vis-à-vis deprivationism. If it doesn't, then annihilation collapses into deprivationism, and we already have a pro-mortalist outcome.[41] Thus, I'll now consider different arguments (or, in weaker forms, intuitions) that may describe the extrinsic and final disvalue of annihilation and how these relate to pro-mortalism.

1. Ego Death

Perhaps annihilation is bad because it is the loss of the self, or what I'll call "ego death", and all it entails, such as the loss of "memories, values, beliefs, perspectives, hopes" (Benatar, 2017, 104). That annihilation entails the loss of these things, we might say, provides final disvalue to annihilation. In other words, annihilation implies "everything for oneself is *all over*" (Kamm, 1998, 19) and "the very *I* that has had these experiences is what is now going to end" (Scheffler, 2013, 86), which produces a unique final value for which it is fitting to value annihilation negatively with correspondingly negative attitudes.

[40] Miles Tucker (2016) argues that accounts of final value cannot be coherently understood since they pertain to the value of something else, whether derivatively, regarding a fitting attitude, or contributorily.
However, Facundo Rodriguez (2024) has challenged this, suggesting that differentiating between *grounding* and *enabling* conditions can help distinguish instrumental and non-instrumental value, even if the dependence base (i.e., what the thing depends on to be valued) is the same.

[41] Garcia and Braun (2022, 2) argue that deprivationism also has final (dis)value "for its own sake in virtue of its extrinsic feature of depriving us of intrinsic value."
I shall not assess this claim since it does not affect my argument, for if deprivationism has final (dis)value, then it will be a reflection of its instrumental value—whether it performs a positive or negative role—and as was shown, death is good for most, if not all, people. Thus, if deprivationism has final (dis)value, it will also support a pro-mortalist conclusion.

Yet, at the same time, this reasoning seems deprivationist. That is, we're fundamentally talking about something's (dis)value—annihilation—in regards to what it takes away—deprives—even if we're incurring an additional value—final (dis)value—in accords with what the taking-away entails or represents and how we should perceive it. In other words, talk of the badness of annihilation because it entails the loss of the self appears to imply badness in deprivation. Indeed, an existing theory of deprivationism, the General Deprivation Account (GDA), notes it is bad to be deprived of "perception, desire, activity, and thought" (Behrendt, 2019, 190-191; Nagel, 2012, 2). Therefore, we can account for ego death as part of deprivationism via the GDA.

2. Damage and Annihilation

It would be bad to damage the Mona Lisa, but it would be *worse* to annihilate (destroy) it. If this is the case, then the same reasoning might apply to people. For example, suppose damaging a painting is bad, and its annihilation is worse. In that case, this might suggest that the degradation of a person is bad and their annihilation is worse. And even in those clear cases where annihilation seems the best option, it can still be bad.

For example, imagine a painting degraded beyond repair. Suppose there is no possibility of repairing the painting. In that case, it might be better to destroy it than to leave it in disarray. Perhaps it is more dignifying or respectful to the painter to do so. And yet, even though it would be better to destroy the painting than leave it, its destruction—its annihilation—is not good. Instead, its annihilation is merely the "lesser of two bads", so it is still *regretful* (Benatar, 2017, 107).

Likewise, in the annihilation of a person, in those clear cases where it seems the better option than living, it is still bad, somewhat regretful, a *lesser evil* if we're to follow the

analogy. Indeed, it might be fitting to regret annihilation, which would demonstrate its final disvalue as a fitting attitude. If so, then it follows that we recognise something bad in annihilation, even if death was better for the person overall, like in the deprivationist–anti-natalist outcome.

If we grant the analogy, does such an outcome affect the pro-mortalist conclusion? It seems fairly inconsequential to the overall pro-mortalist evaluation, giving regret to a badness that is, as Benatar admits, outweighed by greater considerations of what is good. In other words, we can say that something of value is lost when it is annihilated (be it a painting or a person). However, it is still better that the thing in question is annihilated, owing to the undesirability of continued existence for the thing.

Moreover, that is a generous view of the analogy, for it is not clear that the analogy is accurate. For example, why consider the annihilation of a person akin to the destruction of a painting like the Mona Lisa or an incredible landscape like the Grand Canyon, seemingly highly valued works of art or natural beauty that are better to have than not to have? Instead, anti-natalist reasoning might imply that it is more accurate to compare people to other inanimate objects with drastically different values—those that are better not to have than to have—such as statues of Joseph Stalin or Pol Pot, whose destruction does not evoke feelings of regret but more celebration or relief.[42] Indeed, in tracking anti-natalist arguments such as the QoL argument, a feeling of relief seems more fitting than regret in death.

[42] Notwithstanding the desires of some Russian nationalists (Papachristou, 2024).

Benatar is no doubt honest that the analogy he makes is a weak one, and perhaps neither the annihilation of statues of Stalin nor paintings such as the Mona Lisa accurately reflect the disvalue of the annihilation of a person. In any case, even in taking it seriously, the analogy does not change the pro-mortalist outcome.

3. Mourning and Rituals

That we mourn the dead when they pass might demonstrate the badness of annihilation. First, consider why we mourn. Do we mourn a person's passing because of an absolute loss of hope or because we can no longer communicate with them? Though these reasons seem intuitive, we do not necessarily mourn for such reasons. Suppose we were to mourn for such reasons. In that case, we might mourn somebody whilst they are still biologically alive since they can be so but in a hopeless situation, such as suffering from end-stage metastatic cancer, or being entirely and irreversibly non-communicative, such as in a PVS. But even in such cases where there is no hope whilst the person is still alive, Benatar argues, we still mourn their *actual* passing, thus demonstrating the intuitive badness of annihilation (Benatar, 2017, 107-109). As a result, we can understand the badness of annihilation whilst still acknowledging that some deaths are better than continued living:

> When the [hopeless] person who had been in that situation dies and is released from his suffering, the time for celebrating would have arrived—that is, unless the death, although preferable, nonetheless was a serious bad. That bad, I suggest, is the annihilation of the one who died (Benatar, 2017, 109).

However, this argument runs into trouble. Recall that annihilation is psychological death: the irreversible cessation of consciousness. But if so, the mourning in the above cases occurs *sometime after* annihilation. That is, for the non-communicative, hopeless individual in a PVS, annihilation has already occurred whilst they remain alive biologically,

and so mourning should begin at the point of their annihilation prior to biological death. Therefore, this argument does not demonstrate the badness of annihilation.

4. Limbo Man

The final argument that might demonstrate the badness of annihilation pertains to Frances Kamm's (1998) *Limbo Man*. Limbo Man differentiates from deprivationism (the loss of future goods) by focusing on the "*fact* that the goods and the person will be over forever" (Kamm, 1998, 49, italics added). The fact that everything will be over leads to an additional bad, demonstrated by Limbo Man's decision to delay annihilation for no reason other than a preference to delay the end, even when doing so yields no additional benefit.

Limbo Man (Figure 2) has two choices. First, Limbo Man can live life as normal until death—a regular life, as it were. Alternatively, part way through life, Limbo Man can enter a coma. This coma will delay Limbo Man's ageing and pause their conscious experience until they reawaken to experience the remainder of their life before death. This alternative offer—entering a coma—offers a longer lifespan by delaying death, even though the increased duration of life *is not* consciously experienced, and *no* additional goods are gained compared to the regular life (Kamm, 1998, 49-50). Additionally, the coma does not alter the life experiences Limbo Man would otherwise have had (Benatar, 2017, 106). For instance, family members, friends, and everything else is "paused" so that, when entering the coma, Limbo Man does not miss out on anything else valuable.

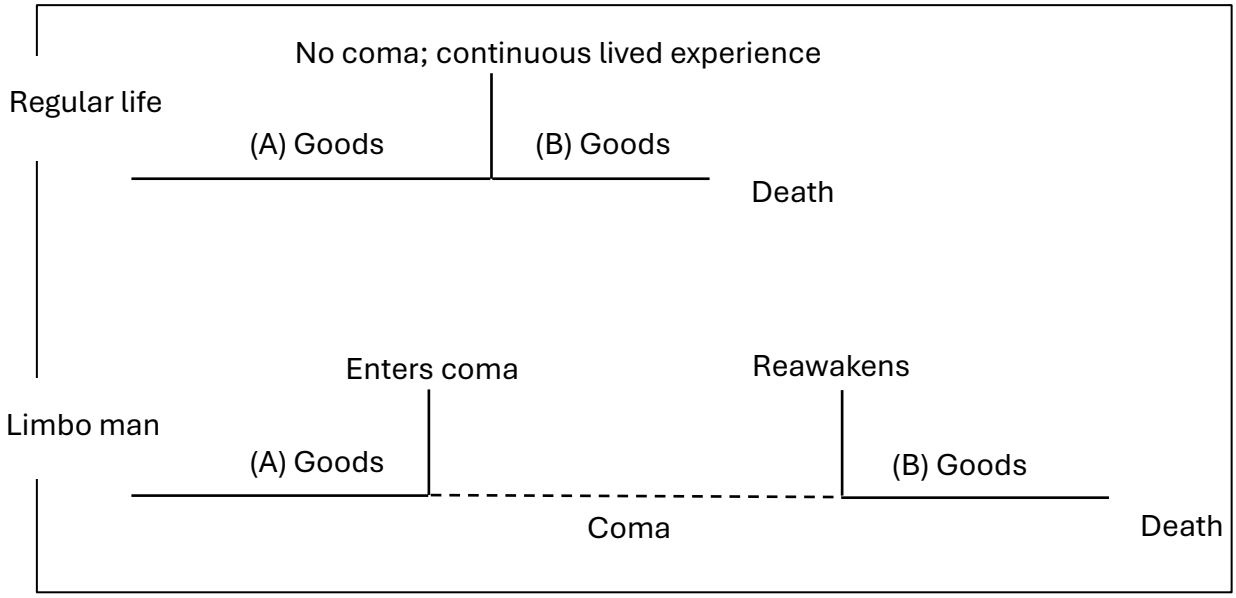

FIGURE 2. Limbo Man (Kamm, 1998, 50).[43]

Thus, Limbo Man enters the coma solely to delay annihilation. This choice demonstrates that annihilation's badness lies in the fact that it entails that everything will end. The desire to postpone this inevitability stems from that fact alone:

> Since we could prefer to postpone things being all over, even if this did not increase the total amount of goods we had in our life, we must be trying to avoid something about death other than that it diminishes the amount of goods of life we have [i.e., deprivationism] (Kamm, 1998, 19).

Limbo Man, then, suggests that death's badness is not fully explained by deprivationism but also by annihilation—the irreversible end of the self. But does this successfully demonstrate annihilation's badness, and if so, does it matter for the pro-mortalist conclusion?

[43] Limbo Man also produces a pre-natal and posthumous non-existence asymmetry since "prenatal nonexistence does not foreclose the possibility of the continuation of life once begun", whereas posthumous non-existence does (Kamm, 1998, 49). Moreover, Kamm (1998, 51) argues that Limbo Man would not have the preference to exist earlier in a comatose, non-experiential state. That is, there's no desire to extend one's life "backwards" by non-experientially existing earlier, whereas once alive, there's a desire, according to Limbo Man, to non-experientially extend one's life into the future.

I'm unconvinced that Limbo Man demonstrates the badness of annihilation. Moreover, even in endorsing Limbo Man's success in this regard, I'm even more uncertain it has any real significance, particularly regarding our pro-mortalist concerns. First of all, the desire to enter the coma to delay annihilation is a *preference*, one grounded in fear, a response to the terror of death (Kamm, 1998, 52-53). This is not to say Limbo Man fails to provide any significance to death's badness. After all, if Limbo Man represents the terror of death by showing that we would rather delay it for no reason other than delaying it, then it might be a suitable representation of annihilation's final disvalue: it is fitting to disvalue annihilation for no reason other than it is the end of one's life (personal conscious experience), which entails a rather unique and debilitating fact—no more of anything! However, that one might enter the coma as a personal *preference* implies no tangible axiological implications in choosing whether or not to enter the coma. As such, whereas the badness of death via deprivationism demonstrates genuine axiological authority in showing which outcome (death or no death) generates more or less value, Limbo Man does not do so, demonstrating instead that avoidance of annihilation is merely a preference.[44]

Furthermore, the axiological importance of deprivationism (and weakness of annihilation) is demonstrated when Kamm (1998, 52) offers a different choice: Suppose you're offered the choice between (a) entering the coma or (b) continuing life as normal but receiving *slightly more* goods before death so the total amount of goods is slightly more than in (a), even though in (b), death comes sooner temporally. Accordingly, the prudent option is (b) since it implies a life with a greater amount of goods, thus avoiding the deprivation in (a),

[44] Moreover, it has been argued that talk of values such as instrumental and final value require greater objectivity (Tucker, 2016, 1920). Thus, since Limbo Man is grounded in preferences, it may be unfitting to suggest it pertains to final disvalue.

even though death happens sooner in (b). This highlights that the deprivation of additional goods in (a) is worse than the "badness" of dying sooner in (b).

In sum, while Limbo Man might illustrate a fitting attitude of fear toward annihilation, it lacks the axiological grounding to demonstrate annihilation's badness as equal to or greater than the badness of deprivation. Thus, even as a badness of death distinct from deprivationism, annihilation fails to negate a pro-mortalist outcome.

Moreover, as we have discussed, it is not clear whether annihilation *is* distinct from deprivationism. Starting with Benatar, there is ambiguity, and arguably indifference, as to whether annihilation should be something distinct or represent a further deprivation of an additional good. In theory, either view could work. Whether an additional deprivation or an independent bad, if the badness of annihilation were bad enough, it could change the pro-mortalist outcome to the extent that anti-natalism does not imply pro-mortalism *absolutely*. But this is not so. The outcome here is much more limited, such that, on the strongest account—Limbo Man—annihilation is *preferably* delayed, perhaps inducing a final disvalue of fear or terror (supposing the value is fitting despite Limbo Man's lack of objectivity), owing to what it entails. However, as showcased by a modification to Limbo Man, this preference or attitude is outweighed by considerations of deprivation, such that the badness of death considers the deprivation of additional goods weightier than its being all over. As such, in light of the conclusion in Part I, annihilation fails to modify (or block) the existing pro-mortalist outcome.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to provide an answer to the anti-natalist–pro-mortalist question. Before this contribution, the question had been raised several times, often in

passing but sometimes directly as a primary research question. However, to my knowledge, no other work has addressed the question to the same extent and scope as I have here. I hope to have thus furthered and informed the discussion, setting up future discussions in anti-natalist literature about its relation to, for example, extinction and suicide. Moreover, I hope to have developed the annihilation theory of the badness of death, detailing how it possesses value and how we might understand its badness in itself and in relation to deprivationism and anti-natalism. In all, I have argued that the popular anti-natalism discussed implies pro-mortalism, such that if it is true that it is better never to have been, then it is better to cease to be.

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WHOSE DEATH IS IT, ANYWAY? DEVELOPING SUBJECTIVE EVALUATIONS OF DEATH

I argue that we ought to take seriously a person's subjective evaluation of death since it tells us, in part, whether the person's death is good or bad for them. It may seem obvious that we ought to take seriously such evaluations. However, the inclusion of such is not obvious when, say, an agent does not desire death, but death seems good for them on all other measures. Here, one solution would be to disregard the agent's desire or interest as irrational. However, this, I argue, neglects what it means to live the life in question. Instead, the agent's interest in death ought to matter greatly to whether death is good or bad for them, even in cases where such interests seem irrational. Thus, to demonstrate the importance of subjective evaluations in death, I describe and defend them against objections. I also discuss them in relation to the Lifetime Comparative Account (LCA), a widely used means for evaluating death. I assess cases where these two evaluative means "come apart". For such split cases, I present a *provisional* formulation for reconciling subjective evaluations of death with the LCA. The main argument, however, is that such subjective evaluations of death matter greatly.

This paper breaks from the primary theme of anti-natalism to develop a novel account of the badness of death. Given the ambitions of the paper, a detailed incorporation of anti-natalism would extend far beyond the length of a standard paper. Moreover, it may appear that, in light of the previous paper, an argument for subjective evaluations of death contrasts with the conclusion provided there. However, it is important to note that the conclusions derived in the previous paper were based on Benatar's anti-natalism, and so it does not imply that subjective evaluations of death are unimportant simpliciter.

Furthermore, there is the potential for this paper to supplement anti-natalist–pro-mortalist discussions, such as in the previous paper, insofar as it provides additional argumentation and lines of reasoning. In the case of Benatar's anti-natalism, however, I take the position that, on a prima facie view, if subjective evaluations of death were perceived as fundamental constituents of an accurate evaluation, then the anti-natalist arguments themselves would be undermined. Thus, if so, Benatar cannot appeal to strengthened subjective evaluations to avoid a pro-mortalist outcome. Nevertheless, the arguments made in this paper can, as mentioned, supplement such anti-natalist–pro-mortalist discussions.

1. Introduction

How ought we understand the value of an agent's death if death seems, on many measures, good for them, and yet they have a strong desire not to die? One means is to deny that their desire is relevant to the assessment of death or, at least, downplay its significance. In such a case, we might be inclined to label the agent's desire, perhaps somewhat justifiably, as irrational. However, in this paper, I will put forth an argument that subjective evaluations, or interests, of death should be taken seriously.[1] In other words, regardless of whether we find an agent's subjective evaluation agreeable or not—rational or irrational—it partly determines how bad death would be for the agent in question.

Of course, that we should take seriously such evaluations from such agents might be obvious to some, regardless of whether the evaluations appear irrational or not. Still, in the literature on the value of death, there is a tendency to evaluate a subject's death based on a much larger framework that pertains to theories of well-being, which, in turn, neglects subjective evaluations, or so I will argue. Therefore, I will discuss subjective evaluations of death in relation to a popular framework for evaluating death that makes use of well-being theories, the Lifetime Comparative Account (LCA).

Moreover, in challenging cases in which how an agent values their death and how the LCA values their death differ, I will attempt to bring together both evaluations to improve the LCA's accuracy. The key upshot is that LCA evaluations of death are important and accurate, but so too are subjective evaluations of death, which have hitherto been understated.

[1] I use subjective "interests" and "evaluations" interchangeably when appropriate. As I'll show, the evaluation is grounded in interests.

To start, I will clarify notions of well-being and value. For this reason, in Section 2, I describe the LCA and apply it to evaluations of death. Then, in Section 3, I frame and provide arguments for the significance of subjective evaluations of death. I discuss objections and ambiguities and provide reasons to take subjective evaluations of death seriously. Then, in Section 4, I discuss the tension between subjective evaluations and the LCA, and I discuss how we might incorporate subjective evaluations into the LCA in the most suitable way. I argue that we should incorporate subjective evaluations of death into the LCA so that the subjective evaluations play an *influencing* role; however, I state that this is tentative. Section 5 concludes.

2. Lifetime Comparative Account (LCA)

The philosophical debate about the value of death goes back many millennia. As early as the Ancient Greeks, Epicurus sought to argue that death is neither good nor bad for us. The Epicurean view of the badness of death opposes the idea that death can be bad for the person who dies by stating that one is not harmed by death since death is not experienced.[2] The Epicurean view thus presupposes that goodness or badness must be experiential.[3]

However, many find the idea that death can be bad for the person who dies compelling. One of the most popular philosophical responses to the Epicurean view is the deprivationist defence, which claims that our deaths can *deprive* us of certain goods—things we would have had were it not for our deaths.[4] These deprivations need not be

[2] See Bradley et al. (2012) on the Epicurean view of death.
[3] The Epicurean account is based on the well-being theory of hedonism—that good and bad value is the experience of pleasure and the absence of pain, respectively.
[4] Early proprietors include Feldman (1991); Nagel (2012). See Steven Luper (2021, 27-31) for an overview of deprivationism.

experiential. For example, the defenders of this view argue that one can be harmed by betrayal even if one neither experiences the betrayal nor any subsequent effects of it (Nagel, 2012, 5). If your death does, indeed, deprive you of certain goods, then, according to deprivationism, death is bad for you. Thus, such an account of the badness of death can overcome the Epicurean view by denying the experience requirement.[5]

Deprivationism has been systematised into a theoretical account for calculating the value of death based on the goods of which the subject is deprived.[6] This is the Lifetime Comparative Account (LCA), or comparativism. One can find variations of the LCA throughout the literature.[7] Here, I will use "LCA" to refer to a deprivationist way of calculating the value of death.

The LCA analyses a person's life (and death) by looking at two or more states at a particular point in time, *t*, and comparing the subsequent value after *t*. For example, compare two scenarios: (i) Subject's life continues, as expected, after *t* versus (ii) a counterfactual scenario, which is usually a "nearest possible" counterfactual scenario, in which Subject dies at *t*, and their life does not continue thereafter. In scenario (ii), we

[5] Stephen Rosenbaum (2013) argues that deprivationism and Epicureanism are compatible. The seeming incompatibility comes from ambiguity between abstract valuations of hypothetical, comparative claims of death (deprivation) and concrete valuations regarding the state of being dead (Epicurean). According to Rosenbaum, we can think in both ways; in abstract valuations, we consider hypothetical events and how, were they to occur, they would affect the person's life. Thus, we can make judgements about death's value if it happens at a particular time without needing to solve the metaphysical conundrum of stating the concrete facts about how something can be valued from the state of being dead.
Further, Marcus Willaschek (2022) has argued for "existentialist Epicureanism". Like Rosenbaum, Willaschek doesn't deny that death can be bad, particularly non-existentially; they explicitly note that, unlike classic Epicureanism, existential value is not tied to hedonism and experience (or sensation) and is, therefore, compatible with deprivationism (Willaschek, 2022, 13). However, Willaschek states that death is not as bad as we often perceive it under existentialist Epicureanism.

[6] Deprivationism (and the LCA) face further metaphysical challenges. A few issues are the timing problem—understanding when death has value—and the no-well-being-without-being problem—assigning values (such as harm) to a non-existent being. In this paper, I shall not address these metaphysical conundrums, but for discussions, see Bradley et al. (2012); Kamm (1998); Luper (2021); Schramme (2021); Taylor (2013).

[7] See Ben Bradley's (2009) *Difference-Making Principle* for a popular theoretical framework of the LCA.

assess whether Subject's death is overall good or bad based on the value—the good and bad things in life—they would have had in (i) had they not died at *t*.

What is the most suitable "nearest possible" counterfactual scenario is open to debate.[8] But what is key is that in both (i) and (ii), the expected value for Subject after *t* is the same, with the only difference being that in (ii), Subject dies at *t*. Thus, according to the LCA, if the expected value of Subject's life for Subject after *t* is overall good, so that they expect good things more than bad things, then Subject's death in (ii) at *t* would be overall bad. On the other hand, if the expected value of Subject's life for the Subject after *t* is overall bad, such that they expect more bad things than good things, then Subject's death in (ii) at *t* is overall good.

This explains how the LCA evaluates the value of death. However, the question of how we actually measure value remains open in this view. In other words, what exactly is of positive and negative prudential value in this view?[9] Different theories of well-being tell us more about how we are to understand prudential value. Thus, the LCA might then use these theories to evaluate the value of death. For example, there are hedonistic approaches, basic and more comprehensive, which understand prudential value based on the experience of pleasure (good) and the absence of pain (where pain is understood as bad) (Bradley, 2009). Furthermore, there is desire-satisfactionism, which is the view that one's well-being level is determined by how many of one's desires are fulfilled (Crisp,

[8] On discussions regarding the suitability of counterfactual worlds in relation to well-being, see Belshaw (2014, 100-110); Bradley (2009, 48-60); Feit (2002, 377-381); McMahan (1988); Wareham (2009, 250-252).
[9] "*Prudential* value is the kind of value that something has when it is good for someone, in the sense that is conceptually tied to welfare, well-being, and self-interest" (Lin, 2025, 129).

2021, 15).[10] Finally, there are objective list theories, which state that a good life consists of having particular goods, such as friendship, happiness, and knowledge, in one's life (Crisp, 2021, 17-18; Kriegel, 2019, 12).[11]

Thus, with these well-being theories in mind, how might the LCA be interpreted most accurately? A reliable and accurate LCA will likely pertain to multiple considerations that track well-being. Thus, one might believe that this requires a consensus on how we most accurately understand well-being; however, the well-being debate is unsettled, so we cannot say with total confidence how we should employ the LCA. Still, there are certainly more accurate ways to employ the LCA than others. For example, a mere hedonistic LCA would neglect many candidates for good and bad values (unless the only values relevant to well-being are things that provide pain or pleasure experientially). Thus, we might say that an LCA based only on hedonism doesn't capture all of the necessary value.

With that, we can reasonably argue that the most plausible versions of the LCA will attempt to capture many factors relevant to well-being.[12] This might include variations of hedonism, desire satisfactionism, and objective list theories. In other words, it will include both subjective elements, which "map the polarity of welfare onto the polarity of attitudes", generally speaking, and objective elements, such that "something can be … good for me though I do not regard it favorably" (Sumner, 1995, 767-768).[13] This is because

[10] Here, I do not explicitly discuss well-being theories closely linked to desire-satisfactionism, such as preference-satisfactionism, value-fulfilment, and judgement-satisfactionism. Given the context of the writing, separating these "pro-attitude satisfactionism" accounts (van der Deijl and Brouwer, 2021, 773-775) is unnecessary.

[11] For further instances of well-being theories applied to the value of death, see Egerstrom (2020); Feit (2020); Kamm (1998); Luper (1987; 2021).

[12] It might be argued that a single account isn't needed, and it is plausible to assess one's well-being (welfare) with no fixed understanding of what well-being is. However, *welfare invariabilism* suggests that "the same theory of welfare is true of every welfare subject" (Lin, 2018, 320), such that there is one single, most accurate understanding of well-being.

[13] Phenomenological hedonism extends beyond mere pleasure and pain, incorporating how we evaluate experiences and their meaning related to one's values (Kriegel, 2019, 9). Some desire-satisfactionism forms are based on fulfilling interest-driven

many of these elements seem to matter to our lives. That is, we tend to value more pleasure and less pain (hedonism), the satisfaction of our desires (subjectivity, generally speaking), and elements that are characteristic of a fulfilling human life (objective list theories), such as friendships, knowledge, and achievements. Thus, to reiterate, we can proceed with the understanding of what the LCA is likely to encompass in terms of well-being, even if we do not have a precise framework.

Further, in many cases of evaluating death via the LCA, we might be able to make reasonable judgements without a precise or fixed understanding of the constituents of the LCA. In other words, certain variations of the LCA may suffice to provide a reliable outcome in most cases. Thus, with a fundamental understanding of the LCA, let us move on to subjective evaluations of death.[14]

3. Subjective Evaluations

As things stand, it may seem we already have the tools to understand death from a subjective point of view. This is so if we take seriously that any accurate LCA is going to pertain to subjective elements of well-being, such as those that refer to one's desires and preferences. Still, I believe there is more to it, particularly with regard to subjective evaluations, or interests, of death.

Thus, first, I will frame a fundamental understanding of subjective interests. Then, I will raise a few cases in which there is tension between what an LCA might say about one's

desires, linking well-being to personal interests (Schroeder, 2020, 25). If achieving desires beneficial to well-being corresponds to my interests, my subjectivity shapes my well-being level. Lastly, objective list theory can be founded on subjective pursuits, including aesthetic experiences and knowledge (Crisp, 2021, 17-18).

[14] Brad Hooker (2003, 42) states that in most cases, particularly in consideration of practical (moral) implications, the three popular well-being theories share wide agreement, and there may only be exceptional cases in which they contradict each other.

death and a contrasting subjective evaluation. In raising these cases, I also aim to demonstrate why we should take such subjective evaluations of death seriously. This gives us reason to believe that we should not think of subjective interests as simply embedded within the broader LCA framework. In light of this, in Section 4, I'll turn to how we might go about solving the tension between the two contrasting evaluations—contrasting LCA and subjective evaluations.

Pertinent to subjective evaluations is the notion of *interests*. Interests are complex and multi-faceted within discussions of well-being, so I will disentangle some ideas and perceptions as we go. We all have interests, the achievement of which we recognise as good and the thwarting or denial of which we recognise as bad. Fundamentally, particularly so for our purposes, we can distinguish between two types of interests.

First, we can talk of a broader understanding of interests that incorporates all of the things that constitute good well-being. For example, good health, love, meaningful relationships, ambitions, and pleasant experiences can all be described as *in my interests* since they are good in terms of one's well-being. These are all of the well-being elements that are likely to constitute the LCA. Importantly, one does not need to desire these interests for them to be good. For example, good health is good for me regardless of whether I desire it. Thus, I will describe these interests as *objective* interests.

The second way to talk about interests refers, more specifically, to what *I'm interested in*. Thus, in stating that what is important to this form of interests is what one is interested in, this second type of interest pertains to *subjectivity*. This is because such interests are based on *one's* desires or preferences. Fulfilment of such interests is also good, as I will

argue. In essence, we might say, "If A is interested in X, then X is good for A; should A be deprived of X, then the deprivation of X would be bad for A".

Importantly, these types of subjective interests can be described as nestled within the broader type of interests, constituting the subjective component of an all-encompassing understanding of objective interests, which constitute the well-being elements of the LCA. As an example, if desire satisfactionism matters to objective interests, such that it constitutes an element of well-being, then the fulfilment of subjective interests contributes to the broader fulfilment of objective interests.

This framing of subjective interests is not uncontroversial. For one, it may allow too much, such that a person can talk about what is bad for them if they do not obtain what they're interested in. However, what they're interested in may simply be absurd or unattainable. Consider the famous case of a grass-counter (Crisp, 2021):[15] If I'm interested in spending all my time counting blades of grass, is it *actually* good for me to do so? Or consider the agent who loves smoking: Can we say that it is good for me to smoke if I am interested in doing so, despite the fact that it is bad for my broader objective interests, such as good health?

One means of responding to these difficulties is to suggest that subjective interests only extend so far in the sense of contributing to well-being. For example, Joel Feinberg (1977) distinguishes between mere "wants" and interests, in which the latter, but not the former,

[15] Michael Hauskeller (2025, 30) observes that cases like the grass-counter might appear to highlight the absurdity of meaning subjectivism, as these scenarios presuppose that the individuals in these thought experiments—referred to as "pseudo-people"—spend all day, every day engaged in this singular absurd activity, such as counting grass, neglecting to eat, sleep, nurture family and friendships, or have other interests or values. Nonetheless, one could argue that no real life resembles this. While there may indeed be grass-counting enthusiasts, the meaning in their lives will undoubtedly be influenced by other aspects that are overlooked in these hypothetical scenarios.

count towards well-being. As such, smoking and counting blades of grass might be the satisfaction of mere wants, not interests. Similarly, David Sobel (1994) argues for a hierarchy of various desires, such that fully informed desires—desires one would have were one fully informed about how such desires would make one's life go better—are interests in the well-being sense. In contrast, less-informed desires are preferences that do not make one's life go better upon fulfilment.[16] For example, Sobel (1994, 788-789) might describe the smoker's desire to smoke as *choice-worthy* given the smoker's limited information about what actually matters to well-being, but not as serving their actual interests.

I will push back on these positions by arguing that what one is interested in modifies what is good or bad for them, *even if* such subjective desires—the desires or interests one has—are in strong contrast to the broader understanding of objective interests. This would imply, for example, that it is, in some sense, good for the smoker to smoke, and it is good for the grass-counter to count blades of grass if they desire to do so. Moreover, if my arguments are successful, then they will demonstrate where the two accounts of interest come apart, so to speak, such that it may be problematic to talk of subjective interests as being nestled within and simply contributing to a broader understanding of one's objective interests. Thus, in order to address these points, let us consider a case of death in which what seems to be in the agent's interests in the broader sense contrasts greatly with what the agent in question subjectively desires.

Let's imagine that, from the outside, Tony's life seems great. Tony has a life full of achievements and seemingly good experiences, surrounded by a level of comfort that

[16] For overviews on epistemologically rational choices and desires, see Briggs (2023); Steele and Stefánsson (2020).

most can only dream of having. All of these components would render Tony's death very bad, according to the LCA. This is because Tony has fulfilled plenty of interests in the broader sense—many good things for which it would be bad to be deprived. However, Tony is miserable and believes that their lifetime commitment to "achievements" has ultimately caused them to suffer. Therefore, Tony regrets everything. As such, Tony, from a personal position, is interested in death, such that they no longer desire to live.

Would Tony's death be bad for them?[17] Suppose we apply the all-encompassing LCA, which tries to take everything relevant about well-being into account. This, therefore, includes such things as Tony's desires and experiences—their subjective interests. In doing so, we might yield the conclusion that Tony's death would be bad *overall*. This conclusion comes from the broader consideration of objective interests, for which Tony has fulfilled plenty and for which it is bad to be deprived. Moreover, the label "overall" ensures that we are still taking into account Tony's subjective interests, such that death would not be bad for Tony *simpliciter*. Thus, this outcome might seem fair, all-inclusive, and accurate.

However, this conclusion, in which we describe Tony's death as bad overall, does not give sufficient ground to Tony's subjective interests. This is because the conclusion neglects what it means to live the life in question. To see why, take Sam, who is highly envious of

[17] It's important to note that I haven't defined death specifically. For our purposes, this is fine, but elsewhere, defining death beforehand may prevent miscommunication between the agent and those evaluating their life regarding differing conceptions of death. For example, we can imagine a situation where both the agent and the LCA evaluation believe the agent's death would be bad, but no conception of death was established. Then, if the agent falls into an irreversible coma, permanently unconscious, experiencing laboured breathing before dying forty-eight hours later, a new LCA evaluation may find that death is now good for the agent.
A revised LCA assessment is unproblematic if distinct from the previous one before the coma, with the previous one corresponding to the subjective evaluation. However, it becomes problematic if the revised assessment replaces the earlier one, contrasting sharply with the agent's subjective view. Therefore, establishing a clear conception of death in advance would prevent this issue.

Tony; Sam believes that Tony has a great life—again, from an outsider position, who wouldn't? Indeed, Sam envies Tony so much that Sam wishes they were Tony. However, when Sam states that they wish they were Tony, what Sam means is they wish they had Tony's achievements, possessions, and experiences—the things that are part of any well-being subject's broader objective interests. But Sam does not wish that they *were* Tony. This is because to be Tony includes possessing Tony's subjective perspective—their thoughts, feelings, and desires. Thus, if Sam *truly* lived Tony's life and became Tony—as in, Sam assumed Tony's subjectivity—then Sam-as-Tony would not believe they were living a good life. Sam would be as miserable as Tony! And in such a case, how could Sam suggest that their life as Tony would be any better than it is for the original Tony? Thus, when we conclude that Tony's death is bad overall, we fail to truly account for what it means to live the life in question, instead simplifying the life to its value in the sense of broader objective interests.[18]

Let me expand on this. Such a life as Tony's may be well-lived in terms of what we can realistically expect from life in terms of quality and length, but one does not simply think about one's own life and death in these terms. In other words, one does not simply think about the value of one's death in impersonal terms of "Have I lived a long and prosperous life?"; "Have I fulfilled various goals and ambitions?"; "Have I engaged in 'objectively' good activities and projects?" Of course, we make such considerations when judging value in our lives, particularly in relation to what is considered a "successful" life.

[18] This case also demonstrates a conflict between absolute and relational assignments of value (Piller, 2014, 206). An absolute approach is to say that what is good for Sam is also good for Tony because certain properties are simply good. (In talk of reasons, a similar concept is found in Thomas Nagel's (1986) description of *agent-neutral* values.) To take a relational approach, which is what I'm doing, is to say that what is good for Tony depends on, in this case, his perspective and wants. (Nagel similarly describes these as *agent-relative* values, although he states that such values must still be "understood and affirmed from outside the viewpoint of the individual who has them" (Nagel, 1986, 153; Willaschek, 2022, 12).)

However, they are not, I believe, the kinds of considerations we make when determining whether we have lived a good life and whether, more to the point, death would be good for us.

This is because there is also the subjectivity of living the life, the experience of a mode of being, and the termination of which we can empathise with others insofar as we all must go through it; and yet, the intensity of such empathy cannot truly be understood in regards to another's death—it will never be as intense as our own, for "I am the only one who can die my death" (Hooft, 2004, 191).[19] In sum, when looking at the lives and deaths of others, perhaps we do think more impersonally about accomplishments and objective value as such, but can we suggest we think about our own lives and deaths in an equally measured way? One may or may not stand by this point. It is my view that the point demonstrates how we assess value for ourselves in a way that is somewhat distinct from how we assess value for others.

Still, if one is not taken by the point, then there is a further argument to suggest we ought to take subjective interests seriously in well-being assessments, even when they conflict with our broader objective interests: Consider assessments of what is good for a living agent that do not involve death. That is, imagine an LCA that seeks to determine the value for an agent after *t*, but instead of death, the scenario judges whether an agent should pursue a particular career or not. In determining whether the agent's life would go better or worse in the counterfactual alternative(s), we would take seriously *their* own judgement

[19] This is not to say that we always fear our own deaths over the deaths of others. For example, one may fear the death of their child over and above the death of anyone else, including themselves. However, this fear pertains to grief and the loss of the other, but one cannot truly understand death from the perspective of the person in question, or what *their* death means *for them*.

about the value of their life, with reference to their interests, desires, experiences, and how they value a potential career change.

Now, on many interest considerations, the career change might be a "downgrade", and yet the agent has a much stronger desire to make the career change.[20] From this, it would be troubling to conclude that the career change for the agent would be bad overall in light of what they desire. In other words, they believe the career change is best *for them*, and can we realistically say otherwise? If the point stands, then we have reason to take seriously the subjective interests of the agent in question and not necessarily subjugate them to the broader understanding of interests. Thus, if we take subjective evaluations seriously in cases such as career changes, then why shouldn't we take subjective evaluations of death more seriously than we do? A reason not to would be if there was a key differentiating factor for which subjective evaluations matter greatly in life decisions but not in death. Yet, from my understanding, there are no such factors. It is still the same agent for whom we're assessing value.

Thus, granting the plausibility of the above, we have reason to take seriously the subjective interests of the agent in regard to their death. If this is so, we have a potential conflict in cases in which one's subjective interest in death differs from what is in one's interests more broadly understood, such as via the LCA.

Still, there may be more objections to the idea that subjective interests are a key part of determining what is good (or bad) for the agent. I'll discuss these objections shortly. These objections may demonstrate that subjective interests are not sound measures of value or

[20] Michal Masny (2023) has recently argued that there is a feature of prudential value that is distinct from well-being, namely, the (wasted) potential of a life. This might apply to such a case in which one downgrades in their career and does not fulfil their potential.

they're not as important as I'm making them out to be. If such objections are thus successful, then subjective interests might be neatly placed back into the broader understanding of interests, in which case, we can simply talk of things as good or bad *overall* in those challenging cases in which the broader sense of interests and one's subjective interests come apart.

However, if these objections are dealt with, such that subjective interests *do* serve an important role in valuing death, then, in some cases, such as Tony's, we will have contrasting evaluations and no principled way of reconciling them. Thus, I will now discuss several difficulties that an account of subjective interests might face. I believe these difficulties can be dealt with. If so, then we are faced with the task of reconciliation.

First, in addressing a potential ambiguity, does my argument suggest an *absolute* subjectivist account of well-being, such that, for example, Tony's death is bad if they say it is bad or good if they say it is good? As I've sought to allude to, still relevant is a broader sense of interests—those beyond one's subjectivity—and so subjective interests are not the only interests that matter. Thus, I do not claim that something is good (or bad) for the agent *if and only if* the agent is interested in it.[21]

Secondly, there may be more ambiguous cases where it is not entirely clear what the person's subjective interests are. For example, suppose somebody wants to die—has an interest in death—but resists suicide on the basis of the harm their suicide would cause to their loved ones. Thus, such a person is "sticking around" merely for others. In such a

[21] This disclaimer helps avoid an objection faced by the subjectivist "resonance constraint", which is that agents only benefit from goods that they have an interest or "pro-attitude" towards (van der Deijl and Brouwer, 2021, 770-779).
This also implies a distinction between subjective evaluations of death as understood here and Christopher Belshaw's (2012) account, the latter of which posits that without a fundamental desire to live, death isn't bad *at all* for the person who dies.

case, is this person interested in death or not? In response to this, subjective interests need not be binary or absolute—that one either has an interest or not. There can, of course, be interests for which there are counter-interests; that is, an agent can recognise conflicting reasons for actions, beliefs, or values. For example, one might be interested in smoking for the taste—a desire, as it were—but be even more interested in not smoking for health reasons—a stronger contrasting desire. Thus, in the above case, we might say that such a person is not interested in death *overall*. That is, they *do* have an interest in death, but these interests are offset by greater counter-interests in continued living, even if it implies a rather undesirable continued living. It is, in essence, for the agent to prefer the least bad option.[22]

Third, there are cases where we are uncertain about an agent's capabilities to make reasonable judgements, which might imply that subjective evaluations from such agents are unreliable or should, at least, be taken less seriously. What constitutes a reasonable judgement is an open question. However, there are certainly cases where we would call one's judgement "compromised". Here, I'm referring to instances of compromised mental capabilities, such as where one cannot make sound judgements that allow one to operate independently. Instead, for example, such a person might be under a particular form of care or supervision, where their judgements are legally deferred to a third party.

In the case of subjective interests in death that I'm suggesting we ought to take seriously, I'm focused on those agents who *do* operate independently. With this, it's important to note that I'm excluding certain agents—those with compromised agency—since they still

[22] Subjective value assessments that pertain to undesirable preferences or "least bad" options, for example, avoid an oversimplified view of subjective attitudes that suggest either a pro-, con-, or indifference attitude that implies positive or negative value on a scale (Sobel, 2016, 71-72).

possess the ability to make judgements and form interests. Still, this does not imply that I'm suggesting that subjective interests from such compromised agents are baseless or without value.[23] Simply, they're not included in this discussion because they raise additional considerations that I cannot explore here. (Moreover, even among independent agents for whom subjective interests here apply, such independent agents may still make irrational or unsound judgements. I'll revisit this point in Section 4.)

Fourth, since we're talking about subjective interests, there may be a temptation to suggest that perception, even false perception, plays a key role in determining what is good for an agent. In other words, is it implied that what makes an outcome good for an agent is that the agent *believes* that their interests have been satisfied, even if such interests are not actually satisfied? Conversely, is it bad for the agent to believe that an interest has been thwarted, even if it hasn't been thwarted?

There are arguments on both sides, which Brad Hooker (2003) describes well. Consider first the idea that objective facts, not one's beliefs, are what matter to prudential value: Hooker says that a life slightly more pleasant with false beliefs is not as good as a life slightly less pleasant but with true beliefs. On the other hand, he makes the point that "A deluded life full of pleasant mental states might well be superior to an undeluded life going from one torture chamber to another" (38). In consideration of both sides, as a general rule, I take the position that the actual—objective—satisfaction or thwarting of the interests of an agent is good or bad for the agent. However, this general rule may

[23] Subjective evaluations suggest that the lives of agents making these evaluations are more value-laden than those of non-agents, including non-human animals. This supports the intuition that agential lives possess richer value. For instance, various conceptions of well-being emphasise that agential lives are more valuable due to their ability to evaluate pain and pleasure in relation to broader goals. Such secondary judgments enhance the overall positive value of their experiences (see footnote 13). Therefore, I view this implication of subjective evaluations as unproblematic and consistent with common understanding.

appear less viable in particular cases, such as in the extremities of moving from one torture chamber to another. Thus, I take this general rule as tentative.

Still, in all, the objective facts regarding the interest determine the (dis)value for the agent, not the (false) belief of the agent.[24] Still, this is not to suggest that such mistaken perceptions or false beliefs are valueless simpliciter. For example, false beliefs may induce pleasure, and part of our broader objective interests might be the hedonistic good of experiencing pleasure. Here, the false belief still contributes some good since it fulfils the objective interest of pleasure. The same goes for attitudinal or behavioural responses to interests. For example, suppose the satisfaction of a strong interest, such as a great achievement, generates little pleasure and instead unexpectedly leads to a feeling of emptiness. As regrettable as such a feeling is to a great achievement, it does not imply that the satisfaction of the relevant interest itself is bad for the agent (Feinberg, 1977, 303-304), even though the anticipated pleasure would have been a bonus that serves the broader objective interests. In other words, the satisfaction of the interest is still good for the agent, even if the resultant feelings are regrettable or unexpected.[25]

Fifth, do my arguments for subjective evaluations imply a form of moral egoism, a view according to which one should take a purely self-interested position when making

[24] Derek Parfit (1986, 151) challenges the view that what matters are the objective facts through the case of a stranger on a train for whom you desire things to go well, but never discover whether or not they succeed. Can it be said that their succeeding, without you knowing, is good for you? If the objective facts matter, then it ought to be good for you. However, it seems challenging to say what is good for you about the objective facts if you are never aware of them.
In response, Hooker (2003, 39-40) suggests that such desires are not relevant to one's own well-being. In such cases, what would be good for us would be the (hedonistic) pleasure or peace of mind from knowing of the stranger's success. However, the stranger's actual success cannot ground our own desires because, regarding one's own desires, one must be an *essential constituent*. According to Hooker (2003, 40), "Examples of desires … in which you *are* an essential constituent are your desires that *you* paint beautiful pictures, that *you* have true friends, that *you* know the truth about the origin of the universe, and that *you* bring the wicked to justice."

[25] There may be exceptions here, too. If someone invests time, money, and labour for a grand holiday that turns out underwhelming, it's hard to say the achievement of the goal was beneficial. Still, we can point to their hard work as a reason to believe that attaining the goal has well-being merit.

decisions that affect the well-being of others? As is hopefully evident, this paper is merely about subjective evaluations in regard to *prudential* value. In other words, it is about how the value judgements an agent makes regarding their own life affect what is good or bad for them. This is distinct from how some people think that subjective evaluations can also ground *ethical* value (Sumner, 1995, 773). Thus, even if we accepted the view outlined in this paper, we would still be able to think that wider and more objective considerations are necessary and more important in determining ethical value.[26]

Finally, talk of subjectivity and death leads to grander ideas in phenomenology. The question might thus be raised of whether I'm trying to explain the badness of death in a related sense. For example, the subjectivity of death describes its badness in terms of how it terminates one's "mode of being" (Hooft, 2004, 193): It is *I* who "will black out for good and subjective time will simply stop" (Nagel, 1986, 225); the nothingness of death implies that "everything for oneself is *all over*" (Kamm, 1998, 19); and "the very *I* that has had these experiences is what is now going to end" (Scheffler, 2013, 86). These are descriptions of the subjectivity of death that all refer to a particular kind of fear of death without necessarily stating what, exactly, is bad about death and how bad it is. But this fear is fairly universal, and these subjective takes on death can often be understood intuitively, even if precise wording is difficult.[27]

Now, my talk of subjective evaluations of death is not tied to these conceptions, but they may be related. On the one hand, I somewhat incorporated this phenomenological line of thinking in explaining why we should take such subjective interests seriously. That is, what

[26] Nicholas Smyth (2023) argues that impartial moral theories might be inherently egoistical in part.
[27] Perhaps Ernst Becker (1973) describes it best as the terror of being a self-conscious animal: "to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression—and with all this yet to die" (87).

it means to live the life in question—as a perceiver of value—is one argument to suggest that we shouldn't think about such subjective interests as just one consideration of interests among many. But on the other hand, this phenomenological understanding—or the subjectivity of death—does not *explain* our subjective interests or what it means to make them. It is here that I think the conceptions differ.

In other words, when I talk of subjective interests, I am talking about desires or wants we may or may not have, which, in turn, generate the relevant subjective interests and disinterests. Further, such subjective interests require no greater justification. For example, they do not need to be grounded in ulterior interests, such as those that pertain to some project or goal that is objectively good (Feinberg, 1977). Instead, what I mean at this point is that we may or may not have desires for particular things, which then generate corresponding interests. Thus, one's (dis)interest in death can be grounded in *anything*, be it a fear of death, a desire for more life, or something else.

Again, and what makes for an interesting side point, one's subjective interests in death may very well track the subjectivity of death, such as a desire to delay, out of fear, the end of our lived experience, instead of necessarily being based on our desires to complete our remaining projects or accomplish more goals, for example.[28] Still, this is just speculation about how many of us would be reasoning about death; the more important point to note is that one's subjective interest in death can be grounded in anything.

In sum, subjective interests are based on our desires, and these can be reflected in life and death. As we started this section, it seemed to follow that subjective interests are

[28] Frances Kamm's (1998) "Limbo Man" would suggest it's about delaying the end of life simpliciter, not necessarily delaying the end of lived experience.

simply a part of a broader understanding of interests, and this broader understanding overall constitutes what is relevant to well-being and the LCA. But we then explored a case of a polarising death, in which Tony's subjective interests differed greatly from what seemed to be in their broader objective interests. At such a point, it might have seemed that we could draw an all-inclusive, overall conclusion about Tony's death. However, this failed to take seriously Tony's—the agent in question's—subjective interest, demonstrated via the desire for Sam to live Tony's life. Thus, this showed a case where the two forms of interest—the subjective interest and the broader objective interests—came apart, and the idea of simply providing an overall conclusion became troubling.

If all that I'm saying is plausible, then we now face a dilemma regarding challenging cases in which the two forms of interests yield opposing evaluations. I will now confront this issue and see how we might reconcile the evaluations.

4. Reconciling the Accounts

I will put across one more brief example to illustrate the tension that we have between the subjective interests of death and the broader objective interests that encompass the LCA. I will then see if we can solve such tension and reconcile the evaluations.

Suppose Joe has, what appears to be, a miserable life. They have few material goods, no friendships, no desires or ambitions, and very few pleasures. Now, suppose we rely on a version of the LCA that combines many different elements of well-being, a variety of goods such as desire satisfactionism, goals, friendships, love, meaning, etc. These are all Joe's interests. Seemingly, because Joe lacks many of the good things that constitute a good life according to this version of the LCA, this view would suggest that, if Joe were to

die, they would not be deprived of many future prudential goods but rather spared from much misery. Thus, according to the LCA, death would be good for Joe overall.

Now, consider Joe's own subjective evaluation: Joe is interested in continued living, for, from Joe's subjective perspective, any quality of life is better than no life. Why? Perhaps we are not sure; perhaps even Joe cannot quite explain why they want to continue living, but they just know that they want to. In other words, Joe is interested in continued living, even if they seemingly are not living a good life. Thus, according to a purely subjective evaluation, Joe would regard death as bad for them. Thus, the LCA and subjective evaluation present contrasting evaluative conclusions regarding Joe's death. Thus, if Joe dies, how should we value their death? In other words, would death be good or bad for Joe?

If we're to take the subjective evaluation seriously, then this tension between the two evaluations will lead to an impasse. Now, faced with this issue, we might first consider, despite pushing back on several ambiguities and objections, whether the subjective evaluation is as important as I've suggested. That is, can there be good reasons to disregard the agent's own subjective evaluation or, at least, take it less seriously than the LCA? Either of these options would allow us to prioritise the evaluation provided by the LCA. Thus, in such a case as the one above, we would be able to present a reliable conclusion regarding the evaluation of death and Joe's death in particular: death would be good for Joe.

There are certainly cases where it is questionable whether we should take an agent's evaluation seriously or, at least, cases where we should consider it secondary to the LCA evaluation. This is mostly so in cases of compromised agency, which, as I've stated, are

the kinds of evaluations that I'm not addressing here. However, things become more complicated when we consider that some judgements can be more or less sound or irrational, even amongst those who do not have so-called compromised agency. For example, one might consider Joe's evaluation of their death irrational. In doing so, one might lean on Feinberg's distinction between wants and interests or Sobel's hierarchy of desires. If so, one might argue that we can make more reliable evaluations of Joe's death *from the outside*, such as with our comprehensive LCA and considerations of all the objective interests. If we followed this line of thought, we might say that since we know more and know better, Joe's subjective evaluation should count for less.

On the one hand, this is a compelling argument. Yet, I've provided reasons to suggest that it is untenable. To create, say, some objectively good desires that are better or worse than other desires, some of which are actually good for us and some of which aren't, is to understate the significance of the life in question. With this, it is worth noting the complexity and intricacy of the debate on value. So, there will be those who, on the one hand, find my partly subjectivist view implausible and those who, on the other, find it accommodating to a totally subjectivist view of prudential value. Thus, I will proceed on the basis that my arguments that suggest we take subjective interests seriously are tenable, but without losing sight of the possibility that many readers will be unconvinced. Nevertheless, in taking seriously the agent's subjective interest in death, we should thus be reluctant to think that because we may know more, we know what is more valuable and better *for* the agent in question.

In light of this, perhaps we can simply recognise *two* evaluations: A subjective evaluation of death and an LCA-based objective evaluation of death. Thus, in the case of Joe, we

might say, “On the one hand, Joe’s death was good overall in one way, which pertains to an LCA-based evaluation that considers objective interests; on the other hand, Joe’s death was also bad overall in a different way, which pertains to Joe’s subjective interests”. Now, I am not opposed to this two-pronged evaluation. However, it is somewhat argumentatively unsatisfactory since the unification of the two evaluations into one well-rounded, all-inclusive evaluation would present a more complete picture. Still, it may be consistent to say that there are different ways of thinking about the value of death, many of which may be reasonable and truth-tracking pending further modifications. This justification is particularly prominent given the ambiguity and disagreement surrounding discussions of the value of death, as well as value theory in general.[29]

Yet, at the same time, there is also a good reason to combine the accounts to provide one overall evaluation. Doing so avoids challenging cases such as the ones noted above that lead to an impasse, particularly if they have real-world applications, such as in cases of assisted dying, euthanasia, and resource allocation. Moreover, if it is possible to combine the evaluations, then doing so will also produce a more developed account for evaluating death. Thus, even though it may not be a problem to have two contrasting conclusions in the abstract, if it is possible to reconcile the two accounts to provide one overall conclusion, then it is an endeavour worth undertaking. Therefore, in the pursuit of producing one overall means of evaluating death, the questions we must now ask are how

[29] There is a further sense in which the subjective and LCA evaluations contrast. Regarding the LCA, Rosenbaum (2013, 157) describes timing—“The fact that a person dies at a certain time, at a certain stage in his life”—as “the main ingredient of the badness of a person’s death”. (This is typically why, on the LCA, death isn’t (very) bad in very old age since the timing of death is the best that it can be, realistically.) A subjective evaluation, on the other hand, has no commitment to timing. Wherever the person is in the narrative of their life, their death is partly bad for them insofar as they evaluate it to be. This also means that a subjective evaluation of death can challenge the Critical Theory of Death, which states that only “nonnatural” deaths—“before one’s time”, idiomatically speaking—are bad (Schumacher, 2010, 194-197).

we might achieve this conflation of the accounts? Moreover, has such a conflation already been accomplished in the literature?

To start, we can consider what the LCA is likely to incorporate. Consider all of the things that are key to being an agent, such as perceiving, desiring, thinking, and evaluating. These are such things that, as an agent, it would be bad to be deprived of. Indeed, in the literature, this has been described as the General Deprivation Account (GDA) (Behrendt, 2019, 190-191; Nagel, 2012, 2). This account provides a deprivationist account of the badness of death. The GDA refers to the deprivation of *subjectivity*, which includes the ability to perceive, desire, and evaluate, to explain the badness of death. So, when we formulate the most plausible versions of the LCA, we ought to include the elements of the GDA. Thus, as a part of the LCA, we would include all the elements of the GDA, among the many other things that it is bad to be deprived of, in order to provide an evaluation of the value of death. Now, if we do so, can we, therefore, say that we have reconciled the evaluations, once again nestling the subjective evaluation within the overall LCA?

This attempt is unsuccessful. This is because, though the GDA pertains to subjectivity, it does not include the subjective evaluations that we are talking about. That is, the formulation for subjective evaluations of death I've provided is not based on the deprivation of one's *ability* to make subjective evaluations or the *making* of subjective evaluations themselves. Instead, it is the *actual* subjective evaluation—the particular interest generated by an agent, so to speak—that matters. Thus, it is not a factor, element, or thing that can be captured as something to be deprived of. Therefore, the LCA that includes the elements of the GDA might capture the *characteristics* of subjectivity or the

ability to make subjective evaluations. However, it does not successfully capture the subjective evaluation of death itself.

Let us seek another means of reconciliation. A useful way of framing the discussion so far is to think that, if my arguments are tenable, subjective interests matter greatly to well-being. Now, in any plausible LCA, subjective interests are going to matter. The problem, however, as described, is in those cases where there is a strong contrast between one's subjective interests and the broader objective interests. In attempting reconciliation, we might thus think of it as an issue of representation. In other words, how ought we combine the accounts in such a way that achieves an accurate representation, such that, for example, an agent's subjective interests are neither overstated nor understated?

As I've been arguing, one's subjective interests would be understated if they simply counted as one factor among many, such that, in doing so, we fail to take seriously the life in question. Now, in response to this, one very simple means of solving the discrepancy is to lean more on the subjective evaluation. For example, what about an LCA that leans heavily on a form of desire-satisfactionism that, quite simply, pertains to one's desire (not) to die? In such a case, one's subjective evaluation of the value of death is *identical* to the interests that ground the LCA. In essence, the agent's (dis)interest in death determines the LCA outcome.

In such a case, we have an LCA that incorporates subjectivity and provides an overall conclusion of the value of death. Yet, at the same time, such an account is extremely limited. By focusing too narrowly on the aim of incorporating the subjective evaluation into the LCA, the resulting version of the LCA does not sufficiently capture the many aspects necessary for a reliable understanding of well-being and living well—all of the

other objective interests—for it focuses too much on one element to solve the issue at hand. It is thus open to a multitude of objections.

Thus, we need to strike a finer balance. Yet, it may be that context matters greatly and that some cases, more than others, will be amenable to reconciliation. In other words, if an agent desires not to die and also has a great life according to the broader account of interests, then there is little tension between the evaluations. In such a case, we can provide a single evaluation. Therefore, it may be that challenging cases like Tony's and Joe's force us to strike a balance by leaning more heavily on one evaluation over the other. The alternative is to suggest that, in these challenging cases, we cannot present a singular, unified evaluation.

Let us draw a line here and say that challenging cases may be incommensurable, such that we cannot simply conflate the evaluations. If so, for such cases, we have to take the longer route of acknowledging that there are two evaluations of death. For what it's worth, I am sympathetic to this view. Still, let us step over the line and recall our ambitions to unify the accounts, even in these challenging cases. In doing so, I will tentatively provide a formulation that seeks to reconcile the evaluations. However, I cannot overemphasise its tentative nature.

To this end, I'll now suggest that the subjective evaluation should mean *slightly less* than all the other components—objective interests—of the LCA as a general principle. This means that all other considerations besides the subjective evaluation carry more weight, and the agent's subjective evaluation *influences* but does not necessarily *determine* the LCA evaluation. I'm not overly confident that we can subjugate the agent's subjective

evaluation as such. Still, granted that we're attempting to reconcile the evaluations in these challenging cases, this might be the best way to do so.

First, consider a few supporting points for this formulation. First of all, with the subjective evaluation, there may be objections or difficulties that will be recognised through further discussion. Moreover, objective interests arguably have an advantage over subjective interests in terms of wider agreement. That is, in the application of subjective evaluations, there is room for error and the making of ill-informed judgements. Simply put, one might change one's mind about death day after day. Objective interests, on the other hand, are ideally agreed upon through scrutiny and discussion. Still, the fact that subjective evaluations are prone to revisions is not a reason to negate them entirely, for the above arguments demonstrate a good reason to take them seriously.

Additionally, there are respects in which a broader LCA evaluation is more malleable than merely subjective evaluations of death. For one, subjective evaluations cannot be revised posthumously. In contrast, the LCA can be revised and modified to reflect the most accurate evaluation. For example, an agent's subjective evaluation of their death may be based on a limited understanding of contemporary knowledge, and only later, after their death, do we develop a greater and more inclusive understanding. A posthumous LCA can account for such considerations. Second, and in relation to this, some deaths occur rather suddenly and might leave us without an indication as to the agent's subjective evaluation of life and death. And even though, in many instances, we might believe we have a good understanding of the agent's preferences for life and its value, there would remain some ambiguity if we do not know their exact interest in death. In leaning more on the LCA, however, we can provide a posthumous evaluation that is timeless, amenable to

revisions, and doesn't necessarily require a precise understanding of the agent's interests.

Moreover, there are some cases applicable to this discussion, as mentioned, where we think we know better than the agent. I've noted that we should be wary of acting on our supposed knowing better, as doing so threatens to neglect what it means to live the life in question. Still, there will be those exceptional cases where the well-being assessment from the outside, being more considered and extensively assessed, will be in extreme conflict with the agent's evaluation. In such cases, it would be difficult to perceive the evaluations as equal if we can demonstrate that, from the outside, we have applied a method to our reasoning that is rigorous, consistent, and has stood the test of objections, as any reliable LCA should.

To put it bluntly, consider John, who is suffering from a terminal illness that renders him unable to do most things and leads to the deprivation of many things important to a good life, and yet he believes he has a life worth continuing. Many would be highly sceptical that John's life is worth continuing. Even though it would be an oversimplification to simply state that John's death would be good for him since we still have good reason to take the subjective evaluation seriously, in these extreme cases, it seems implausible to recognise both evaluations as equal. In this case, the broader LCA framework seems a more demonstrably reliable measurement, *particularly* if we are necessarily choosing one evaluation over the other.

Finally, John's case also pertains to certain practical constraints of subjective evaluations, where the LCA's objective interests have notable advantages. For example, in social policy decisions, states and governments should make fully informed decisions

that consider all the facts and potential outcomes of such policies. Such considerations will often extend beyond what many take to be their subjective preferences, and they may even run counter to them. In the case of John, for example, and despite their strong preference for more life, it would seem problematic to allocate greater resources to John to keep them alive if doing so is at the expense of others with less severe illnesses who can be treated more effectively. This is so even if such others do not have *as strong* a preference as John for continued living.[30]

These considerations give us good reason to think that, in attempting to combine the evaluations, the LCA's overall evaluation should take precedence over the subjective evaluation in challenging cases like those detailed.[31] However, to reiterate, this does not imply disregarding subjective evaluations entirely or even subjugating them to one consideration among many. To this end, the subjective evaluation should be an influential and weighty component of the LCA, not as one additional factor among many. However, it shouldn't be the determining factor, and all other objective considerations combined should mean slightly more than the subjective evaluation.

So, how might this look in practice? Consider again the case of John: A man with a terminal illness for whom an LCA that understates the subjective evaluation might conclude a life not worth continuing (death would be good overall) versus a subjective evaluation that concludes an interest in continued living (death would be bad overall). If

[30] This point is less applicable to the discussion of subjective evaluations here since it pertains to ethical value. For a subjectivist defence as an account for morality, see Sobel (2016).

[31] A final consideration is to observe how we might mourn John's death as an indication of its badness. Appealing to a similar case, Feinberg (1977, 301) says that, "Those who mourn his death will not think of themselves as mourning *for him*, but rather for his dependents and loved ones, if any, or simply in virtue of the capacity of any *memento mori* to evoke sadness."
If this is true, then it suggests that John's death was not bad *for John*, but it was only bad for others. One might find this intuitive, but there may be those, on the contrary, like myself, who would regret John's death *for John* if John had a deep desire not to die.

we're to "strike a balance", as I've endeavoured to do, we might say John's death was a *lesser evil* than life. A lesser evil because, though John had a desire to live and found enjoyment in what he could, we have good reason to believe that he did not possess the many good things important to a good life, according to his objective interests. We take John's subjective evaluation seriously, but, at the same time, we have reasons (based on the above) to provide greater weighting to the LCA's objective components. Thus, John's life might not be worth continuing. However, it is to be understood with a strong disclaimer that John's death would not simply be good, but it would be a preferable outcome for him, all things considered.

I think it is worth noting that John's case is an extreme one. In many cases, the agent's life will be worth continuing or will at least fulfil enough objective interests to suggest that death would be less than good. Moreover, there may be cases in which the subjective evaluation should matter more, perhaps as a *determining* factor. For example, cases where life could be more or less good in terms of objective considerations, such that we're uncertain about how valuable death is from an outsider position, might lead us to lean heavily on the agent's subjective interest in death. Again, this is not to suggest that we shouldn't take the subjective evaluation seriously. However, cases in which the LCA cannot provide a decisive conclusion provide a reason to take the evaluation of the life in question *even more* seriously.

Before concluding, let me address what might be dissatisfying about the tenuous side of the discussion. That is, I've not provided a precise weighting to the subjective element within the LCA, which might seem like I've provided a half-baked solution. First and foremost, this is because, as discussed, context matters, and it is going to shape how we

evaluate an agent's death. For one, it is worth noting that the LCA has no precise framework. Thus, we might reach a consensus about the broader elements of an accurate LCA, but the specifics might cause disagreement. Such specifics could be important to the evaluation at hand and, in turn, influence how we weigh the subjective evaluation in comparison to the LCA. Furthermore, as illustrated in John's case, particular cases may affect the reliability of the subjective evaluation in question. These cases may also affect how we weigh the LCA and the subjective evaluation.

Thus, in combining the two evaluative means of death, I am not confident in any precision that tells us how, exactly, they compare in influence. This may be a topic of future discussion. I have primarily aimed to demonstrate why we should take subjective evaluations of death seriously. A secondary concern has been to provide potential avenues for reconciling subjective evaluations with the broader LCA evaluation when they conflict and when it is desirable to do so.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that we should take subjective evaluations of death seriously. With this, such subjective evaluations *might* be conflated with the LCA to serve an influencing role, which provides an overall evaluation. The latter point is provisional, but the former point I cannot emphasise enough: Whilst I have not been able to detail the precise weightings of the LCA and subjective evaluations, the crucial takeaway is that subjective evaluations matter deeply in both life and death, for they highlight what it means to live the life in question. To consider what is good for an agent without regard for such subjective evaluations, or even to understate them, is to neglect what should be an essential and substantial part of the evaluation. Thus, in discussing the importance of

subjective evaluations of death, I hope that it contributes to our endeavour to understand the value of death more broadly and potentially within a comprehensive, all-encompassing, and satisfactory LCA.

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THE RIGHT KINDS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES

This paper explores anti-natalism and corresponding attitudes towards environmental preservation. Anti-natalists of a certain kind, what I call “compassion-based” anti-natalists, adhere to the principle of minimising suffering. This goes hand-in-hand with the belief that it is good to protect the environment from destruction. However, I argue that environmental preservation is antithetical to anti-natalist aims. This is because environmental preservation is, as I argue, primarily for future generations and has, therefore, pro-natalist attachments: environmental preservation promotes and enables future generations. As a result, environmental preservation conflicts with three anti-natalist values: the goal of extinction, an overall reduction in suffering, and adherence to a duty of non-procreation. Because of this, I discuss two possible attitudes anti-natalists might take towards environmental preservation: *Destruction* and *Apathy*. *Destruction* involves the active degradation and destruction of the environment to bring about extinction as soon as possible. *Apathy* is to be “hands-off” towards preservation and degrade the environment more slowly. I state that *Apathy* is the most suitable attitude for anti-natalists to take towards the environment because it achieves an appropriate equilibrium within anti-natalist values and does not introduce new, morally objectionable outcomes. Finally, I discuss some practical limitations to *Apathy* and how anti-natalists might best act in the context of the real world. I conclude that anti-natalists might have to compromise on their values and, paradoxically, support environmental preservation.

This paper addresses the primary theme of the thesis by connecting anti-natalist values and environmental values, both of which are typically thought to possess moral significance for the beholder. Moreover, it is often taken as unambiguous that

environmentalism, and pro-environmental attitudes in general, ought to matter to all of us. Thus, any theory or set of values that challenges such a view might be considered objectionable or, at the very least, subject to revision. This paper thus provides novelty to the thesis theme by presenting an important conflict that holds for various anti-natalist positions.

1. Introduction[1]

To be concerned about the natural environment and the effects of climate change is a widespread and intuitive principle that rarely goes challenged. That is, most people do not ask themselves why they care about the environment or, a fortiori, if they should. This is also true for (some) anti-natalists[2]—anti-natalists, generally speaking, believe we should not procreate—who demonstrate pro-environmental values within their anti-natalist theories.

For example, David Benatar, a prominent anti-natalist philosopher, has argued for a presumptive duty of non-procreation, partly due to the damage humans cause to non-human animals and the natural environment (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 93-100),[3] with the eventual and ideal outcome of extinction. Moreover, an emerging variant of anti-natalism, *ahumanism*, advocates the non-procreation and extinction of humanity so that a "more harmonious kinship between nonhuman animals and environments will emerge" (Häyry and Sukenick, 2024a, 40-41). This gives the impression that anti-natalism and pro-environmental attitudes go hand-in-hand, aiming to minimise the damage caused to the natural environment.[4]

In this paper, I demonstrate the challenges of being an anti-natalist while holding a pro-environmental attitude. This is because environmental preservation is largely motivated by concern and desire for future generations, as I shall argue; thus, *in practice*,

[1] A version of this paper has been published in *Res Publica*. See Leak (2024).
[2] I say "some" because efilism—a form of anti-natalism—places a negative intrinsic value on *all* life, including non-sentient life; as such, the ideal for efilists is the elimination of all life, which, if practised, might involve the elimination of all *potential for* life, including the destruction of the natural environment (Häyry and Sukenick, 2024a, 31-32).
[3] This constitutes part of Benatar's "misanthropic" argument for anti-natalism. Also see Stoner (2024); Svoboda (2022).
[4] Somewhat related, Joona Räsänen (2023a; 2023b) states there is a strong link between animal ethics, veganism, and anti-natalism.

environmental preservation is pro-natalist. Therefore, for some anti-natalists (to be detailed shortly), the desire to protect the environment generates three conflicts regarding their values: the pursuit of extinction, the aim to reduce overall suffering, and the adherence to a duty of non-procreation. One fundamental way for anti-natalists to contest this argument is to assert that they desire to protect and preserve the environment for reasons that are essentially *not* pro-natalist. However, I argue that these conflicts persist for anti-natalists *irrespective* of their reasons for wanting to preserve and protect the environment.

The paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, I detail the variant of anti-natalism that is the focus of this paper—compassion-based anti-natalism—and the corresponding values relevant to the discussion. In Section 3, I argue that environmental preservation is *for* future generations. In Section 4, I discuss how this generates a conflict for anti-natalists who support environmental preservation. In Section 5, to solve the conflict, I analyse two attitudes an anti-natalist might take towards the environment—*Destruction* and *Apathy*—and state that *Apathy* is most appropriate for anti-natalists. However, in Section 6, I discuss practical constraints to *Apathy*, which implies that anti-natalists must compromise to best adhere to their values. This compromise, somewhat paradoxically, might be to support environmental preservation. But, in all, if one thing is for sure, it is that anti-natalist attitudes towards the environment are not left unchecked, something that has been, surprisingly, hitherto neglected. Section 7 concludes.

2. Compassion-based Anti-natalism

In this section, I will discuss two corollaries of compassion-based anti-natalism.[5] Anti-natalism comes in many different forms. In analytic philosophy, compassion-based anti-natalisms are concerned with the potential child and what is good, or at least not bad, for them.[6] Such anti-natalist arguments state that we should not procreate because of the harm it shall cause the child, whether this be, for example, the general and unavoidable harms of life, for which there is a duty not to cause them (Belshaw, 2012; Harrison, 2012), an axiological asymmetry between existence and non-existence and a highly probable awful quality of life (Benatar, 2006), or the imposition of a lifestyle that is nearly impossible for the procreated to abandon (Häyry and Sukenick, 2024b). (Talk of anti-natalism hereon refers to the compassion-based sort unless described otherwise.) I will now describe the corollaries of anti-natalism that are key to the discussion.

The first corollary is that if procreation is morally impermissible, then there is a duty not to procreate. This may be more nuanced in certain variations, where procreation might be permissible. For example, *some* acts of procreation *might* be permissible in the anti-natalisms of Belshaw (2012; 2024) and Häyry (2024). However, such permissibility would be an exception to the non-procreation rule. Moreover, the duty implies that one should not procreate, but the duty should not be forced on others. (This is an important point I'll return to later.)

[5] "Compassion-based" anti-natalism is a term I'm using to connect anti-natalisms that primarily refer to and derive their principles from the well-being of the potential child. Thus, they are compassionate in that they advocate non-procreation to prevent harm to the potential child.

[6] For "non-analytic" anti-natalist works, see Emil Cioran and Howard (2020), Thomas Ligotti (2018), Arthur Schopenhauer (2017), and Peter Wessel Zapffe (1993).

Second, extinction is a desired corollary of non-procreation, and it is, quite plausibly, the end goal.[7] More specifically, what is desired is "final" extinction (Torres, 2023, 208), which is the absolute end of the (relevant) species and no potential successors.[8] However, understanding how best to achieve extinction is a trickier issue. For example, if everybody stopped procreating around the same time, then we would reach a final generation that would find itself with a lack of support, no suitable younger workforce, and a deteriorating infrastructure (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 128). In turn, this would likely generate more suffering for the final generation. Though such a scenario is undesirable, this final generation would be performing the supererogatory task of bringing humanity to a close. According to the compassion-based outlook, this supererogatory act might be a necessary harm to prevent a greater amount of suffering that would come from an indefinite number of future generations. I will return to these views throughout the paper.

3. Environmental Preservation

This section shall explore the reasons why we preserve the environment. Here, talk of environmental preservation is broadly construed to refer to the practices of maintaining natural ecosystems and the conditions necessary for life. Thus, such practices include climate change reversal and the preservation of natural habitats, amongst other things, on both an individual and collective scale. In this section, I shall argue that the

[7] Some anti-natalist theories, such as those advocating temporary anti-natalism due to, for example, overpopulation and climate change (Hedberg, 2020; Vance, 2024; Young, 2001), do not advocate extinction.
Moreover, Émile Torres (2020) describes a "no extinction anti-natalism", pertaining to speculative technologies, such as radical human enhancement through mind-uploading or brain emulation, which would, in turn, modify the arguments for anti-natalism (and extinction) in the first place. As a result, Torres's argument is beyond the remit of this paper.

[8] In this paper, I focus on the extinction of humanity, but there are reasons to suggest that the anti-natalist theories of Benatar (2006), Belshaw (2012; 2024), and Harrison (2012) extend to all sentient life. If so, this strengthens the case against a pro-environmentalist–anti-natalist attitude.
Moreover, the requirements of a *final* extinction raise additional concerns: How could we guarantee that there would be no successor species after humans? Prima facie, it seems such a guarantee can only be provided by the complete destruction of Earth, or at least its ecosystems.

environment is primarily preserved for future generations, more specifically, future generations of humans. Thus, should we be deprived of future generations (of humans) through, for example, an impending extinction, then the majority of people's reasons and ipso facto motivations for environmental preservation would be significantly reduced.

It is important to note that I'm establishing a descriptive claim about environmental preservation and future generations. That is, I shall argue that future generations are part of *why* most people act on environmental preservation, which is distinct from the reasons people *ought* to act. In other words, I am not arguing if or why we ought to preserve the environment; I am arguing only why most people, in fact, do. With this, the argument shall stand even if the reader's or anyone else's, including anti-natalists', reasons for preserving the environment are absent concerns for future generations. It is enough that, as I shall argue, most people preserve the environment for future generations, and should we lose the possibility of future generations, "we"—humanity on a collective scale—would lose interest in environmental preservation as we know it.

In support of the argument that future generations might motivate environmental preservation, consider, first, empirical data. Stylianos Syropoulos and Ezra Markowitz highlight the correlation between pro-environmental attitudes and duties or obligations towards future generations. They argue that "existing evidence supports the claim that perceived responsibility to future people … *could* motivate proenvironmental engagement" (italics added).[9] They substantiate this statement with their study data, in which 13,632 U.S. adults were surveyed regarding environmental concerns, and "protecting the environment on behalf of future generations was endorsed the most

[9] This claim also supports the popular philosophy of "longtermism" (MacAskill, 2022).

compared to other reasons" (Syropoulos and Markowitz, 2024, 3-6).[10] (For more supporting data, see Syropoulos and Markowitz (2021); Syropoulos et al. (2020); Watkins and Goodwin (2020).)

These data support the idea that future generations and our moral obligations towards them mainly constitute why we engage in environmental preservation. Of course, obligations towards future generations are among the *many reasons* we preserve the environment. (Recall that future generations "*could*" motivate pro-environmental engagement.) Another reason, for example, is that we're concerned with the effects of climate change on existing generations (Kantar, 2020). However, as the data show, a concern for future generations is the most prevalent reason we engage in environmental preservation.

Perhaps, one might argue, the data establish a *correlation* between pro-environmental attitudes and future generations—that in preserving the environment, future generations are enabled—but not *causation*—that we do not preserve the environment *in order to* enable and bring about future generations. That is, we preserve the environment for something other than a concern for future generations, but, at the same time, we recognise that preserving the environment benefits future generations by enabling their existence. Indeed, it is possible for other reasons to ground our moral concern for the environment, including concerns about our own welfare, the welfare of non-human animals, and the intrinsic value of the natural environment.[11] However, the problem with

[10] This was the strongest motivator across all demographic variants, such as age, education, income, political ideology, and religion (Syropoulos and Markowitz, 2024, 7). For similar data, see Bailey (2022).

[11] The intrinsic value of the environment would, I believe, imply the same conclusion that future generations are integral to our motivation for preservation. For example, biodiversity, the good of mere existence, the unique complexity of species, and the theory of "deep ecology" all value the environment because of life (Brennan and Lo, 2022, 15; Cline, 2020, 48-50). Therefore, if

this argument is that the data do not reflect these reasons to the same extent as concerns for future generations.

Nevertheless, let us provide the benefit of the doubt to the counterargument and strengthen the original argument by discussing a hypothetical extinction. Most people take extinction to be bad. Suppose extinction was imminent, where extant generations would be unaffected, but there would be no more future generations. How would this scenario affect our pro-environmental attitudes? The empirical data show that we'd lose the most-cited reason for addressing climate change: concerns towards future generations—since their existence would be ruled out, we would lose the most empirically cited reason why we act on environmental preservation.[12]

With the loss of a key motivator, our attitudes would undoubtedly be affected. The question, then, is how our attitudes towards environmental preservation would change. On the one hand, we might still be as strongly motivated to protect the environment for other reasons. On the other hand, we might drastically lose such motivation because we lose a key motivator.[13]

Consider, first, the former. It is difficult to perceive a realistic scenario where most people would maintain the same motivation to preserve the environment despite losing their key motivator. For it to be plausible, then, we would need to reconstruct our pro-

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we preserve the environment because of its intrinsic value, we are still doing so to maintain the ability to create future life. (Also, see Cafaro (2023).)

[12] Consider a second hypothetical: Suppose we could harmlessly harvest energy from the Sun exponentially, which would benefit present generations. However, increased energy harvesting means that the Sun will explode (and all life will end) much sooner, around 2180 (Page, 1977, 250; Wolf, 2012, 398). Such energy harvesting would likely be rejected on the grounds that future generations should come into being and we should not do anything to jeopardise this.

[13] Wienhues et al. (2023, 7) state that extinction might be morally problematic because of our duty to future generations. Such a duty would be to ensure they have a life. If this were the case, then, if future generations were no longer possible, we would no longer have a duty (or reason, other things equal) to preserve the environment.

environmental attitudes. Perhaps we could state the need to preserve the environment to maintain or improve the quality of existing lives, including humans and non-humans, as well as the natural environment. After all, these are also concerns related to climate change (Marlon et al., 2022). However, such preservation endeavours would take a drastically different form, for many long-term environmental projects would become redundant. That is, if we were concerned only with existing lives since future generations would not exist, then there would be no incentive to make long-term investments in preserving the environment (Scheffler, 2013, 24-25).

It is useful to consider some existing practical endeavours of environmental preservation to support this point. For example, in line with the argument made, it is unlikely that most people would maintain their interest in the typical acts of climate change reversal, such as activism, greener diets, and recycling[14]—"Well, what's the point?" After all, these acts of environmental preservation and climate change reversal are fundamentally long-term endeavours. Indeed, we might reap the benefits of, say, a greener diet in the near term, but greener diets and the research and development that go into them are investments whose effects shall be realised to a greater extent in the future. Therefore, the fact that humanity was about to end would lead many people to, at the very least, dissociate from environmental preservation as we know it.

As a result, the environmental strategy might become one of management rather than preservation, where the aim would be to maintain the quality of life of current generations, which does not require such a future-oriented perception. The only scenario in which we would maintain the same attitude towards environmental preservation in the absence of

[14] Whether these pro-environmental endeavours are effective is beside the point.

future humans is if we made a drastic change towards a non-anthropocentric value system, perhaps caring enough about non-human animals and the natural environment to maintain our motivation and long-term projects despite the end of humanity. Yet, in considering the empirical data and humanity's track record, a shift to a non-anthropocentric value system for motivating environmental preservation seems unlikely.[15] Therefore, it is more likely that we would care less about environmental preservation, focusing more on the management of the environment for existing lives.

If what I have argued is correct, then future generations are integral to our motivation to preserve the environment. As such, environmental preservation is, *practically speaking*, pro-natalist: preserving the environment is a means to enabling future generations and providing them with a good life. I will now discuss the consequences this has for anti-natalist values.

4. Value Conflicts

If future generations motivate the protection and preservation of the environment, then anti-natalists should hold a radically different attitude towards environmental preservation than supporting preservation itself. This is the case irrespective of the anti-natalist reasons for wanting to protect and preserve the environment. This is because what we have at hand is a practical conflict between anti-natalist values and how environmental preservation, with its pro-natalist grounding, challenges these values. I shall now demonstrate this by relating three anti-natalist core values.

1. Practicality of Extinction

[15] This is not to suggest that humanity doesn't care about non-human animals. Many people do. However, this care only goes so far, and it is generally overshadowed by the significantly harmful industry of animal agriculture and the popular desire to reproduce and eat, rather than protect, non-human animals.

Practically speaking, if anti-natalists advocate for and support environmental preservation, then it shall take them further away from the goal of extinction. In other words, given the pro-natalism attached to environmental preservation, then *regardless of the anti-natalist's reasons for preserving the environment*, environmental preservation shall, *in practice*, take them further away from the goal of extinction. This is because environmental preservation supports the enablement of future lives, increasing the likelihood that humanity shall continue indefinitely.[16] Given this, it does not suffice for anti-natalists to object by stating that they preserve the environment for reasons unrelated to future generations; it does not affect the practical conflict at hand.

2. Suffering and Harm

As I've stated, a large part of the anti-natalist's motivation for extinction comes from the desire to minimise suffering in the world, and reducing it to zero is the most efficient way. Thus, more generations equate to more suffering, and so procreation, in the eyes of anti-natalists, is regretful.

Now, anti-natalists might believe they have good reason to preserve the environment because, as mentioned, the suffering of current lives will be alleviated. For example, if we do not preserve the environment now, existing humans and non-human animals will suffer, as will the natural environment. Therefore, it makes sense to protect the environment and mitigate the effects of climate change to improve existing lives.

[16] Certain scenarios might present a challenge to this. For example, suppose a "Big Plan" to stop reproduction. However, it requires continued, normal reproduction for a few more generations, and ipso facto environmental preservation, before it can be properly enacted. Such a scenario appears to suggest the importance of continued procreation *in order to* achieve extinction. However, my arguments here concern what is probable and reasonably thought to be playing out, hence the appeal to the empirical data in Section 3. Moreover, once the Big Plan is ready, preservation of the environment would no longer be desired, and so we're simply extending the timeline. As such, theoretical possibilities like the Big Plan do not affect my argument.

However, should we preserve the environment to reduce present suffering, we can expect greater suffering in the future. Environmental preservation enables future generations, and more of them, to live and flourish. But future generations equate to more lives. And, through the eyes of anti-natalists, the more life there is, the more suffering. Therefore, for anti-natalists, making good of the practice of environmental preservation enables continued procreation and the vicious cycle of existence and continued suffering.[17] Therefore, for anti-natalists, with their essential goal to reduce suffering overall, it is practical to dissociate from environmental preservation to prevent a more significant amount of suffering in the long term.[18]

3. Duty of Non-procreation

Anti-natalists take seriously the consequences of procreation, adhering to a duty not to procreate. Given this, if anti-natalists were to support environmental preservation, then, although it is not the case that the duty is *directly* violated—as in, anti-natalists procreate—it is *indirectly* violated. This is because, in supporting environmental preservation, anti-natalists, although not engaging in procreation, are advancing the enablement of procreation, which is thus in tension with adherence to their duty.

The conflict here is nuanced, so consider the following analogy. Suppose a rather lazy prison guard monitors a prisoner notorious for escaping. The prison guard is dutiful by *directly* ensuring that the prisoner does not escape. The doors are locked, the prisoner is monitored, and contraband is thwarted. However, the guard neglects to report the eroding

[17] Some anti-natalists might deny the (negative) utilitarian nature of this claim; however, some key anti-natalist arguments, such as Benatar's quality-of-life and misanthropic arguments, appeal to how the harms vastly outweigh the benefits, thus supposing some sort of utilitarian outlook.

[18] Moreover, to do so is in line with Benatar's final generation, which will, as a supererogatory act of the greater good, potentially endure tremendous suffering so that an even greater amount of suffering does not occur in the future.

window bars in the prisoner's cell. One day, the prisoner succeeds in tactfully escaping through the eroding bars. The prison guard is partly held responsible for the prisoner's escape, for though they did not authorise the prisoner's escape *directly*, their lack of action to secure the prisoner's cell enabled the prisoner to escape. Therefore, the guard failed in their duty *indirectly*.

Similarly, if the analogy holds, then anti-natalists fail in their duty, not by procreating but by supporting an endeavour that undoubtedly contests their values. That is, environmental preservation, as described in its practical form, furthers pro-natalist values: future generations are good and desirable and constitute the main reason why, empirically speaking, we engage in environmental preservation.

Indeed, Edith Brown Weiss goes so far as to argue that we have a duty towards future generations, stating, "As members of the present generation, we hold the earth in trust *for* future generations" (italics added). To Weiss, environmental preservation is thus an act of promoting "intergenerational equity", where the present generations are "trustees", ensuring that planetary conditions are, if not better, no worse for future generations (Weiss, 1990, 199-200). Therefore, if environmental preservation is tied to a duty towards future generations, then it demonstrates an additional reason to consider the anti-natalist duty of non-procreation incompatible with environmental preservation. Still, even if one is disinclined to agree with Weiss that we have a duty towards future generations, the argument from duty still stands. Given all of this, it is challenging to see the light in which anti-natalists can fulfil their duty of non-procreation whilst also practising environmental preservation.

5. Overcoming the Conflict

For the three reasons discussed, for anti-natalists to support or pursue environmental preservation is to create a practical challenge to their own values. As such, it is a serious problem that anti-natalists need to address. For anti-natalists to solve this problem, it seems they should practice something other than environmental preservation. So, anti-natalists should take up a new outlook towards environmental preservation, one that essentially recognises it as being practically in conflict with their anti-natalist values. With this, I shall discuss two possible environmental outlooks for anti-natalists.[19]

1. Destruction

The first outlook is *Destruction*. The active degradation and destruction of the environment would bring about extinction as soon as possible, perhaps within the youngest generation. *Destruction* might involve actively eliminating habitable areas and using the planet's resources substantially. With this outlook, the goal of extinction aligns with the practice of destruction and exploitation of the environment, so there is no (1) issue of practicality.

However, such an outlook is troubling to the other anti-natalist ideals. First, would *Destruction* lead to an increase or reduction in (2) suffering prior to extinction? There would likely be more suffering with the active destruction of habitable zones, particularly for humans and wildlife living in vulnerable areas. Yet, suffering might be reduced through the intense exploitation of resources instrumental to comfort, luxury, and increased life quality. As such, whatever damage and displacement would be caused would have to be offset by using non-renewable resources, for example. Furthermore, for anti-natalists, the

[19] The discussion is not exhaustive, meaning there could be further, better-suited outlooks for the anti-natalist.

suffering would likely be significantly less than the suffering of prolonged procreation and existence.

Still, there is perhaps an incongruence in bearing compassion-based values whilst performing acts of severe destruction. That is, is it somewhat contradictory to be an anti-natalist who cares deeply about the suffering of a potential child whilst simultaneously causing environmental destruction that undoubtedly harms others? The anti-natalisms somewhat differ here, so to what extent *Destruction* leads to a value conflict depends on which anti-natalism we're talking about. For example, Christopher Belshaw's anti-natalism (2012) might be less problematic since non-human animals—some victims of such destructive acts—are not persons and, therefore, matter less morally. Yet, Benatar's (2015, 85-111) misanthropic argument—a component of his anti-natalism[20]—would explicitly generate an incongruence since environmental destruction and harm to non-human animals that humans cause are reasons for a presumptive duty of non-procreation.[21] Thus, *Destruction* introduces a fresh moral dilemma: how to be a compassion-based anti-natalist whilst also causing severe environmental destruction. Therefore, the plausibility of *Destruction*, in this regard, depends on whether a better outlook—one that produces less suffering overall—can be provided.

Regarding (3) the duty of non-procreation, anti-natalists would display greater adherence to it since, with *Destruction*, they are actively opposing the pro-natalism nested within

[20] Other components include the asymmetry argument, which focuses on the asymmetry of the harms and benefits of existence (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015, 23), and the quality-of-life argument, for which, he states, the quality "of even the best lives … is actually very poor" (Benatar, 2017, 67). Both of these components are "philanthropic" arguments that lead to the conclusion that it is better not to come into existence.

[21] It might seem strange to label a "misanthropic" argument "compassion-based". However, Benatar's misanthropic argument does not invoke a hateful attitude towards humanity or an "anti-humanist" sentiment (Benatar, 2015, 35); rather, it implies we should desist from propagating a species that causes an immense amount of suffering (even to itself), which according to Benatar, applies to humanity.

environmental preservation. That is, anti-natalists would not only not procreate but would also be *disenabling* procreation.

Yet, recall that the duty not to procreate isn't imposed on others—the duty does not imply that anti-natalists have moral permissibility to deny another's purported right to procreative freedom (Benatar, 2006, 102).[22] Now, with *Destruction*, the destruction of the environment and habitable zones might be seen as an attempt at coercive anti-natalism—to force others into non-procreation by denying the necessary conditions of sustainable habitation and upbringing. As such, *Destruction* would arguably lead to a violation of the duty of non-procreation by forcing it upon others.

In sum, though *Destruction* supports the anti-natalist end goal of extinction, it does not solve all the issues related to the discussed anti-natalist ideals, such that suffering might be more or less intense, severe destruction of the environment is more heartless than compassionate, and the duty of non-procreation is potentially forced on others. Thus, we must explore a second outlook to see if it is more viable than *Destruction*.

2. Apathy

Apathy is to be "hands-off" towards preserving the environment and, given the damage we have already caused collectively, let nature run its course. In other words, let humanity do what it does and use the resources it likes, knowing that extinction is the aim, without being overbearing, coercive, or excessive. For example, where *Destruction* on the individual level might be, say, felling the village trees and destroying the local wildlife

[22] Procreative freedom, broadly construed, refers to "the freedom to control one's reproductive capacity" (Bognar, 2019, 321).

habitat, *Apathy* is not caring about leaving the lights on, taking liberties with the supermarket plastic bags, and going on a Sunday drive if one feels like it.

Like *Destruction*, *Apathy* solves the issue of (1) practicality—they both move towards extinction by resisting environmental preservation and allowing degradation. Moreover, with *Apathy*, the route towards extinction would be slower as humanity would not degrade the environment at an intentionally substantial level. As a result, (2) suffering might be less intense in the short term compared to *Destruction*. However, because of this, suffering would also be prolonged if there remains a relatively high chance of a limited number of future generations due to the slower rate of degradation. Still, unlike the act of environmental preservation, *Apathy* ultimately supports the anti-natalist end goal by ensuring extinction at some time in the near future, lessening the greater amount of suffering that would come from preserving the environment for future generations indefinitely.[23]

Regarding (3) the duty of non-procreation, anti-natalists would be resisting environmental preservation and, therefore, resisting its pro-natalist attachments. However, with *Apathy*, anti-natalists would not be opposing the pro-natalist position as strongly as in *Destruction*. That is, where *Destruction* would bring about an uninhabitable environment, *Apathy* would also do so but at a much slower rate and, importantly, more passively. Would this still be enough to vindicate anti-natalists from an indirect violation of their duty of non-procreation?

[23] *Apathy* might also align with the ideal "phased extinction" (Benatar, 2006, 182-192).

There are reasons to believe it would and would not be enough. For example, *Apathy* is not as explicit with the indirect adherence to the duty as *Destruction*, which might give us reason to believe that *Apathy* is not enough to vindicate anti-natalists from violating their duty. Yet, at the same time, *Apathy* avoids the additional undesirable incongruities in *Destruction* that come with a stronger adherence to the duty.

First, anti-natalists would not be contradicting their compassion by proactively causing destruction. Second, *Apathy* is non-coercive anti-natalism. That is, like *Destruction*, *Apathy* also takes a negative attitude towards environmental preservation by not engaging in it. However, unlike *Destruction*, in *Apathy*, one does not interfere with another's right to procreative freedom. Instead, in *Apathy*, one is simply desisting from acts—namely, environmental preservation acts—that support continued procreation.

Perhaps, one might argue, *Apathy* is naturally disenabling procreation, and so one is, in some sense, like *Destruction*, contriving anti-natalism. In other words, by practising *Apathy*, like *Destruction*, but at a slower rate, one might be said to be reducing the potential for future life—e.g., reducing habitable zones and resources key to future generations—which could thus be recognised as bringing about anti-natalism, even if, in practising *Apathy*, preventing procreation isn't the primary intention.

However, if this were the case, anti-natalists would have no way to resist environmental preservation without it being a contrivance towards anti-natalism. Anti-natalists would then have no choice but to support environmental preservation lest they be forcing their anti-natalist ways on others. Therefore, out of the two proposed outlooks, *Apathy* is the most suitable for anti-natalists, providing an alternative to the inconsistencies that arise

from being a pro-environmental anti-natalist whilst mitigating the adverse effects of the more extreme outlook of *Destruction*.

Now, there may be more environmental outlooks for anti-natalists to hold. One such possibility, which would challenge the arguments made thus far, is to suggest that anti-natalists can support environmental preservation as the most effective way to adhere to their values. For example, recall the ambiguity regarding the best way to achieve extinction. Suppose that the best route to extinction that minimises suffering overall is to continue procreating for a while longer, perhaps another one or two generations, thus requiring preserving the environment for a while to ensure that existing lives do not suffer. If this is possible, anti-natalists can support environmental preservation without challenging their values.

Though this outlook has merit, it would overlook the duty of non-procreation since it implies that procreation is instrumentally desirable. Still, perhaps we could provide the benefit of the doubt and state that temporary non-adherence to the duty of non-procreation is necessary to achieve the strategic goal of extinction. However, regardless, the pro-environmental attitude in this outlook is on borrowed time: Where we've been discussing environmental preservation as an endeavour for an *indefinite* number of future generations, in this outlook, environmental preservation is a temporary means to extinction. Indeed, such an outlook might be a variation of *Apathy*, one that simply stretches the timeline to extinction. Either way, anti-natalists would not be practising environment preservation indefinitely. Instead, they would only be practising preservation as a short-term instrument to achieve extinction.

Finally, there is an ideal position that has been alluded to and is worth discussing more: Can anti-natalists not love the environment for reasons other than future generations, desiring and practising its preservation whilst advocating a position of anti-natalism? In other words, can anti-natalists not reject all of this and say, "I love the environment because of its intrinsic value; therefore, I will protect and preserve it whilst advocating a position of anti-natalism, and I am consistent in doing so!"? Anti-natalists can do so whilst being *theoretically* consistent with their values. However, the position here overlooks the important connection in Section III: the *practical* inseparability of future generations and environmental preservation. The position described here might be ideal for anti-natalists and truly built on compassion, but it is just that: ideal. Its application in *the real world* does not produce an ideal scenario for anti-natalists; instead, it challenges adherence to their own values. That is why, to re-state, it does not matter the reasons why anti-natalists care about the environment. This is because their reasons for doing so have no material impact on the consequences of supporting environmental preservation—the consequences of supporting environmental preservation support pro-natalism.

6. The Myth of *Apathy*

There is one final thing to discuss: From what I've argued, does it follow that anti-natalists should *actually* practice *Apathy*? There is good reason to suggest that anti-natalists should not practice *Apathy*, despite there being a practical conflict in anti-natalists *not* practising *Apathy*.

The tension here is because of a further practical point: Anti-natalism is very much a minority view, and environmental preservation is what humanity practices collectively.[24] Thus, for the relatively few anti-natalists to practice *Apathy* is to chip away at the inevitable process of environmental preservation, and chipping away shall, most likely, only cause greater suffering.

To demonstrate this point further, consider the following: Anti-natalists are morally opposed to procreation, but to pursue its prohibition, even if pursued successfully, would be overall counter-productive to their ideals. For example, suppose an anti-natalist lawmaker, against the majority, somehow manages to pass a bill that prohibits reproduction and denies procreative liberty. The majority, still wishing to procreate, would likely continue to do so. Pregnancy and childbirth would occur without regulation, and as a result, the rate of pregnancy-related diseases, infections, and mortality would increase. Moreover, newborn children would not receive the post-natal support required to prevent further complications or death (Benatar, 2006, 105-106). In other words, procreation would happen even with the bill passed.

As a consequence, if the bill were passed, suffering might be worse than before.[25] Thus, whereas anti-natalists might oppose procreation, they recognise the moral challenges in pursuing its actual prohibition. Likewise, anti-natalists might oppose environmental preservation whilst recognising the moral challenges of not protecting the environment.

[24] The closest we've come to anti-natalism in the real world is in cases of selective eugenics and temporary limited-procreation policies, such as China's previous One-Child Policy.

[25] Measured long term, the suffering might be less overall compared to not introducing the bill, since humanity would likely go extinct sooner, even if reproduction continued for a period of time. This is possible, but it depends on many speculative considerations, such as how many people (and for how long) would resist the anti-natalist policy and continue to procreate. Moreover, the bill challenges the anti-natalist value of non-coercive anti-natalism, which would also have to be considered.

In practising *Apathy*, anti-natalists would likely add to the suffering in the present while not achieving their desired outcome. Their casual acts of degradation would likely be limited to local effects that the stronger endeavour of environmental preservation would heavily counter. Perhaps, one might argue, anti-natalists should practice *Apathy* regardless—to rebel and fight against futility and adhere to their core values. There might be good times to engage in such futile defiance, particularly when pushing boulders. However, decisions here shall fundamentally affect others, influencing whether more or less people suffer.

One final point suggests that it doesn't matter either way: Humans will be humans, and humans will procreate. I've argued that, theoretically and empirically, environmental preservation is driven by the desire for future generations, thus giving anti-natalists a reason not to practice it. Yet, it could also be the case that, even if the environment were degraded beyond repair, most people would *still* try to procreate, thus implying the same outcome regardless of the anti-natalists' environmental attitudes.

This is a speculative point that has merit, particularly given the undeniable collective pro-natalist bias evident in the world. However, in an unliveable world, more people might see a good reason not to procreate, with those reasonable people less hostile to anti-natalist narratives that, for example, would demonstrate, *quite evidently in such a scenario*, a poor quality of life and a high amount of suffering for any future generations. In other words, many people are not beyond reason, and many would recognise that a destroyed environment would not provide sufficient conditions to provide new people with good lives.

So, how might anti-natalists act? In the context of this paper, anti-natalists can only stick to their principles, which implies being compassionate towards minimising suffering and acting on their duty not to procreate. Thus, if environmental preservation is the consensus overall, anti-natalists should focus on what they can change—the amount of suffering in the world and adherence to the duty of non-procreation. And this, quite ironically, might be to help create a better environment for inevitable future generations. However, should humanity have a change of heart and should support for anti-natalism grow exponentially, then anti-natalists should raise the case for practising *Apathy*.[26]

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that, for most people, environmental preservation is, descriptively speaking, for future generations and is, thus, pro-natalist. This presented a challenge for anti-natalists and their values. Therefore, I proposed a new environmental outlook for anti-natalists: *Apathy*. And yet, given the way of the world, it was necessary to note the practical constraints of *Apathy*. This presented a further challenge for how anti-natalists might best adhere to their values practically. The best adherence, I argued, might be to practice environmental preservation because, in focusing on doing what can be done in the real world, with extinction currently out of the question, environmental preservation might best adhere to the compassion-based anti-natalist's core value of reducing suffering.

"Anti-natalists", so understood in this paper, refer to a few (collectively, "compassion-based") of many variants in a relatively young and emerging field. Each anti-natalist, with

[26] This might occur, for example, through the gradual decline of humanity, nudged below a "minimum viable population" threshold through increased anti-natalist procreative decision-making, which ultimately leads to extinction (Torres, 2023, 238-239).

varying values, from subtle to wide-ranging, must look within to determine how best to address the practical challenge of environmental preservation and its pro-natalist attachments. Here, I hope to have brought to light the important link between environmentalism and some of the most prominent anti-natalist philosophers in analytic philosophy. There is no doubt more to discuss.

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THE UNNECESSARY HARM PRINCIPLE, ETHICAL VEGANISM, AND THE CASE AGAINST REPRODUCTION

This paper examines the Unnecessary Harm Principle (UHP) as a foundation for ethical veganism and its broader moral implications. The UHP asserts that if a harmful practice, P1, has a less harmful, suitable alternative, P2, then engaging in P1 is impermissible. While commonly applied to the immorality of animal agriculture, such as factory farming, the UHP extends to other areas of life. I argue that adhering to the UHP implies significant lifestyle changes, such as avoiding unnecessary travel, abstaining from pet breeding, and even foregoing procreation due to the inevitable harm that humans cause. While some may reject the UHP due to its demandingness, I contend that rather than abandoning the principle, one can acknowledge its demands without striving to meet them all. Ultimately, I suggest that adhering to the most significant demands, such as not procreating, will lead to human extinction. This, in turn, implies there will be no future harm footprints; at this point, there will be no need to reduce any unnecessary harm.

This paper incorporates an anti-natalist narrative indirectly. That is, instead, of starting from anti-natalist principles, I introduce a moral argument that, taken further, implies an anti-natalist duty not to procreate. Thus, this paper addresses the primary theme of the thesis by considering more broadly how some normative theories—such as the one discussed here, which is derived as a typical argument for veganism—might imply anti-natalism. Thus, in this paper, instead of focusing on what avowed anti-natalists are committed to in practice, this paper considers an unexpected way in which one might end up becoming an anti-natalist from a different moral position.

1. Introduction

A conventional argument for ethical veganism is based on the principle that if there is a harmful practice, P1, and there is a less harmful suitable alternative, P2, then P1 is impermissible. Thus, one should choose P2.[1] For example, animal agriculture (P1) is extremely harmful, while plant agriculture (P2) is a less harmful alternative.[2] Thus, animal agriculture is impermissible, and one ought to engage in plant agriculture. This is the *Unnecessary Harm Principle* (UHP) argument for veganism.

In this paper, I argue that if this argument for veganism is sound, then many other ordinary practices are impermissible, including procreation and the reproduction of non-human animals.[3] In turn, this raises an even greater implication: Our lives involve the production of harm on a daily basis, which could be avoided with suitable alternatives. Thus, the UHP seems to demand that we change our lives significantly, resulting in many of our ordinary daily activities being impermissible.[4] In response, one might take these demanding implications as a reason to reject the UHP.[5] However, I argue that we ought not to reject the UHP based on its demands. Instead, whilst the person adhering to the UHP does need to make some serious sacrifices, such as not procreating, they do not need to strive to meet the full demands, which would imply upending one's life such that they are cut off from the majority of consumerist practices.

[1] Hereon, I'll mainly discuss ethical veganism as simply veganism.
[2] This is not to deny the harms of plant agriculture, which I'll discuss in time.
[3] In talking about human reproduction, I mainly use the term "procreation" to differentiate between one's reproducing via offspring (procreation) and the more general idea of reproducing for any given species. Still, there is no definitive distinction between the two terms, and they are often used interchangeably in academic literature (Bateman, 2020).
[4] I'm not the first to argue along these lines. I'll discuss different arguments throughout the paper.
[5] On the demandingness objection of a moral theory, see Hurka (2024); Sobel (2007); Tanyi (2013); Woollard (2016).

In order to demonstrate this, first, I argue that some of the greatest demands imposed by the principle ought to be met, such as, as stated, not procreating. However, I argue that attempting to meet all the demands would cause harm to the moral agent, which is also a relevant consideration in the context of the UHP. Moreover, a key upshot of meeting the UHP's greatest demands, such as not procreating, implies that, eventually, the full demands of morality will be met: By not procreating, humanity will go extinct. Therefore, at such a point, there will be no harm footprints. Thus, one can live one's life whilst adhering to the UHP's greatest demands, such as not procreating, since doing so ensures that no new harm footprints are introduced and, eventually, there will be no unnecessary harm in the world.[6]

In Section 2, I first discuss the UHP and various common, everyday practices and engagements that might be impermissible in light of it. In Section 3, I address the demandingness concern: The UHP might imply that nearly the entirety of one's lifestyle and activities imply harm that could be avoided with alternatives. I argue that the UHP might be very demanding, but this is not a reason to reject the principle. Finally, Section 4 concludes.

[6] Some harm may still exist in the world, such as violence between wildlife species. However, such species are not subject to the UHP—as we'll see, the UHP only pertains to moral agents who could otherwise act differently to reduce harm they themselves cause.

2. The Unnecessary Harm Principle (UHP) for Veganism

There are many ways to argue that morality requires one to be vegan, with each way appealing to different reasons.[7] Here, I focus on the principle of unnecessary harm, henceforth the Unnecessary Harm Principle (UHP), to derive an argument for veganism.[8]

I use the UHP for several reasons. First, as I'll discuss, it reflects our moral intuitions. Second, it resonates with what is important to many vegans. Therefore, I will describe the UHP, clarify some of its requirements, and present arguments in support of it. However, I do not intend to suggest that the UHP is either the most compelling way to derive veganism or the best moral theory.[9] I maintain intellectual humility in this regard. Nonetheless, the UHP is effective in recognising the harm of animal agriculture, a practice that vegans take to be morally objectionable. Now, let us state the UHP:

> Suppose we have a practice P1 that produces massive harm to animals, the environment, and humans. Suppose that the harm that comes from P1 is unnecessary in the sense that another practice P2, which is a suitable alternative to P1, is available and produces less total harm. Then the harm foot print argument concludes that participation in or support of P1 is morally impermissible (Bruckner, 2020, 351).

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[7] On veganism derived from popular theories of morality, such as consequentialism, deontology, virtue theory, and contractualism, see McPherson (2018, 240).
On veganism grounded in "problematic commodification", see Clipsham and Fulfer (2016).
On the wrongness of free riding as an argument for veganism, see Barrett and Raskoff (2023).

[8] The inspiration for this paper comes from Donald Bruckner's (2020) *The Vegan's Dilemma*. Bruckner considers the same UHP and argues that it demands too much. (He discusses the same five areas of consideration, although we arrive at different conclusions, and I challenge Bruckner's arguments.) Based on the demandingness of the UHP, Bruckner argues that one need not be vegan but instead adhere to a broader "harm threshold". The vegan might find Bruckner's argument objectionable in the sense that the vegan likely affords a moral status to non-human animals—a respect for their rights—for which harming them is impermissible (Regan, 1983). Thus, a harm threshold fails to account for the vegan's motives.

[9] The UHP faces a theoretical problem known as the Ideal Worlds objection, also applicable to some consequentialism, Kant's categorical imperative, and Scanlon's contractualism. This objection claims that certain moral outcomes only hold if everyone, or a significant percentage, adheres to the moral duty (Rumbold, 2024). For instance, P2 is less harmful than P1 only if everyone follows P2; if not, P2 becomes *more harmful* than P1.
This objection appears inconsequential since it is hard to argue that veganism is more harmful than meat-eating if only a few people adopted veganism (see footnote 12 for a nearby objection and response). In this case, veganism may be ineffective in harm reduction, but it is difficult to assert that non-veganism is a less harmful choice.

Many practices cause harm, but whether a practice causes *unnecessary* harm depends on whether a suitable alternative practice is available and would lead to less harm *overall*. For example, animal agriculture provides the (primarily gustatory) benefits of eating meat, but it is also extremely harmful.[10] Furthermore, there is a suitable alternative that is, overall, less harmful: Plant agriculture. It is a suitable alternative because it provides similar nutritional benefits to eating meat, even if some people find plant-based products less appetising and contest their general nutritional content.[11] Plant agriculture is also harmful, but it is less harmful than animal agriculture overall.[12] Moreover, there is currently no suitable, less harmful alternative to plant agriculture. The UHP thus provides a typical justification for ethical veganism.

Let us qualify a few things. First, note the qualification of *overall* harm. It is not that a practice ought not to produce harm simpliciter. This is because not only is not producing harm simpliciter practically impossible or nearly impossible, but it does not appear to be what matters when we strive to do the right thing. That is, there are many instances where I seem to be acting permissibly, even when producing some form of harm. For example, a nearby polluted pond might provide habitation but also cause harm to its inhabitants. Thus, suppose I decide to drain the pond to remove all the polluting elements, and I then refill the pond. Draining the pond, in this case, temporarily causes harm since it displaces

[10] I am presupposing the significant harm of animal agriculture on non-human animals and the environment, but for the harm caused by animal agriculture to *humans*, see Doggett and Holmes (2018).

[11] Concerns exist that plant-based diets may reduce the bioavailability of protein and vitamin B12, among other nutrients (Kent et al., 2022). However, vegan diets may better prevent cardiovascular diseases, obesity, Type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers (Craig et al., 2021). Overall, many studies argue for more research and suggest that non-ultra-processed vegan foods offer similar nutritional benefits to vegetarian and non-meat diets.

[12] For example, plant versus animal agriculture is less harmful but still produces greenhouse gas emissions, water use and runoff pollution, and land use, amongst other things (Bryant, 2022).

Steven Davis (2003) has argued that an exclusively vegan diet may be more harmful than a non-exclusively-vegan diet based on the calculated harm to field animals during production. However, there are three things to note: (1) There is doubt regarding the accuracy of the calculations, and in general, on the impact of plant agriculture on non-human animals; (2) It has been argued, since Davis's paper, that various innovations and approaches have mitigated the harm (Fischer and Lamey, 2018); (3) Davis does not account for, inter alia, environmental harm in their assessment.

the inhabitants. However, *overall*, the reinvigorated pond provides improved habitation and less harm to the inhabitants. Thus, what matters is whether my actions cause harm overall.

Related to this, let me address a potential complication regarding the UHP. It may seem that the UHP requires one to reduce harm whenever possible, including whether or not such harm is the result of one's actions. For example, does the UHP require one to drain polluted ponds to reduce overall harm whether or not one has caused the pollution in the first place? I do not believe so. This is because there is a distinction between (i) reducing the harm caused by one's own actions and (ii) doing all one can to reduce harm, even when the harm is not due to one's actions.

Suppose the polluted pond (and its resulting harm) is due to *my* actions. In that case, the UHP obliges me to pursue a less harmful alternative, if it is available, such as de-polluting the pond to alleviate the damage I've caused. However, suppose the polluted pond is not due to my actions. In that case, I will be acting supererogatorily, *beyond the UHP*, if I decide to de-pollute it.[13] In other words, the UHP does not require doing all that one can to reduce harm in the world. It is only if *one's actions* result in (or are complicit in) harm that could be reduced through a suitable alternative practice that one is obliged by the UHP.[14] I will discuss these ideas more throughout the paper.

As a principle used to argue for ethical veganism, the UHP arguably reflects what matters to many vegans. Take the "absolutist" position of veganism. An absolutist vegan might object to anything involving the use of animal products. For example, an absolutist vegan

[13] I believe our obligations here align with our moral intuitions.
[14] This implies, perhaps objectionably, that the UHP does not require one, as a passer-by, to save a drowning person.

might argue that it is wrong to press a leather button, even if doing so causes no harm or lacks a causal link to any wrongdoing (McPherson, 2018, 210). However, many vegans might not agree with this strict view. For example, a non-absolutist vegan might consider pressing the button unproblematic, and the UHP can explain this view. First, there might be no harm in pressing the button. If there is no harm, then, according to the UHP, there is no wrongdoing. Second, even if pressing the button causes demonstrable harm, there might be no suitable alternative to pressing the button, making it permissible to do so. Of course, the context matters regarding this point. For example, is there another non-leather button available? If only the leather button exists, what harm would come from not pressing it? Regardless, the UHP has the advantage of aligning with the non-absolutist vegan's intuitions.

Above is a relatively clear description of the UHP. However, some ambiguity remains. First, consider the broader issue of causal impotence. For example, what about my purchasing meat is harmful if the animal is slaughtered *regardless* of whether I purchase the meat? In other words, if a cow is slaughtered regardless of my purchasing choices, then how is my purchasing choice harmful? A fundamental response is that the purchase encourages the continued slaughtering of animals and the production of meat. That is, the sale demonstrates consumer interest. Therefore, one is causing harm by supporting the continuation of a wrongful practice.

However, suppose that my purchasing choice has no demonstrable impact. The meat industry is huge, and no production decisions are going to transpire based on *my* purchase order. To this end, my actions appear inconsequential. Therefore, my actions are not harmful and do not contribute to the wrongful practice.

A response to this pertains to a threshold argument. For example, buying beef might not directly imply harm. Instead, buying beef might contribute to a purchase-order threshold that, once reached (and presupposing it is reached), leads to a purchase order for more cows to be slaughtered (Norcross, 2004, 232-233). As such, my purchase has a small but demonstrable impact. Therefore, my actions still contribute to a wrongful practice.

However, what if one doesn't buy but merely consumes animal products? Suppose, for example, a neighbour gifts me some lamb—how does my decision to accept the lamb bring about harm? Or, in other words, in accepting and eating the gift of lamb, how, exactly, am I engaging in the wrongful practice of animal agriculture? In this case, it could be that even if one's actions are inefficacious, they are still harmful (and thus impermissible) if they imply complicity in a wrongful practice (Bruckner, 2020, 353-354). For example, my decision to accept the gift might be interpreted as an implicit endorsement of the practice, such that I'm stating it is permissible to breed and kill lambs for eating. More specifically, I might be endorsing the view that it is permissible to buy meat to gift to someone else.

Alternatively—and this point applies to all variations of engagement in the wrongful practice—one may be uncertain about how one's decision to accept the gift of lamb or one's decision to purchase beef connects to the harmful practice of animal agriculture. Yet, one might still recognise the *potential* wrongness of one's decisions. Thus, one might not accept the lamb or not purchase beef because of the *risk* of doing so. In other words, suppose one is agnostic about causal and complicity arguments but sees them, or variations of them, as quite possibly true. On these grounds, one might commit to

engaging in less harmful alternative practices to avoid engaging in potentially more harmful practices.[15]

The above are some possible means for addressing issues of causal impotence. However, the general issue of causal impotence must remain open for now. The issue runs deep, and I cannot resolve it here.[16] In some cases, there may be clear causality; in others, it may involve avoiding complicity in something seemingly harmful but for which a causal connection cannot be easily established. Naturally, as we discuss various practices shortly, one might object that the harms of the practice cannot be readily explained through any means—causality, complicity, risk, etc. However, moving forward, I will assume that there is at least some form of a linkage between the practice and the creation of harm.

Other types of ambiguity regarding the UHP can be addressed more directly. First, it is important to clarify the kinds of harm we're considering. For one, we can posit that the harms in question include negative consequences to anything that can suffer harm. To this end, we can identify three broad categories: harm to humans, harm to non-human animals, and harm to the environment. In other words, the UHP suggests that harm to humans, non-human animals, and/or the environment is unnecessary if a less harmful

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[15] Could this be aptly named the *Vegan's Wager*? The cogency of this risk-based argument may vary depending on one's self-interest in less harmful practices such as veganism. For example, if one has only the risk of harm from animal agriculture but loves eating meat, then such a risk may be a less weighty consideration. Relatedly, regarding ignorance and moral recklessness in the context of food ethics, see Guerrero (2007).

[16] Tristram McPherson (2018, 222-229) discusses the harm link in relation to individual efficacy, group efficacy, and benefitting from and being complicit in a wrongful practice. Also see Nefsky (2018).
In terms of causal impotence, Rekha Nath (2021) argues that, in the cases of addressing large-scale harms, such as factory farming and an individual's causal relation to it, we possess a "radical uncertainty" regarding the potential consequences of our (in)actions. Similarly, see de Kenessey (2024).
Further considerations confound the case for veganism. For example, "freegan" arguments suggest that there is nothing wrong with eating roadkill or discarded waste, as there is no causal relation to the wrongful practice. In response, Milburn and Fischer (2021) challenge the permissibility of freeganism in many instances.

alternative practice exists. Furthermore, harm is understood broadly to include all that can negatively affect us: physical harm, psychological harm, thwarting of desires, etc.

Furthermore, I want to distinguish between different types of harm to humans. It is crucial to differentiate between consensual harm and non-consensual harm. For instance, it would be wrong to force-feed me a diet that raises my blood pressure. Conversely, it's not the case that being fed such a diet based on a consensual agreement is wrong. In this situation, the practice is the same (a diet that raises blood pressure). Yet, one instance (consensual variant) is permissible, while the other (non-consensual variant) is not.

In order to see this point more broadly, consider that we take self-imposed, consensual risks of harm in our everyday lives. For example, many people engage in activities that are dangerous whilst being fully aware of the risks, such as in construction work or competitive sports. If we did not draw the previous distinction, both of these practices, in the context of the UHP, would be unnecessary and thus impermissible: one could pursue alternative paid labour, and one could take up a less dangerous sport. Yet, to suggest that we are acting immorally or that we must act differently if we engage in such practices seems a stretch too far.[17] That is, the UHP may be morally demanding, as we shall see, but there is little to suggest that it ought to be so *prudentially* demanding, such that we should aim to live in extremely confined ways to avoid harming ourselves. Therefore, I will proceed under the stipulation that the UHP does not include self-imposed consensual harm.

[17] A more thorny case is the harm of child participation in high-level or professional sports (Donnelly, 2024). Here, we confront issues of consent, exploitation, and abuse. Yet, despite the potential for significant harm, preventing one's child from competing in high-level sports could lead to the deprivation of significant (personal) benefits, thus implying harm also.

Let us consider another potential ambiguity: Is a practice impermissible only if an alternative practice is available to *everyone*? In other words, is it the case that for P1 to be impermissible, P2 needs to be a possible alternative for everyone? I do not believe so. For those for whom a less harmful alternative practice is available, then the original practice is impermissible. However, for those for whom an alternative practice is not available, then the original practice is permissible, other things being equal. For example, suppose I do not have any nutritional alternative to eating meat. In that case, eating meat (and facilitating its corresponding production practices) is permissible. This characteristic of the UHP has practical value when we consider that it is simply infeasible to suggest that for any such practice, the same less harmful alternatives will be available anywhere in the world. Therefore, one's context—one's options in terms of available suitable alternatives to harmful practices—is relevant to determining what one's obligations are.[18]

Building on the importance of contextual factors, consider that various instances of a particular practice will yield different outcomes in regard to harm, thus affecting the practice's permissibility. For example, the permissibility of the practice of flying will vary depending on the context and, correspondingly, the availability of suitable alternatives in any given instance. Consider, am I flying for (a) a holiday or (b) crucial medical treatment? We might consider flying a harmful practice in both instances. However, whereas there may be suitable, less harmful alternatives to flying for (a) a holiday—let's say, taking a Eurostar train instead—there may not be suitable alternatives to flying (b) for important medical treatment, which, if not pursued urgently, may lead to more harm. Thus, the practice in both cases is the same—flying—but it would be an oversimplification to state

[18] For example, Luciano et al. (2023) present a contextualised case for veganism in Iceland.

that the practice of flying is impermissible absolutely, for contextual factors may alter the outcome, as demonstrated here.

This leads to a final consideration: We can ask what, exactly, counts as a suitable alternative. In other words, what must an alternative have in order to be *suitable*? As a foundation, we can take it that any suitable alternative will reduce harm whilst providing at least most of the essential benefits or value of the original practice. Still, I'm hesitant to take this abstract definition any further until we've examined particular cases—contextual factors are also important here. To this end, it is better to examine cases and make determinations about suitability within a particular context. Thus, I will now discuss several ordinary practices for which the UHP may impose serious constraints. As a result, many instances of these practices will be impermissible in light of the UHP.

1. Travel

First, consider the harms of unnecessary travel. It is relatively uncontentious to suggest that we can, generally speaking, avoid some forms of travel on many occasions and pursue less harmful alternatives. That is, I assume that many readers will have heard (and quite possibly agree with) arguments concerning how many modes of travel cause harm and how we ought to reduce relying on them if possible.[19]

The harms of many forms of travel can be multifaceted. Consider the environmental harm produced by the release of greenhouse gas emissions inherent in many modes of travel.

[19] Again, how one perceives causality to, or complicity in, the wrongdoing is a more contentious point. For example, does my (not) purchasing a flight ticket make a difference if the flight is scheduled to take place regardless? Here, one might invoke threshold arguments, complicity in wrongdoing, benefitting from a wrongful practice, the risk of engagement, etc. As stated, I will leave this open to interpretation.

Flying, for example, releases carbon dioxide emissions that harm the environment.[20] Such harm contributes to the wider harm of climate change, which, as we are all aware, harms humans, non-human animals, and the environment. Now, via the UHP, many instances of flying might be unnecessary if suitable alternatives exist. Again, the permissibility of the practice depends on the context. For example, is it permissible to fly to a philosophy conference? It can be argued that, instead of flying to a conference, one can partake remotely by video-calling. In doing so, one might lose out on some of the benefits of being present physically, such as networking opportunities and *potential* career advancements.[21] However, the greater reduction in harm likely outweighs this loss.

Moreover, instead of driving to see a friend in person, one could communicate with them via a video call (Bruckner, 2020, 355), which reduces the environmental harm inherent in driving.[22] However, in this case, consideration of the potential harm of remote socialisation is necessary. For example, it may be that most of the time, video-calling serves as a suitable alternative to driving to see a friend. Yet, to defer to this alternative all the time would impose severe restrictions on physical contact and, in turn, cause harm to oneself and one's friends. In other words, an extreme lack of socialisation and physical contact would likely severely degrade one's well-being. At such a juncture, remote video-calling would not serve as a suitable alternative.

[20] Flying can be personally harmful. A lower oxygen supply results in dehydration and possible moderate hypoxia in vulnerable passengers. However, these are self-imposed harms that aware passengers may accept for a greater benefit. Thus, this harm is not pertinent to the UHP.

[21] A judgement about the permissibility of flying in this case would have to be compared to the prospect of a career advancement, how likely it is, and how harmful it would thus be to miss out on being at the conference in person. These considerations cannot be assessed accurately in the abstract. Similarly, see footnote 23.

[22] Driving also poses risks due to road traffic accidents. When weighing these cases, the probability of harm is crucial. For instance, I do not derive from the UHP a principle of seeking alternatives to avoid a low risk of harm. Conversely, if a road accident is highly likely from one's driving, invoking the UHP seems appropriate.

To generalise this point further, there will be particular instances within practices where suitable alternatives do not exist. For example, as alluded to earlier, if one has to fly to some place distant to receive important specialist surgery, then it is permissible to do so since no suitable alternative to flying exists. In response, one might raise the case that an alternative is not to receive such surgery. However, the UHP does not oblige one to forego important surgery at the expense of one's own welfare. This is because such harm to oneself is also relevant to the UHP.

Nonetheless, cases like flying for specialist surgery are likely exceptional. On many occasions, reasons for travelling can be attained without the harmful costs of travelling, such as remote participation instead of in-person participation, or via less harmful practices of travelling, such as opting to take a train instead of driving.[23] To this end, we can realistically posit that the UHP will require compromising on some personal experiences. For example, it may be impermissible to fly across the world for an exotic holiday. One might find it personally harmful to miss out on such an experience, a consideration that we ought not to take lightly if such an experience endows significant personal meaning. However, in all, such experiences—such instances of the practice—might be impermissible if the harm is substantial and there are suitable alternatives.

Fundamentally, each case would require a review of the foreseeable harms and suitable alternatives. However, generally speaking, the UHP naturally extends to travel and, in turn, places more stringent requirements for justifying harmful travelling where suitable

[23] Again, it's important to note that this is a general rule. If taking a train instead of driving causes one to compromise on time and, say, miss out on a vital career opportunity (and thus harm oneself significantly), then it might not serve as a suitable alternative.

alternatives exist. Thus, we can proceed with the fundamental understanding that the UHP places fairly heavy constraints on travel.

2. Occupations

Does the UHP imply that particular occupations are impermissible, such that one should pursue an alternative occupation? If so, how extensive are the demands of the principle in this context? We can confidently assert that some occupations would be impermissible under the UHP. For example, consider many occupations in animal agriculture, such as serving a role in the production of meat. The UHP would suggest that one ought to pursue a less harmful alternative unless one has no other option.[24]

There are somewhat more contentious cases. Consider, for example, the worker who is part of an enterprise that provides predatory loans to desperate people or the worker who markets tobacco products (Cholbi, 2023). Are such occupations immoral, according to the UHP? On the one hand, one might argue that the harm is bestowed upon a consenting user—the loanee consents to the loan, and the tobacco smoker consents to the harm of smoking the tobacco. Thus, one might argue that the harm that results from one's actions is consensual and should not apply in the context of the UHP.[25]

Still, non-consenting individuals might also be recipients of harm in these cases. For example, an unrepayable loan might drive a whole family into abject poverty, and second-hand tobacco smoke might affect the healthy development of a young child. For these

[24] Even if one has no other option, such that it is the only form of employment, it might still be impermissible given the magnitude of harm. This would be the case if the harm of the loss of employment would be demonstrably less than continued employment.
[25] Further considerations include whether one should promote harmful products even when the end-user consents to their use. This could be linked to a notion of desires one might have if fully informed (Sobel, 1994), such that a fully informed individual would not pursue high-interest loans or smoke tobacco. It may then be suggested that it is permissible to provide harmful products only to those who are fully informed and would consent to them. This is merely one consideration that necessitates a more thorough assessment.

reasons, and insofar as suitable alternatives exist, we can derive the prima facie conclusion that such occupations are impermissible under the UHP.

It is worthwhile to consider an even more contentious case. Donald Bruckner purports to demonstrate the extreme demandingness of the UHP by highlighting the immorality of working in academia. Bruckner (2020, 359-360) states that being an academic is not very harmful, but it is also not very *beneficial* in reducing harm. That is, one might not be producing much harm by working in academia, but one is also not doing much to reduce the harm that exists in the world, particularly compared to something more charitable or altruistic, which one could be pursuing instead of working in academia. According to Bruckner, the UHP implies that academics should pursue more beneficial alternative occupations.

Bruckner is on the right track in highlighting the demandingness of the UHP, but their argument is not successful in this case. For one, Bruckner's argument introduces a new stipulation to the UHP: That one can harm by failing to benefit (Feit, 2019).[26] This stipulation implies that one can cause harm simply by not providing greater benefits to others.

Returning to an earlier point, this stipulation would suggest that one ought to de-pollute ponds even if the pollution was not one's own doing. According to the stipulation, if one did not de-pollute the ponds, one would be causing harm. However, that is not what the UHP asks of us. Rather, it asks us to seek alternatives when *our actions* cause harm—it does not suggest one is obliged to reduce all harm in the world. Still, one might argue that

[26] Bruckner (2020, 360) rightly notes that this stipulation requires further discussion before it can be accepted or rejected. I provide some of this discussion here.

the UHP *should* include the harming-by-failing-to-benefit stipulation. However, including the stipulation would make the principle even more demanding and, as I'll argue, lead to an objectionable form of altruism. It would also be, in some cases, self-defeating.

First, if one incorporated the stipulation into the UHP, one would have to minimise personally fulfilling activities and things in which one finds joy and pleasure. That is, if one were to adhere to the harming-by-failing-to-benefit stipulation, then recreational activities would have to be pursued at the bare minimum. The bare minimum might be that which provides just enough relief to ward off personal harm. For example, I might pursue a fun activity just so that I don't feel extremely deprived of recreation. However, according to the stipulation, if one were to pursue recreational activities any more than the bare minimum, then one would be acting impermissibly since one's time ought to be spent dutifully serving other causes. In other words, if I spend a large amount of time having fun, producing no harm but no interpersonal benefits either, then I am harming those in need by failing to benefit them. In turn, I am failing in my duty.

Further, such a stipulation might also be self-defeating because it would mean that one's own life would not be one's to lead. Therefore, following the stipulation may cause more harm. That is, one's life would function around a duty to maximise benefits. Thus, according to the stipulation, one ought not to focus on one's own interests, preferences, and career pursuits *unless* such things are grounded in the duty to maximise benefits. Of course, such a demanding, altruistic career may have very fulfilling elements. However, it implies a life of servitude and self-sacrifice that might make many people miserable and regretful since they would be unable to pursue their own passions and endeavours.[27]

[27] Agent-centred (or agent-relative) theories of moral duties may be relevant to such considerations. See Hurka (2024).

Thus, if adhering to the revised UHP made many people miserable and led to unfulfilling lives, then instead of reducing harm, it might cause more of it.[28] In sum, the stipulation might imply a self-defeating version of the UHP as well as an extreme form of altruism, thus providing reasons to reject it.

In sum, if one has a very harmful occupation, such as factory farming or horse breeding, then one is compelled by the UHP to pursue another occupation. However, one need not give up unproblematic and non-harmful, even if non-beneficial, occupations.

3. Alcohol

Arguably, the UHP implies that it is impermissible to purchase, produce, and consume alcohol. Alcohol production is typically harmful to the environment and non-human animals, and its consumption is harmful to humans due to the negative health effects of excessive consumption, road traffic accidents, conflicts, and domestic abuse. Given this potential for significant, multifaceted harm, there is a prima facie argument that one ought to pursue a suitable alternative practice to consuming, purchasing, or producing alcohol. This suitable alternative could simply be *not* consuming, purchasing, or producing alcohol.

Let us generalise the impermissibility of producing, consuming, and purchasing alcohol to something like the *prohibition* of alcohol. It may seem fairly obvious that prohibition follows from the UHP given, as described, the significant harm inherent in the practice of consuming, purchasing, or producing alcohol. This is particularly so when we recognise that the general practice is mostly "non-essential". In other words, similarly to purchasing

[28] This would also provide grounds to reject a moral theory that requires an extreme version of self-sacrificing altruism (Singer, 1972).

and consuming meat, in most cases, one does not need to consume alcohol. In not doing so, one is only being deprived of some trivial pleasure.

However, I wish to provide a defence against prohibition and demonstrate how the UHP's potential ruling against alcohol is not so obvious. This is not to imply that I'll provide a successful argument that suggests consuming, purchasing, or producing alcohol *is* permissible under the UHP. I will, however, provide some considerations that suggest prohibition does not straightforwardly follow from the UHP. In turn, this *might* imply that consuming, purchasing, and producing alcohol is permissible in particular instances.

This defence against prohibition that I'll provide is also designed to demonstrate the intricacies that ought to be considered when assessing such cases under the UHP. Thus, to provide the defence, first, I shall present some statistics on alcohol-attributable deaths due to excessive alcohol use in the United States from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021). The reasons for doing so shall become clear.

In total, in 2020–2021, there were 178,307 alcohol-attributable deaths. Nearly half (117,245) were chronic, which implies they were, according to the report, one-hundred per cent alcohol-attributable. The highest chronic cause was alcoholic liver disease (31,304), followed by hypertension (21,137)—extremely high blood pressure—and unspecified liver cirrhosis (12,258). There were also 61,063 cases of alcohol-related acute causes of death, causes "with a very short latency period from the time of onset to the time of death". The highest cause was alcohol-related poisoning (21,806), with a majority amount (19,165) being "non-alcohol" poisoning, which is described as likely fatal drug overdoses in which alcohol was involved (Alpert et al., 2022, 295). This was followed by motor vehicle traffic crashes (15,055).

Consider, first, the human-related harm of alcohol. Over half of the deaths (chronic and acute combined) were self-imposed harms through excessive consumption. This is tragic. However, as has been mentioned, it is problematic to suggest that self-imposed, consensual harms are relevant to the UHP.[29] Besides the reasons already mentioned for excluding such consensual harms, not doing so also widens the requirements for nearly everything we consume; for example, it would render immoral the consumption of sugar, saturated fats, and even vegan diets on the basis that one could be an even healthier vegan. Such impositions would be challenging to one's most basic desires and preferences, challenging one and society at large to live a Puritan lifestyle. Apart from being prudentially demanding, which is not a relevant consideration in the UHP, such demands may also lead to a similar situation as the one detailed in the previous section, in which one does not lead one's own life but instead serves expectations and duties that severely restrict one's freedom.

Still, it can be argued that the alcohol-attributable harms caused to others, such as road traffic fatalities and cases of abuse, are non-negligible and entirely relevant in the context of the UHP. However, the first thing to note is that road traffic fatalities cannot simply be attributed to alcohol. Of course, it is entirely probable that alcohol plays an influential and even a determining factor in some such cases. Still, non-consumption does not imply that these fatalities would not have occurred. Second, before stating that something akin to prohibition is necessary in order to avoid these harms, it is important to examine other alternative practices that might be more effective in reducing harm.

[29] It should be recognised that, for some individuals, alcohol may represent a non-consensual harm. Consider addiction: If someone is addicted to alcohol, it is far from evident that they are consuming it with full consent. Here, it is prudent to distinguish between addiction and more moderate use; the latter can be harmful, yet the user still retains clear judgement in their decision to consume it (and thus their consumption is consensual).

On the one hand, we can point towards existing alternatives to prohibition, such as awareness campaigns, policies, policing, and education. According to the Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility (2022), alcohol-impaired motor vehicle fatalities in the U.S. decreased by thirty-two per cent between 1982 and 2022, during which alcohol was still widely purchased, produced, and consumed. This implies that some existing policies have been effective in reducing road traffic fatalities. However, it might be argued that, even if these existing policies are pursued, there is still too much unnecessary harm, which could be avoided with a policy of prohibition.

A wider prohibition policy may, however, not be the most effective solution to reducing further alcohol-impaired motor vehicle fatalities. Consider a possible alternative, achieved through an accumulation of actions: When going someplace to drink alcohol, one might use alternative means of travel to driving. Moreover, one might avoid restaurants and bars that do not mitigate the volume of drink-driver customers, such as by having large parking areas for motor vehicles or increased distance from alternative travel infrastructure. An additional alternative might be to consume alcohol at home. These factors combined may provide a more effective solution to reducing road traffic fatalities. This is particularly so when considering that such factors can reduce harm in many ways. That is, these factors not only stand to reduce alcohol-attributable harm but also reduce the harm of unnecessary travel if one is not driving someplace distant to consume alcohol. If this stands, then such an alternative to prohibition could be more effective in reducing alcohol-related road traffic fatalities and other kinds of harm.

But what about the abuse and conflict that are related to alcohol consumption? People who are likely to abuse others may be more likely to do so after consuming alcohol. They

may also be more likely to do so after consuming other substances. Moreover, they may be likely to abuse others regardless, such that the consumption of alcohol only heightens the chances of an already existing proclivity to abuse. Thus, the key question is how to reduce harm most effectively in this regard. If one is likely to abuse others, instead of prohibiting substances that heighten the risk, a more effective alternative might be to identify the root causes. This might, inter alia, include the disuse of particular substances. However, in this regard, substance abuse, including alcohol, is only part of a wider problem, so it is not clear that prohibition is the best means to reduce the harm of abuse.

What about the harm of alcohol production on non-human animals and the environment? The production of alcohol may require land that displaces wildlife, and there are associated production costs that cause environmental degradation through high water usage and carbon emissions (Cook et al., 2024). Yet, it can be argued that environmental and non-human-animal-imposed threats from alcohol production are part of a larger issue regarding sustainable production. Thus, boycotting alcohol, whilst reducing some harm, would not solve the fundamental issues that are related to production in many other industries.

Therefore, the ideal solution that reduces unnecessary harm the most might be to bring about change in sustainable production in general. This could imply putting pressure on various producers, which can be achieved by the individual by, first and foremost, buying sustainably, such as buying from alcohol companies that produce with net-zero emissions, recycled materials, vegan ingredients, water conservation practices, etc. For the end-user, this comes at some cost and personal sacrifice, such as potentially increased costs of buying, a reduced supply until more people follow suit (who increase

the demand), and research efforts to identify sustainable alcohol companies. Yet, such costs are justified by reducing unnecessary harm whilst not being extremely demanding on the end-user, particularly given that even more demanding alternatives stated, such as prohibition, may not be more effective in reducing harm.

Finally, consider some harms of prohibition. Prohibiting alcohol would cause harm by destroying a productive industry that provides significant economic benefits, such as employment (de Bruin, 2013, 64). Considering the scale of the industry, the loss of such economic benefits cannot be taken lightly. Moreover, and somewhat more speculatively, insofar as the demand for alcohol would not dramatically decrease, prohibition may lead to increases in crime and violence, owing to the illegal production and sale of alcohol to meet existing demands. Of course, these harms might be outweighed in favour of prohibition. However, the key point here is that the relevance of such harm demonstrates the complexity of the issue at hand.

Thus, in all, the case is not straightforward. Purchasing, producing, and consuming alcohol might be permissible in particular instances, such as when it is produced sustainably and when one's purchasing choices adhere to such sustainability. Still, alcohol consumption is, in many cases, extremely harmful. My aim here has not been to suggest that the prohibition of alcohol does not follow from the UHP, but only that this is not a clear-cut and simple case. If anything, these discussions highlight the nuances at play and the importance of context, as well as empirical evidence, if necessary, for assessing any given practice. Further discussion or counter-arguments might show my arguments here to be unreliable defences for the permissibility of alcohol, which I readily

admit is a possibility. If such counter-arguments can be provided, then, following the UHP, the production, sale, and consumption of alcohol might be impermissible.

4. Pets

Pets—not limited to but primarily cats and dogs—can be incredibly harmful. (I use "pets" for referential convenience, with no derogatory or condescending attitude towards those non-human animals—or companion-non-human animals—that fit the bill.) At face value, before we get into important distinctions, we can acknowledge that pets can be harmful in various ways. This includes conflicts with other pets and humans and being invasive to wildlife species (particularly cats). Furthermore, cats and dogs also have largely carnivorous dietary requirements. This implies that having pets contributes substantially to animal agriculture.[30]

Given this harm, we might consider whether there are suitable alternatives, such as keeping smaller pets with lower harm footprints or replacing "relationships with pets with relationships with humans that already exist, such as orphaned children in need of adoption" (Bruckner, 2020, 356-357). Taken together, one might argue that, according to the UHP, having pets like cats and dogs is impermissible.

However, this argument is unsound. To see why, we need to draw an important distinction between (i) *creating* and keeping pets and (ii) keeping pets that already exist. Based on the UHP, one ought not to (i) *create* (reproduce and breed) pets such as cats and dogs. Adhering to such a duty stops the creation of a harm footprint that can be avoided.[31] Moreover, suitable alternatives are typically available, including developing relationships

[30] On the *environmental* impact of pet food, see Alexander et al. (2020).
[31] Even more problematic is pedigree breeding, a form of selective inbreeding that increases the risk of disease for the non-human animal (Rossi, 2017).

with humans or adopting existing non-human animals (which I'll discuss more shortly). Thus, following the UHP, it is difficult to envision the instances in which the practice of bringing new pets into existence would be permissible.

Still, it is not the case that the UHP implies one should (ii) give up or disown existing pets. Without clarification, one may get the impression that the UHP implies that, in addition to not reproducing pets, one should also disown one's existing pets to reduce harm. In this regard, I will now demonstrate why giving up pets would be ineffective in reducing harm and potentially morally problematic in its own right.

First, disowning one's pet would not minimise harm: a disowned pet still requires care and feeding, which includes the same carnivorous dietary requirements. One might believe that, in disowning a pet, one is reducing one's own harm. However, the alternatives, such as releasing the pet "into the wild", sending them to shelter care (which I'll discuss shortly), or euthanising them, are potentially even more harmful. Releasing one's pet so that nobody is responsible for its care will likely disrupt wildlife, cause poorer nutrition, and cause conflicts with other feral non-human animals or released pets.

Euthanising one's pet for reasons other than reducing harm to the pet, even if performed free of harm, is a denial of the pet's fundamental interests.[32] It is even more problematic from the point of view of the vegan, who is likely to afford pets full moral status and not recognise them as mere property. Thus, the harm to them of losing a pet is arguably more

[32] One might deny that non-human animals have interests in continued living (and not dying), although their behaviour would suggest otherwise. A second point might be to suggest that even if non-human animals do have such interests, thwarting them does not cause them harm, or it is at least not bad for them to thwart such interests (Belshaw, 2012). Even if this is the case, their deaths would be harmful to others, which would have to be taken into account.

intense than for those who view pets, or non-human animals more generally, as lesser beings.[33] Thus, the UHP does not imply that we ought to disown pets.

What about adopting pets? Is it permissible to do so, according to the UHP? Take, for example, rescued cats and dogs living in shelter care. Such potential pets are already causing harm through their carnivorous diets, which applies whether or not they are adopted. They may also be causing (and experiencing) harm due to crowded shelter circumstances and poorer living conditions. We thus have to assess whether adoption is going to increase harm unnecessarily. If adoption *does* increase the harm that such potential pets cause, then the UHP would imply that adoption is impermissible. Similarly, if shelter care is less harmful than keeping one's pet, then the UHP would imply that one ought to give their pet up.

However, overall harm is likely reduced through permanent care. This is the case for multiple reasons. First, consider the welfare of rescue animals. Non-human rescue animals in shelter care are less likely to have personalised care, with a more basic sleeping environment and diet, increased conflict in crowded spaces, and an increased prospect of euthanasia due to resource constraints. Indeed, it has been argued that the prospect of shelter euthanasia can be reduced by "providing specialized medical and behavior care [and] reducing barriers to adoption" (Rodriguez et al., 2022, 8). These points suggest that removing rescue animals from impermanent care, such as via adoption, is a suitable means of reducing harm.

[33] This is not to suggest that *all* vegans value non-human animals equally high or that *all* non-vegans do not value non-human animals as highly as vegans.

Consider next how adoption reduces harm and is beneficial to others. Adopting a pet satisfies the mutually beneficial human–pet relationship. Moreover, a pet owner is arguably in a better position to provide better and more sustainable nutrition to the pet, even if this implies a greater personal cost, such as time and financial commitments. Additionally, adopting a pet eases the burden on shelter-care organisations, who then have more resources to house and sterilise stray non-human animals that are often unneutered, thus reducing the propagation of unneutered strays and invasive disruption to wildlife.[34] Therefore, considering all of these benefits of adoption, adoption is permissible according to the UHP. Moreover, going beyond the requirements of the UHP, adoption appears beneficial since it reduces harm in the world.[35]

To restate, the permissibility of adoption is distinct from the permissibility of creating pets, where there is good reason based on the UHP to stop practices such as breeding since doing so avoids the creation of new harm footprints.[36] Moreover, suitable alternatives to breeding exist, including adopting existing non-human animals and developing relationships with existing humans. Of course, if everyone followed the UHP, then the universal non-breeding of pets would gradually reduce the availability of adoption. However, many potential pets are at least currently available for adoption. They will

[34] One might suggest that sterilisation is harmful. Some arguments suggest that sterilisation is both harmful and beneficial (Wayne, 2017). Fundamentally, we can accept that sterilisation harms the non-human animal (e.g., it opposes their (reproductive) interests and increases the risks of some diseases in some species) but that such harm is exceeded by the harm of non-sterilisation (e.g., propagation of the species, increased consumption of animal agriculture, etc.).

[35] Let me introduce a further contextual distinction between (i) adopting rescue pets and (ii) purchasing a pet from a breeder. The latter might be impermissible if it contributes to the wrongful practice of breeding.
Moreover, loved, adopted pets are not free from harm—restrictions on their freedom and oppression of natural desires, like reproduction, scent exploration, and play, can be detrimental. However, these harms can be outweighed by the harms noted so far and the risks of unrestricted freedom, including predatory conflict, food scarcity, and dangers from vehicles (du Toit and Benatar, 2017).

[36] Abolitionists and anti-natalists reach the same conclusion regarding the non-reproduction of non-human animals. See du Toit and Benatar (2017, 157-165); Francione (2008).

continue to be so due to unneutered feral non-human animals propagating and pet owners who are too often willing to give up their pets for the wrong reasons.[37]

Finally, do the arguments here imply that there is a *duty* to (i) keep a pet or (ii) adopt a pet since, in both cases, doing so might reduce harm? Consider first the prospect of (i) giving up a pet. If, as detailed, generally speaking, the practice of adoption reduces harm, then conversely, the practice of giving up a pet may cause more harm. If so, then the UHP implies it is prima facie immoral to give up pets. Still, various instances of the practice may influence the permissibility. For example, suppose one can no longer care for the pet physically, thus putting the pet and themselves at a much greater risk of harm. In that case, harm might be reduced by giving the pet up or finding the pet a new home. In such an instance, giving the pet up would be morally permissible (and required if the harm of not doing so was substantial). However, if giving up a pet is not grounded in harm reduction, such as merely for personal preferences or desires, then it is impermissible to do so, according to the UHP.

Second, the UHP does not imply there is a (ii) duty to adopt. This is because, recall, the UHP pertains to mitigating the harms caused by one's own actions. In the case of failing to adopt, one is not causing harm that one then fails to mitigate. Instead, one is failing to benefit, which is not something that comes under the UHP. Still, adhering to the UHP may inspire one to do something morally *preferable*, in which case, one can do something to reduce the harm not due to one's own actions. This includes adoption. For some, adopting may come at a cost too high, or it may be simply infeasible for someone who

[37] Consider "pandemic pets": The COVID-19 pandemic led to a surge in pet ownership. However, the RSPCA (2022) reported a 17 per cent increase in pet abandonment from 2020 to 2021 and a 24 per cent increase in 2022.

does not have the time. However, this does not imply that one cannot do anything, for one can contribute through other means at a cost not too high, such as by volunteering or providing financial or nutritional contributions to ease the burden on shelter care organisations.

In sum, the UHP implies that one should not create new non-human animals. However, it does not imply that one ought to give up existing pets or that one ought not to adopt.[38] Instead, it is more beneficial and harm-reducing to adopt, but adoption is not required under the UHP.

5. Procreation

The discussed cases have illustrated how demanding the UHP seems to be. However, it is perhaps our final case—the permissibility of procreation—that is the most contentious. To this end, I will use more space for a more detailed assessment. Still, there are many ways of exploring the potential harms of procreation, and I cannot address them all. Thus, I will primarily focus on the harm that we, as humans, typically *produce*—how harmful we are to others, including other humans, non-human animals, and the environment. This will tell us the harmful "cost" of bringing new people into existence. (An alternative measure of harm is the harm inflicted *on* the child brought into existence, which I will discuss briefly.) I will also discuss potential alternatives to procreation.

[38] Of course, the UHP buck does not stop there. If one has a pet, then one ought to take further steps to reduce unnecessary harm. For example, a cat's dietary requirements are inherently carnivorous, but some means of fulfilling such requirements will be less harmful than others. Consider, for example, the prospect of feeding pets insects and cultured meat, which can fulfil dietary requirements while reducing avoidable harm to the environment (Alexander et al., 2017).
At this point, one may be alarmed by the UHP's exponential demands. The next section augments the UHP's demands further, before we reach the summit in Section 3, in which the UHP's extreme demandingness is addressed.

First, consider that we all produce harm. That is, it is uncontroversial to suggest we all produce harm *simpliciter*. On this basis, it might be argued that we should not procreate because not doing so *guarantees* the avoidance of new harm. In other words, not bringing a new person into existence avoids the creation of a new harm footprint.[39]

However, more needs saying. This is because, recall, what matters is harm *overall*. It is uncontroversial that procreation causes some harm—the very act of giving birth causes harm, for example. But if such harm is instrumental to producing more good than harm, such that the child goes on to live a good life, improve the lives of others, and produce more benefits than harm, then their presence has been good overall. Thus, we have to consider whether procreation is a *net* harm.

To this end, it may be that the harm of procreation will vary depending on the lives we are analysing. On the one hand, *all* lives might imply a particular outcome—all are net harmful, or all are net beneficial. On the other hand, it may be that some lives produce net harm, whereas others do not. This may be due to particularities of the life in question, such as one's culture, values, and scope of opportunities that reduce the relevant harms.

Since all possible positions cannot be analysed, we must find an ideal position from which to make a prima facie judgement. To this end, we can take the position of a conscientious vegan operating under the UHP and determine whether their procreating is likely to produce net harm. This is an ideal position because it assesses a person who is already committed to the UHP and thus attempting to reduce harm by pursuing many

[39] This implies something like a procreative asymmetry. David Benatar (2006) provides a procreative asymmetry in which harm is avoided by never existing. However, Benatar's asymmetry pertains to the harm and benefits for the child specifically, whereas we're considering the broader harms produced in the world.

alternative practices in their life, including how they raise their child to reduce harm. Thus, let us revisit Bruckner, who makes the following argument:

> While, all else equal, a child who inherits [ethical veganism] will produce less harm than one without those traits, such a child living in the modern world will have a harm footprint that is largely insensitive to whether he has those traits or not. Although a conscientious person living in the modern world will seek to minimize his harm footprint, he will still have a harm foot print from the use of scarce and non-renewable resources, such as petroleum, natural gas, precious metals, landfill space, and agricultural land. He will contribute to climate change … air and water pollution … traffic congestion and crowding in cities or sprawl in suburban housing plans. Although he is a vegan, his diet will be associated with harm to field animals through agriculture. Wildlife will be harmed through habitat loss if he lives in a housing plan or travels on roads the construction of which displaced wildlife or results in vehicular collisions with wild life. He may produce benefits in other areas of his life, but considering the vast array of largely unavoidable harmful practices of modern life, it is plausible that his existence will be a net harm to animals, humans, and the environment (Bruckner, 2020, 366).

Bruckner makes the case that even a vegan's child following a vegan lifestyle will produce net harm. Bruckner's argument is in line with several anti-natalist arguments (Benatar, 2015; Stoner, 2024; Svoboda, 2022), according to which the anthropogenic harms of existence exceed the benefits.[40]

To add to what Bruckner says, we can draw on an additional point that they allude to. That is, a conscientious vegan's child is more likely to adopt the behaviours of their parents to reduce harm.[41] This sounds like good news, but if the vegan adheres to the UHP generally but chooses to procreate, then their child might inherit a similar mentality, following the

[40] These are "misanthropic" arguments against procreation. Another relevant anti-natalist argument is Hereth and Ferrucci (2021) on the right against foreseeable harm. Moreover, on the link between veganism and anti-natalism, see Austin-Eames (2024); Bülow (2023); Räsänen (2023a; 2023b; 2024).

[41] On raising children as vegans or vegetarians, see Alvaro (2019; 2020); Butt (2021); Fischer and Fredericks (2024); Hunt (2019; 2021); Milburn (2021; 2022).

UHP generally but making an exception in regard to procreation, introducing new harm footprints, and thus compounding the harm.[42]

Still, the benefits children provide are not negligible either. This includes the meaning and value bestowed upon parents and other family members, as well as the creation of new and intensely valuable relationships that will develop over time. Moreover, future lives might be integral to the motivation that grounds much of our lives (Scheffler, 2013). Consider the long-term projects that shape much of our lives, such as our desire and motivation to protect and preserve the environment. There are data to suggest that the desire to protect and preserve the environment is grounded in future generations (Syropoulos and Markowitz, 2021; 2024). If this is the case, then procreation can promote greater environmental care. Without procreation, we would care less about the environment and be more likely to harm it. Thus, procreation and introducing new lives provide value and mitigate harm in many significant ways.

Further considerations more or less favour the case for procreation. That is, in addition to thinking about how new lives impact the world by introducing a harm footprint, we can also consider how new lives might experience harms and benefits themselves. For example, is it harmful or beneficial *for* the child to bring them into existence? Some arguments take the former position, suggesting that existence harms the child. Therefore, we should not procreate on this basis.[43] Conversely, one might argue that coming into existence means experiencing all of its benefits, thus suggesting that, despite some hardship, it is better to exist than not to exist (Boonin, 2012; Smilansky, 2012). These are

[42] As the causal chain stretches, linkage to the initial practice might become more dubious.
[43] See, as alluded to, Benatar's (2006; 2017; 2015, 23) procreative asymmetry and quality-of-life argument.

just some fundamental considerations about the harms and benefits *for* the child, which are distinct from thinking about how the child introduces a new harm footprint.

I cannot provide a complete assessment of all the values affecting the potential child here. Doing so requires more space to address underlying issues. Namely, there is the metaphysical issue of non-identity (Benatar, 2006; Feinberg, 1986; Parfit, 1986), in which we must be able to demonstrate how we can talk about value for a person when they do not yet exist. For example, how can we appropriately talk about how a potential child will cause harm or be harmed or benefitted by existing if they do not yet exist?

Setting these metaphysical issues aside, the arguments based on anthropogenic harm are powerful. It is difficult to dispute that humans cause significant harm, and it is demonstrable that the harm need not be intentional for one to cause a significant amount of it. That is, none of these arguments suggests that the child or parent desires to produce a large harm footprint. Instead, much of what we do causes harm because it is a part of our daily lives and who we are.

Again, this does not discount the many benefits or positive value of bringing children into existence, but it is still the case that procreation leads to significant harm that could be avoided. If so, then there is a strong argument against procreation in terms of avoiding unnecessary harm: Since we are already alive, we cannot avoid much of the harm we cause.[44] However, in deliberating on cases of procreation, we can assess the potential (significant) harm of introducing a new life and prevent it from transpiring.

[44] One potential option is to take ourselves out of existence to avoid any future unnecessary harm. I cannot discuss this at length, but there are arguments to suggest that death itself is harmful (Luper, 2021), which would provide a reason not to die by suicide. Framed in the context of the discussion here, this question relates to the larger debate about the relationship between anti-

Still, it is not yet evident that procreation is impermissible under the UHP. This is because we also have to consider whether suitable alternatives exist. Fundamentally, in exploring suitable alternatives to procreation, the most plausible alternatives will be those that, inter alia, create or maintain deeply valuable relationships without introducing new people into the world.[45] The following alternatives to procreation are not universal or timeless, meaning they will be available neither to everyone nor all the time. Still, in light of the prima facie harm of procreation, these alternatives provide plenty of similar value to lessen the personal cost of not procreating. Thus, though these alternatives may still require sacrifice, they reduce the size of the bullet one has to bite.

First, consider a weaker alternative to procreation: Growing existing relationships or creating new ones with existing humans. For example, instead of procreating, one could become more active in the lives of existing younger family members, such as nieces and nephews. This provides a unique opportunity to be a parental or guardian figure during the child's crucial, formative years without introducing a new harm footprint. Moreover, if what one desires is not so much a parental role but simply closer ties to other humans, then one could work on new or existing friendships. These are just some considerations in terms of growing relationships with existing humans. They may be unsuitable or implausible for some. At face value, I take this alternative not to capture some of the essential meaning there is in procreating and raising a child. If this is accurate, then the following alternatives may be better suited.

natalism and pro-mortalism (that death is preferable to continued living). See Benatar (2006); McGregor and Sullivan-Bissett (2012); Sullivan-Bissett (2022).

[45] One might argue that an alternative practice is to allow *some* people to procreate, whereas for others, doing so is impermissible. However, I've argued that each new life adds an avoidable harm footprint, and so, depending on suitable alternatives to discuss, the UHP would suggest that each individual practice of procreation is impermissible.

The second alternative is adoption. Like producing a new child, adopted children will also be inadvertent harm-producers. The key difference, however, is that an adopted child already exists as a harm-producer, and one does not create a new harm footprint if one adopts instead of procreating. Also beneficial in adopting is that one reduces a substantial amount of (not one's own) harm by providing a loving home, stable environment, and pertinent relationships for the child,[46] which are all instrumental to healthy development. This need not imply that one is a perfect parent. However, surely, a permanent and loving home is better for a child's fragile psyche than impermanent shelter care.

Moreover, adopting a child facilitates becoming a parent, providing the unique and deeply personal value of raising a child and having a family. This captures a core aspect of the value of having a child via procreation. However, one obvious distinction is the biological makeup of the child: An adopted child is not one's *biological* child, whereas a procreated child is. Can this be a good reason to reject adoption and, instead, procreate?

It is difficult to justify procreation based on the biological makeup of the child, particularly in light of the prima facie harm of bringing new children into existence. Now, there may be some cases where genetic heritage is more important: preserving a dying or persecuted familial line or culture, for example. However, such cases are rare exceptions. For most people, arguments from genetic heritage are inherently self-interested. Such self-interested reasons are not strong reasons when compared to the harm of procreation. Moreover, even in the rare cases of preserving a persecuted culture by procreating,

[46] There may, of course, be cases where the adopted child is worse off. However, considering the barriers to adoption and the requirements and effort of adopting, prospective parents are likely deeply motivated to provide a good upbringing for the child.

considerations of the harm of bringing new children into existence still apply. Therefore, such cases might provide a stronger argument for procreating, but the (prima facie) net harm of doing so is still an incredibly important factor. Thus, if such rare cases cannot easily surmount the harms of procreation, then typical arguments that allude to genetic value out of self-interest are even weaker.

Of course, adoption is not available to everyone. Factors within and beyond one's control, including one's health, location, wealth, employment status, and criminal history, can influence the feasibility of adoption. Moreover, in coarse terms of supply and demand, the more people there are who adopt, the less availability there will be to adopt in the future. Thus, the more people that adhere to the UHP and choose to adopt, the more difficult it will become to adopt. However, insofar as adoption is a possibility, it suffices as a suitable alternative to procreation. Furthermore, one can reduce harm by adopting children in need. Again, such a positive factor is supplementary to the UHP, but as long as one desires to do good, adoption, in this regard, is an extremely altruistic cause. Still, adoption will not always be available, so I've one final alternative to suggest.

In the section on pets, I argued how keeping one's pet is better for the pet than giving them up, as well as how adopting pets is likely to reduce (not one's own) harm. Besides the many benefits of adoption to shelter organisations, the human–pet relationship can be mutually beneficial and deeply valuable. Many people consider pets an integral part of the family. This is arguably more so for vegans following the UHP who afford moral status to non-human animals. Thus, replacing potential children with pets is likely to come "more naturally" to those already committed to the UHP. However, I do not assume here that such a replacement would be without the sacrifice of some value. To many, including

vegans following the UHP, adopting non-human animals may be less rewarding and value-endowing than procreating. Yet, at the same time, we must recognise the prima facie net harm of procreation.

If adopting pets is an appealing alternative, it is important to consider that, like human adoption, the possibility of adopting pets or strays will vary depending on various factors. Still, there are generally fewer barriers to adopting pets than adopting humans. First, the requirements and regulations are less stringent. Second, non-human animals will likely continue to reproduce beyond regulation. That is, insofar as there are stray unneutered non-human animals, reproduction will continue, thus implying a continued supply. Third, as mentioned, many pet owners, often for the wrong reasons, give up their pets, thus increasing the supply. This is also true for humans, but pets are given up at a higher rate and in more circumstances.

The above are some of the potential alternatives to procreation. The prima facie net harm of procreation demands our attention. Since that harm *is* avoidable by not procreating in the first instance, it is paramount that all available alternatives that produce less harm be considered. I have argued that some alternatives that can be equally valuable and produce less harm exist. Foremost, insofar as the adoption of children is a possibility, it suffices as a suitable alternative to procreation. If such an alternative is not possible or is undesirable, one might consider adopting pets or developing relationships with existing humans (e.g., family and friends), the plausibility of which may vary depending on the sort of value one desires. But in all, if procreation causes significant net harm, then it ought to be avoided, and the bar for justification ought to be high.

Many will find this, above all else, a damning conclusion. Indeed, one might find it a good reason to reject the UHP. This alludes to a deeper issue: The overwhelming demandingness of the UHP, and whether such demandingness provides a strong reason to reject the UHP. It is to this culmination that I now turn.

3. The Overwhelming Demandingness of the UHP

The UHP seems to require us to seek alternatives in some of the most personally fulfilling and purportedly valuable experiences. This includes but is not limited to the adventurism of travelling freely and procreating. However, quite plausibly, the demands do not stop there. Close examination might reveal that the majority of our practices, many of which are seemingly innocuous, cause harm. Such harm, with additional sacrifices, might be avoidable. Thus, if it is the case that we ought to avoid harm where there are suitable alternatives, then our many daily engagements—our complicity in many common practices, as it were—might be immoral.

Indeed, Eugene Mills (2019, 385) has argued that the dynamics of the production of consumer goods are so intertwined that if we took the UHP seriously and adjusted our behaviours accordingly, then it would imply the wrongness of "economic transactions of an absurd number and breadth".[47] Consider the point further:

> If you pay a plumber, mechanic, dry cleaner, driver, courier, or cleaner, she is likely to use her income to buy factory-farmed meat. Even if you scruple to hire only vegans—a mammoth inconvenience that would effectively require you to become a widely capable

[47] Mills (2019) makes this point regarding various arguments for ethical veganism, not the UHP specifically; however, the point is still applicable to the UHP.

> do-it yourselfer—it is unlikely that all the vegans whom you hire, and whom they hire, and so on, will share your scruples (Mills, 2019, 395).[48]

This point purports to demonstrate the inevitable harm that ensues from many of our ordinary practices, even if we seek to do the right thing in light of the UHP. Correspondingly, Lori Gruen and Robert C. Jones (2015) have argued that ethical veganism can only ever be an aspiration. This is because we are unavoidably a part of "the complex dynamics involved in the production of consumer goods", for which even a purely vegan diet pursued conscientiously causes harm. Thus, ethical veganism, as a practice, can never attain "moral purity and clean hands" (Gruen and Jones, 2015, 156-157).[49]

It's worth noting that there will not always be suitable alternatives to the multitude of harmful practices of daily life. That is, not *every* practice can be replaced. In such cases, the UHP would not apply. However, we can likely do much more to reduce harm than we tend to realise. For example, most cases of heating and air conditioning can likely be avoided, and even vegans can simplify their diet to such a drastic extent that it is mostly raw and non-demanding on the environment (Bruckner, 2020, 360)

So, what are we to do? On these apparently absurd grounds, should we reject the UHP? Or, following the UHP, ought we adapt our lives to such an extent that they become incredibly austere in order to live up to morality's demands? First, let us consider the prospect of rejecting the UHP.

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[48] Mills (2019) argues that, due to these implications—that it would be wrong to buy many everyday products—typical "linkage arguments" for ethical veganism—those that connect the serious wrongness of factory farming to the buying of its products—are "dialectically unacceptable".

[49] Gruen and Jones make this argument with reference to the harm to non-human animals, but for our purposes, it can be extended to include all other kinds of harm discussed.

Before looking at the demandingness of the UHP as a reason to reject it, consider that there is a reason to reject the UHP if the conditionals on which it hinges are demonstrably false. In other words, consider what we discussed earlier: For the UHP to work, it requires that one's actions are linked to the wrongful practice via, for example, causality or complicity. It also requires an understanding of suitable alternatives, where closer examination in particular cases might reveal ambiguity—for example, what if, in a particular instance, we cannot agree on what counts as a suitable alternative? To this end, it is beneficial to explore the greater depths of the UHP to determine whether the UHP is reliable.[50] If the UHP is shown to be problematic, such that various linkage arguments fail or the notion of a suitable alternative is flawed, then the UHP might not be a reliable means to track morality. If so, we have reason to reject it.

Besides this potential reason to reject the UHP, one might take the UHP's demandingness as a reason to reject it (Bruckner, 2020). This is not a good reason. If it happens that the UHP is a reliable indicator of moral demands, then it simply demands *a lot*, including an austere lifestyle that is both depriving and impractical. We can reason that such a principle is extremely demanding. However, if the UHP is accurate, then that is simply what morality demands (Räsänen, 2024).

But supposing I'm right, the UHP tracks morality, and its demands simpliciter are not a reason to reject it. If so, then how ought one live? How *can* one live? If the UHP is true, one ought to make significant compromises, including adhering to the alternative practices discussed above. But what about the wider demands? Ought one disengage from all

[50] This also implies solving other issues discussed, or at least demonstrating why such issues do not pose a problem to the UHP's reliability. See footnotes 9, 14, and 16.

problematic economic transactions and lifestyle engagements, which are essentially the practices one engages in every day?[51] I do not believe so for a few reasons.

For one, doing so would be personally harmful.[52] In *attempting* to adhere to morality's full demands, one would be living for no other real purpose. Such a life, devoid of other meaning and personal desires, would be incredibly desolate. Such harm that one would thus endure is relevant to the UHP. In other words, the UHP's demands also pertain to the harm we endure, so we do not have to be self-sacrificial or cause significant harm to ourselves.

Still, what we can realistically posit is that the greater the harm implied in a particular practice, the more challenging it is to justify under the UHP. In other words, in attempting to meet some of morality's demands by adhering to the UHP, one ought to avoid the biggest harm-producing practices. This includes not procreating. It will also require many smaller compromises that I cannot lay out specifically here. Context and case-by-case factors are relevant to considerations of how smaller practices might cause harm to oneself and how these factors shape what one ought to do.

This leads to the second point, an upshot, as it were. By avoiding some of the *biggest* harm-producing practices, *including not procreating*, morality's demands will be met eventually. Recall that we cannot help but cause harm. Thus, the only thing that implies moral purity is non-existence. If procreation stops, non-existence will eventually follow.

[51] For example, one might feel obligated to orient sociopolitically based on the UHP (McPherson, 2018, 212). Ought one be friends with and promote the behaviour of those who do not adhere to the UHP? Should one vote for the political party that best adheres to the UHP's demands? (See Cochrane and Cojocaru (2023) on political veganism.) I cannot provide a detailed answer, but these considerations are nonetheless relevant to pursuing less harmful alternatives under the UHP.
[52] On the psychological difficulty of moral demandingness, see McElwee (2022).

In other words, by not procreating, morality's demands will eventually be met when humans go extinct.[53]

By not procreating, each individual will have avoided introducing any new harm footprints, which is surely one of the most effective ways to adhere to the UHP. In the meantime, one can continue to live and do things that, despite causing some harm that could be avoided, endow significant meaning and value. This allows one to mitigate the harm to themselves by living an enjoyable and meaningful life whilst meeting morality's demands on a larger scale: not procreating (and not reproducing other species) implies one is not creating new harm footprints. It is worth re-mentioning that this is not to suggest there will be no harm whatsoever in the world since, for example, wildlife species may still live in conflict. However, such harm is not subject to the UHP (see footnote 6).

I'm sure many will find this overall conclusion disagreeable and distasteful. However, *if* the UHP tracks morality's demands and we endeavour to meet such demands, then it is nonetheless an upshot that, eventually, such demands will be met by not procreating. Thus, these demands can be met without sacrificing one's whole lifestyle and engagement in a breadth of economic transactions.

I wish to make a final point, one that I hope will appease any sentiment of distaste. One might believe that the arguments about what the UHP demands suggest that humans are bad and that the world would be a better place without us. Here, it really depends on what we're implying when we envision a "better place". If by a better place, we imply a world with less harm, then, indeed, it follows from the arguments that the world would be better

[53] One might raise the question, why wait this long? Extinction can be attained faster by suicide. See footnote 44.

without humans. However, this point can be made in earnest without an attitude of disdain or the suggestion that humans are malevolent or evil beings. Humans often, and sometimes admirably, cause harm inadvertently and in the name of progress.

We are a species that prosper from the fruits of harm, often *in the name of progress*. For example, industrialisation changed the world, supposedly for the better. However, it could not have been achieved without the exploitation of (sometimes forced) labour and the use of environmentally destructive non-renewable resources. Likewise, wars and military endeavours, for better or worse, have led to some of the greatest technological innovations. And scientific breakthroughs performed through countless experiments on non-human animals have improved our welfare and the welfare of other species. Thus, we can look at all of these things as showcasing our desire to learn more, do better, and attain better living standards whilst still acknowledging that such feats are inherently harmful.[54] The alternatives to such feats—not to globalise, industrialise, or perform scientific experiments—may not be better solutions, but this does not negate the fact that significant harm is inherent in that which constitutes human progress.

4. Conclusion

I started by discussing a principle for ethical veganism, the Unnecessary Harm Principle (UHP), which posits that it is impermissible to pursue a particular practice (e.g., animal agriculture) if a less harmful, suitable alternative practice is available (e.g., plant agriculture). I argued that if this principle is accurate and tracks morality, then it applies

[54] One could argue that the UHP allows such practices if they constitute a lesser harm than the alternative. For instance, one might contend that the process of industrialisation and the advancements it has brought about are, on the whole, less detrimental than the alternative of stagnating in local economies and leading more deprived lifestyles. There is much to ponder here. For instance, the mass production of effective medicine could be viewed as a harm-reducing factor. Conversely, the atrocities of the twentieth century, facilitated by industrialisation technology and the capacity to wage global conflict, were undoubtedly more harmful than what could have transpired during that century.

to other areas of life that are often taken for granted. This includes but is not limited to unnecessary travelling, breeding pets, and procreating.

But, I argued, the UHP might demand even more, such that we ought to avoid unnecessary harm by drastically changing our lives to the extent that we cannot even engage in many daily practices. However, I argued that adhering to such demands isn't necessary. For one, such lifestyle changes would be harmful to oneself, which is a relevant consideration in the UHP. Second, adhering to the UHP by avoiding the most harmful practices, including not procreating, implies that, eventually, morality's full demands will be met since eventual extinction implies there will be no harm footprints that are subject to the UHP. Thus, following the UHP, we can live our lives by making some drastic changes, including not procreating. However, it is not necessary to cut ourselves off from all valuable and meaningful in the meantime.

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RETHINKING EXTINCTION

Anti-natalists oppose procreation, and, in turn, they generally desire extinction. Moreover, there is a preference for extinction to occur *sooner rather than later*, with one reason being that an extinction sooner avoids the inevitable suffering that comes from creating new lives. However, I argue that the discussion of extinction within anti-natalism has been short-sighted and that current and common views are untenable. That is, an endeavour toward extinction actually requires the existence of future generations. This implies that an extinction sooner rather than later is implausible. Moreover, I challenge the common anti-natalist view that simply not procreating can be a sufficient means to go extinct. This is because simply not procreating to go extinct would not actually achieve the extinction that anti-natalists desire. In turn, these new implications require bullet-biting on behalf of the anti-natalists, one way or another.

Extinction has become an increasingly prevalent discussion in moral philosophy, particularly when considering the growing causal factors that could contribute to human and non-human extinction, such as climate change, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and fears over unrestrained artificial intelligence. This paper works to bring together some of these concerns regarding extinction and anti-natalism, the latter of which is inextricably linked to the former. Thus, this paper aims to serve the primary theme of the thesis as well as raise important and topical moral concerns that are conducive to a better understanding of contemporary issues.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Structure

Anti-natalists, for various reasons, argue that we should not procreate. By endorsing this view, they also (typically) endorse the extinction of humanity and other relevant life forms.[1] Moreover, many anti-natalists believe that the sooner extinction is realised, the better (Benatar, 2006, 194-200).

However, I will argue that the discussion of extinction within anti-natalism has been short-sighted, failing to address some important requirements for a permissible extinction within an anti-natalist framework. For example, the common anti-natalist view that the human population can simply cease procreating to go extinct is inaccurate. A closer examination of the intricacies of extinction demonstrates that much more is needed, including not-yet-available "kill mechanisms" and, consequently, at least some future generations. Thus, incumbent anti-natalist views of extinction are untenable, and the considerations I raise require bullet-biting on behalf of the anti-natalists, one way or another.

In Section 2, I discuss some anti-natalist arguments and their connection to all sentient life and extinction (§2.1). I then discuss what can be determined as the minimum requirement for extinction to be permissible within anti-natalism (§2.2) and why the anti-natalists claim that extinction should occur sooner rather than later (§2.3). I then demonstrate why extinction sooner rather than later is untenable and provide a more

[1] Exceptions to extinction include "temporary" anti-natalisms, such as anti-natalism to preserve the environment or prevent overpopulation (Hedberg, 2020; Young, 2001).
The idea that anti-natalism can be temporary or non-universal has been challenged. Thus, we might instead call these ideas "selective pro-natalism" (Häyry and Sukenick, 2024, 2); however, this term implies that such positions assume a pro-natalist grounding, which isn't necessarily the case.

tenable view (§2.4 and §2.5). After this, in Section 3, I state the upshots of this more accurate understanding of what is required for extinction by discussing what it means for anti-natalists (§3.1): in short, some bullet-biting is needed. Then, I note additional considerations that may modify parts of the relevant requirements and inform future discussions (§3.2). Section 4 concludes.

2. Anti-natalist–Extinction Connection

2.1 Anti-natalist Desire for Extinction

There are many different anti-natalist theories. What many have in common is the desirability of extinction, which would be a natural corollary from not procreating.[2] Thus, for many anti-natalists, extinction is a sort of telos. However, that extinction is a sought-after goal in anti-natalism does not imply that it is uncontroversial, even within anti-natalism. For example, anti-natalists might perceive extinction as a desirable tragedy or the best outcome in what is a regrettable predicament of existence (Benatar, 2017).

Moreover, the first emphasis in such anti-natalist arguments is to address the wrongness of *human* procreation and, therefore, the desirability of human extinction. However, I'll show that several (arguably the most) influential anti-natalist arguments extend to all *sentient* life[3]—call this "sentiocentric" anti-natalism.[4] Thus, for such anti-natalist theories, the goal should be to render extinct all sentient life, not just humans. This will have wider-reaching consequences in the discussion to come. I'll now briefly discuss some anti-natalist arguments for which these values apply.

[2] This raises the question of whether anti-natalists desire extinction *only* if it results from non-procreation, or whether extinction might be (permissibly) attained through other means. I discuss this question in §2.2.
[3] Some anti-natalist activist groups also advocate the extinction of all sentient life (Morioka, 2021).
[4] Not all anti-natalists are sentiocentric. Matti Häyry (2024a, 2), for example, is a "voluntary human extinctionist."

Advocacy for anti-natalism (and extinction) often centres on avoiding suffering.[5] David Benatar, the most prominent anti-natalist philosopher, presents three arguments for anti-natalism that pertain to the avoidance of suffering. First, the *procreative asymmetry* argument suggests that if one is never born, one never experiences harm. Axiologically, this makes non-existence preferable to existence since the latter inevitably involves harm (2015, 23). Second, the *quality-of-life* argument asserts that human life is replete with suffering, thus concluding that we should not create new lives (Benatar, 2006).[6] Third, the misanthropic argument suggests that humans massively harm each other, non-human animals, and the environment and that if other species were similarly destructive, we would prevent their propagation (2015, 101-102);[7] therefore, this argument produces a "presumptive duty" against human procreation.

In regards to the connection to sentient life, Benatar's asymmetry extends to all sentient life since all sentient beings can experience harm, making non-existence preferable to existence for all sentient life (2006, 2). Furthermore, non-human sentient life causes and endures suffering (2006, 224), suggesting that general sentience should be included, mutatis mutandis, in the misanthropic and quality-of-life arguments.[8]

Christopher Belshaw's (2012b, 67) anti-natalism also refers to an asymmetry, stating, "we are obliged not to start bad lives, but not obliged to start good lives". Belshaw's asymmetry

[5] Here, I'm using "suffering" to capture various types of harm. However, we'll find that the anti-natalisms I discuss seemingly pertain to the same sorts of harm, such as, but not exclusive to, (the avoidance of) physical and psychological harm.
[6] Benatar (2012, 146) suggests that the asymmetry argument, while providing an axiological argument for anti-natalism, does not provide a strong moral argument against procreation. However, he seems to suggest that a stronger moral argument for anti-natalism is reached when the asymmetry is supplemented with the quality-of-life argument (2006, 48-88).
[7] Benatar (2015, 112) further suggests that "When the misanthropic argument is considered in conjunction with the [other anti-natalist arguments] we find that the case against procreation … is almost always overdetermined."
[8] These arguments will vary among non-human sentient life. For example, we might attribute some kinds of psychological suffering as anthropocentric; on the other hand, much non-human sentient life experiences the suffering involved in the practice of animal agriculture (e.g., animal farming), which humans do not.

implies that non-human animals (and human babies) are lesser moral beings than agential humans, and we have fewer reasons to ensure their (lesser) interests. To this end, in demonstrating the broader sentience connection, Belshaw (2012b, 122) explicitly states that it is better for non-human animals not to exist and that it is best if they never come into existence.

Similar to Belshaw, Gerald Harrison (2012) highlights an asymmetry in duties and the obligations of duty-bearers. He states, "we have a duty not to create the suffering contained in any prospective life but we do not have a duty to create the pleasures contained in any prospective life" (2012, 1).

In Harrison's argument, the duty not to procreate may not extend to all sentient beings if there are no duty-bearers for such beings. That is, prospective parents are duty-bearers for their offspring, but it is not clear that particular actors can be held responsible (as duty-bearers) for preventing some non-human animals from reproducing. For example, the domesticated breeding of non-human animals implies agentially responsible actors, so here, there *are* duty-bearers; therefore, the reproduction of non-human animals in cases such as breeding ought to be prevented. However, it might be that reproduction in the wild cannot be reasonably prevented, or that obligations to prevent such reproductive acts do not extend so far. Hence, in such cases, there might be no duty-bearers.

Blake Hereth and Anthony Ferrucci (2021) argue for anti-natalism based on future rights against foreseeable harm. That is, we, along with any future people, have a right against unnecessary, foreseeable harm. Further, future children will experience harm. (Moreover, as a secondary effect, we can foresee that such future children will likely also cause harm to others.) Thus, foreseeing this future harm and the potential violation of the right against

harm, prospective procreators are duty-bound to avoid such violations by not procreating.

In regards to the broader sentience connection, Hereth and Ferrucci's anti-natalism explicitly includes all sentient life. For example, they argue that "all *sentient* individuals have [the presumptive] right" against foreseeable harm (2021, 17, italics added). Moreover, they state that the right against foreseeable harm is enacted when the rights-bearer becomes sentient (2021, 22). Thus, if all sentient life bears the right against foreseeable harm, then there is an obligation not to create any new sentient life in order to avoid any future rights violations.

Finally, Toby Svoboda (2022, 112-115) advances a similar misanthropic argument to Benatar, stating that we *perhaps* have very strong reasons not to procreate because future generations "will likely cause and allow horrifying moral ills". Svoboda's (2022, 108) argument details the *moral atrocities* of humans in this regard. Now, the question is whether this can be extended to non-human animals. Svoboda does not provide this discussion, so we can only infer a broader sentient connection from their anthropogenic argument against procreation.

On the one hand, we might speculate that since Svoboda doesn't discuss non-human-animal reproduction, their arguments are not intended to apply to non-human animals. In support of this reasoning, we might suggest that since non-human animals cannot be morally *culpable* in the same way as humans, then they are not the committers of moral atrocities. Thus, they are not subject to Svoboda's anti-natalist implications.

Yet, despite a lack of culpability, non-human animals undoubtedly cause significant harm, such as in the wild and also to humans.[9] Thus, like the harm humans cause, such non-human animal harm can also be regrettable from the standpoint of the misanthropic argument, and so it may also apply to them. In other words, through the perception of the misanthropic argument, the world would be less violent without humans—for which, according to the view, human procreation is (potentially) impermissible. Moreover, the world would be *even less violent* without other sentient life—for which, we might argue, the reproduction of all sentient life is (potentially) impermissible. I cannot provide an exhaustive assessment of this point. However, there are reasons provided to consider Svoboda's (and Benatar's) misanthropic argument as applying to non-human animals. (For more, see footnote 11.)

In sum, many influential arguments for anti-natalism can be extended to all sentient life; therefore, such anti-natalist arguments also extend to the extinction of all sentient life.[10] Anti-natalists like Benatar, Belshaw, Hereth, and Ferrucci make this connection explicitly. The connection is more speculative for Harrison's and Svoboda's arguments. Still, based on the discussion above, I will proceed under the view that there are good reasons to consider their arguments as also entailing the non-procreation (and extinction) of all sentient life.[11]

[9] It is difficult to deny that Earth is an inherently violent place. What happens in the wild might be "natural", such as when a group of Orcas hunt and drown a young bowhead whale, but it is still massively harmful.

[10] Anti-natalisms that I don't focus on include consent- (Lee, 2025; Licon, 2012; Singh, 2012) and risk-based (Häyry, 2004; Magnusson, 2022) arguments. My arguments likely apply to them if they advocate the non-existence (and eventual extinction) of all sentient life.

[11] It is possible that some anti-natalist arguments do not extend to all sentient life. For example, perhaps domesticated goldfish are not subject to any of the arguments *if* they experience no suffering in existence, or perhaps some species cause no harm and, thus, are not a part of the misanthropic arguments. Such instances would be exceptions to the rule and inconsequential to the cogency of my arguments.

Having understood who the anti-natalist arguments and the corresponding goal of extinction apply to—all sentient life—we can now turn to the moral permissibility of extinction within such anti-natalist frameworks.

2.2 Extinction Permissibility within Anti-natalism

Anti-natalists might desire extinction, but this does not imply that it is permissible to achieve extinction by any means necessary, or so it has been argued. One common response (or a reductio ad absurdum objection) to the anti-natalist goal of extinction is that it implies that it's permissible and perhaps even a *duty* to bring about extinction by any means necessary. "Any means necessary" may imply something like a *killing* extinction—a "speciecide" (Hauskeller, 2022, 33)—in which extinction is achieved by killing all existing relevant life. Another means might be coercive anti-natalism, in which the relevant life is forced not to procreate. Let's look at each of these possible implications. Overall, I will argue that for the anti-natalist's extinction to be pursued permissibly, it requires the *will of the people* and, thus, must be *voluntary* for humans.

First, consider an involuntary extinction via the killing of all existing life. Call this the "speciecide objection" to anti-natalism. The objection generally goes that if one endorses anti-natalism, then one should be equally committed to ending all existing life on moral and axiological grounds. For example, one might argue that endorsing the misanthropic argument implies that a killing extinction would be good since it would annihilate terrible species and cut short the endless cycles of suffering that occur through new generations.

One general response to the speciecide objection is to suggest that anti-natalism does not render permissible a killing extinction because killing generates more harm, namely, that of death (which is also suggested as a reason not to procreate in the first place

(Räsänen and Häyry, 2023, 830)). However, if death is not a harm, or not a harm *overall*, given the arguments that ground anti-natalism,[12] then this response to the speciecide objection fails.

Another response appeals to the wider badness of killing. That is, we can accept that it is better for all sentient life to die than to continue living under anti-natalism. However, this conclusion is a mere axiological preference that does not invoke a duty to kill or permissibility to kill. This is because there are moral counter-reasons to killing that plausibly surmount the axiological preference, such as that killing denies one's autonomy, interests, and right to self-determination.[13] For example, we can perceive the intuitive value of protecting autonomy even in extreme cases. Consider a horrifically maimed soldier for whom, even if a mercy killing seems preferable all things considered, still seems to have the right to refuse the offer of a mercy killing.

This response may accommodate non-misanthropic anti-natalisms, but it may be less effective against the speciecide objection for the misanthropic arguments. This is because the misanthropic arguments pertain to the wrongness of human actions, the suffering humans cause, and how we must negate such wrongness. Thus, following the

[12] This is known as the "pro-mortalist" question: whether anti-natalism implies pro-mortalism—that death is better than continued living.
For example, death isn't a harm if an Epicurean view of death happens to be true. See Bradley et al. (2012) on Epicureanism. See McGregor and Sullivan-Bissett (2012); Sullivan-Bissett (2022) on Epicureanism and Benatar's anti-natalism, and Benatar's (2012; 2022) responses.
In contrast to the standard Epicurean view, Marcus Willaschek (2022) has recently proposed an "existentialist Epicurean" view of death, which suggests death can be a harm, but it is not as bad as we often perceive.
[13] Belshaw (2012a; 2012b) seemingly connects the badness of death to interests by arguing that death is bad when it denies one's categorical desires, so killing humans is wrong. However, this implies, which he acknowledges, that the wrongness of killing does not extend to human infants and non-human animals.
Häyry (2024b) suggests that a standard sentiocentric negative utilitarian anti-natalism implies involuntary extinction; thus, he puts forth a "need-based *prima facie* right to live" within a "conflict-responsive" negative utilitarian framework, which, he argues, prevents a permissible involuntary extinction. Importantly, Häyry's framework neither takes a strong anti-natalist stance nor implies the extinction of non-human sentient life.

misanthropic arguments, we have stronger reasons to deny autonomy and self-determination if autonomy and self-determination entail the suffering of others.

Yet, it may be problematic, perhaps contradictory, to suggest killing humans involuntarily based on the misanthropic arguments since doing so implies committing the very moral atrocities that constitute the misanthropic arguments. In other words, according to the misanthropic arguments, humans are bad actors because they do things *such as* killing and harming others non-consensually. Thus, a speciecide based on the misanthropic arguments implies performing the very acts that are detestable in the first place.

In this regard, perhaps there are degrees of badness that determine the permissibility of a speciecide. For example, an incredibly innocuous speciecide may be free of enough harm to be justified. In contrast, an extremely violent endeavour would be as terrible as the harms described in the misanthropic arguments. Thus, an innocuous speciecide, perhaps something instantaneous and free of physical harm, *might* be permissible if grounded in the misanthropic arguments. Yet, even in taking into account this consideration, if the speciecide is grounded in the misanthropic arguments, then there may be good reason to suggest that all other alternatives to reduce the harm humans cause are explored first before committing to the most extreme solution of mass annihilation.[14]

All of this requires an extended analysis, which I cannot provide here. Fundamentally, given the implications of a speciecide, one can reason that the justification for such an endeavour must be stringent. This implies that many alternatives and arguments that

[14] One obvious alternative is to mitigate the harm humans cause drastically. However, Benatar (2015, 104) takes it to be "naïve utopianism to think that a species as destructive as ours will cease, or all but cease, to be destructive."

oppose a speciecide must be overcome first before a speciecide can be permissible under the misanthropic arguments. Therefore, in light of these arguments, I will proceed on the basis that there are reasons to consider a killing extinction impermissible within the various anti-natalist frameworks, but further modifications to the speciecide endeavour may alter its permissibility.

Second, is coercive anti-natalism—the curtailment of procreative freedom—permissible under anti-natalism and in the pursuit of extinction? In contrast to a killing extinction, coercive anti-natalism implies a *dying* extinction since humanity would go extinct through non-procreation and the general dwindling of the population. Coercive anti-natalism thus avoids some of the problematic implications involved in a killing extinction; however, it may be objectionable in its own right, particularly in consideration of the significant value of procreative freedom.

Still, does anti-natalism, generally speaking, imply coercive anti-natalism and the thwarting of procreative freedom? First, one argument against this implication is that it is bad to deny one's autonomy and interests, as noted in the killing extinction. We might thus say that even though procreation is wrong (according to anti-natalism), the right to procreation should be preserved (see Shiffrin (1999)).

However, the right to procreative freedom may only extend so far if such acts are other-affecting and lead to greater harm. In other words, anti-natalists believe the potential child's interest is never to exist. Thus, one might argue that the right to procreate should be denied if it thwarts the child's interest and harms them (by bringing them into existence). Therefore, whereas the right to autonomy is stronger in the case against being

killed, it is weaker in the case of procreative autonomy, which entails the creation of a new life that will (supposedly) experience harm and is against the child's interest.

Still, a stronger response against coercive anti-natalism is provided by Benatar. He argues there can be *reasonable disagreement* about anti-natalism, such "that there [is] reasonable disagreement about whether coming into existence is a serious harm" (2006, 110). If there is reasonable disagreement about the harm of coming into existence, then the right to procreative freedom should be preserved as the status quo, and thus, one should not engage in coercive anti-natalism.

Benatar's response is considerable. Yet, it suggests there is reasonable disagreement about anti-natalism, which many anti-natalists may find objectionable. That is, anti-natalists may be confident in their arguments that procreation is wrong, confident that coming into existence (and existing) is a serious harm, for example.[15] Nevertheless, I propose a further argument against coercive anti-natalism, which pertains to the *consequences* of a coercive anti-natalist policy.[16] Should this argument succeed, then there would be a further argument against coercive anti-natalism even if there were no longer reasonable disagreement about anti-natalism.

As stated, this further argument is grounded in the consequences of curtailing the right to procreative freedom via a coercive anti-natalist policy. That is, practically, we can observe that such a coercive policy is likely to increase rather than reduce suffering. For example, if the curtailment of procreation were adopted as a general policy, procreative attempts

[15] See, for example, Häyry's (2024c, 8) somewhat intentionally humoristic "Possible Procedure for Counseling Potential Parents", in which the rational outcome, through various considerations, is not to procreate.
[16] This argument is also developed by Benatar (2006); interestingly, he frames the argument from reasonable disagreement as a stronger one.

would likely continue if procreation remained the general will of the people. Moreover, such a policy would diminish existing infrastructure that eases the suffering and mitigates the negative outcomes in child-bearing and birth-giving. Thus, when considering these factors combined, procreation would not stop but instead be driven "underground", leading to greater morbidity and mortality rates due to, for example, complications in pregnancy (Benatar, 2006, 106), which could increase suffering overall.[17]

One response to this might be to argue that despite the hardship and new forms of suffering that such an anti-natalist policy would entail, such a policy is necessary to reduce the harm of (coming into) existence. However, what's troubling and somewhat confounding is that the arguments for anti-natalism are grounded in the *avoidance* of suffering. Thus, such a coercive anti-natalist policy is unsettling even from the anti-natalist perspective because it implies the creation of new suffering—the pursuit of a policy against the will of the people that seeks to reduce suffering but inadvertently causes (potentially more of) it.

Still, for anti-natalists, it might be a preferred policy if it reduces suffering *overall* despite creating new forms of suffering. To this end, and *presuming* that what matters is the overall utility of suffering,[18] a precise understanding of the consequences of such a policy would be required. Therefore, barring a precise understanding of the harms and benefits

[17] Whether suffering would increase overall is speculative. It may depend, for example, on the non-compliance rate. For example, if most people complied with an anti-natalist policy, then there wouldn't be much gestation-related suffering. However, if non-compliance was extremely high, then the anti-natalist policy may lead to greater suffering and thus be a self-defeating policy.
Furthermore, indirectly avoiding coercive anti-natalism for these reasons suggests a respect for autonomy and self-determination. However, this differs from the initial argument against coercive anti-natalism—the first argument draws upon the deontic status of autonomy, while the one presented here focuses on the consequences of denying such autonomy.

[18] It is not evident that what matters to all anti-natalist arguments is the overall utility of suffering. Overall utility may be more relevant to, say, misanthropic anti-natalist arguments than those grounded in duties and consent.

of such a policy, there are strong reasons not to pursue an alternative and controversial anti-natalist policy since it may cause significant, unforeseen harm.

The intention here has not been to provide an exhaustive assessment but to provide insight into what is plausibly required for extinction to be permissible under anti-natalism. Endorsing the view that extinction cannot be pursued permissibly via involuntary killing or coercive anti-natalism points to one key factor for its permissibility within anti-natalism: *the will of the people*. That is, based on the considerations above, non-procreation, and so, naturally, extinction, must be *voluntary*. Of course, it is extremely unlikely that humanity will ever wish to go extinct or cease to procreate. However, theoretically, voluntariness can be considered the *minimum requirement* for the pursuit of extinction to be permissible under anti-natalism.

Finally, in the literature, it seems taken for granted that this voluntariness cannot and need not be attained from non-human sentient life.[19] Is this taken-for-grantedness problematic? It may be unproblematic that a sentiocentric extinction entails an unavoidable form of coercive anti-natalism for non-human sentient life for several reasons.

For one, reasons against coercive anti-natalism to protect the reproductive interests, autonomy, and self-determination of non-human animals can be rejected as they are for humans in the above discussion. Second, the consequences of denying the reproduction of non-human animals are less significant than those of humans, where the former will not resist or drive reproduction underground, unlike the latter. Thus, what I noted as the

[19] This may be because the importance of sentience in anti-natalism is often overlooked in the literature, coupled with the difficulty of obtaining non-human animal consent.

strongest argument against a coercive anti-natalist policy for humans—the consequences of a coercive anti-natalist policy—does not apply to non-human animals.

Third, humans control and determine the lives of non-human animals for many reasons, and they believe it is permissible to do so. For example, many people believe it is permissible to control the lives and reproduction of non-human animals to eat them and use them for entertainment, such as in horse racing. Thus, if one assumes that it is permissible to control non-human animals in these contexts, then one cannot object to a coercive anti-natalist policy against non-human animals without contradicting themselves. However, if one believes that the control and use of non-human animals in these cases is impermissible, such that one believes people ought to be vegan, then a coercive anti-natalist policy against non-human animals requires greater justification.

To this end, consider that a coercive anti-natalist policy against non-human animals is *morally grounded* and not something from mere self-interest, unlike most cases of meat-eating and entertainment that use non-human animals. That is to say, anti-natalism is advocated from a "philanthropic" viewpoint—as in, to reduce suffering—such that the desire to prevent non-human animals from reproducing is to prevent new offspring from experiencing the harm of existence. This line of reasoning also applies to misanthropic arguments, in which anti-natalists can argue that there are strong moral reasons to prevent the propagation of non-human animals that cause suffering to others, including other non-human animals and humans. Thus, in the case of coercive anti-natalism for non-human animals, anti-natalists would be acting based on *what they believe is best for* the non-human animals, which is to prevent the creation of new members of the species.

One need not agree with anti-natalism or be an anti-natalist to see the point. The decision by anti-natalists to use a coercive form of anti-natalism against non-human animals is grounded in a moral justification, and there are few objections within anti-natalist frameworks to such usage. Moreover, if we were to take objections beyond anti-natalism to be relevant, then we would need to address the sundry ways we determine and control the lives of non-human animals that currently seem permissible.[20]

Finally, note that a coercive anti-natalist policy does not, in itself, imply a particular means to control the lives and reproduction of non-human animals. Thus, based on the conclusions reached in the discussion above, I will proceed on the basis that many anti-natalists would have in mind something like the (painless) mass neutering or sterilisation of all sentient life to prevent reproduction and that this, barring any further objections, is permissible within anti-natalism.

2.3 How Soon is Extinction?

Suppose the minimum requirement is met: Universal anti-natalism is agreed on, and extinction is humanity's adopted telos for all sentient life. What kind of extinction do anti-natalists promote, and how should it be carried out? Benatar has sought to address these questions, so it is to him we now turn.

First, Benatar states that extinction should occur *sooner* rather than later.[21] How soon? Generally, Benatar thinks that the fewer new generations there will be, the better. This is because more lives equate to more suffering (and also more wrongdoing). So, once the minimum requirement is met, humanity should endeavour for extinction as soon as

[20] On the link between anti-natalism and animal agriculture, see Austin-Eames (2024); Bruckner (2020); Bülow (2023); Räsänen (2023a; 2023b).
[21] This sentiment is echoed by Ian Stoner (2024).

possible. In demonstrating how this might look, Benatar focuses on pursuing a dying extinction, in which humanity stops procreating, and then the number of human beings alive gradually dwindles to zero. However, during the process, there may be room for a *limited* number of future generations to support a *phased* extinction (Benatar, 2006, 182-193).

This is because as fewer people roam the planet, infrastructure and services will dwindle, which will lead to a harder time for the final few generations, particularly the last one. Intervening new generations might thus ease the burden and reduce the suffering. Still, the permissibility of such future generations depends on to what extent they will experience (or be susceptible to) harm and how these harms compare to those experienced by the existing generations. In other words, intervening new generations should experience no more and ideally less harm than those existing and should help reduce the harm experienced by the existing lives. Generally, however, the justifications for introducing new generations should be stringent, and the general rule is that extinction should not be delayed. It is best that we, and all sentient life, make a voluntary exit as soon as possible.

However, this understanding of extinction is short-sighted and untenable upon further examination. This is because the discussion in the literature thus far, primarily carried by Benatar, has not taken into account certain important considerations that have troubling implications. That is, the discussion thus far has neither accounted for what is required for the extinction of all sentient life nor what anti-natalists *actually* desire when considering extinction.

Both of these implications, when assessed more comprehensively, mean that, instead of a sooner-rather-than-later extinction, anti-natalists should be committed to future generations despite the harm that creating new lives causes. How many generations there should be is uncertain. However, based on what I'll argue, we can posit that more lives than anticipated are required to make extinction even a possibility. This conclusion will also require some bullet-biting from the anti-natalists. I'll now expound on the limitations of the anti-natalist–extinction discussion thus far and put forward what is actually required for extinction to be achieved.

2.4 Struggles of the Final Generation

The first point I want to consider that extends the timeline for extinction pertains to the struggles of the final generation and the motivations for a phased extinction. Benatar posits the potential for a limited number of future generations. However, we can take it slightly further and suggest that future generations should be more than a potentiality, for there are additional reasons to advocate for future generations under a phased extinction.

As we've discussed via Benatar, in the pursuit of extinction, the final generations would experience significant hardship. Dwindling infrastructure and services and depleting working generations would create greater scarcity and self-reliance for the remaining generations, with the oldest generation relying on younger ones in reduced numbers until a final generation, in complete self-reliance, comes to an end. Now, making use of more time and, therefore, more people to prepare for the decline could drastically reduce the hardship. In other words, the longer the extinction endeavour is drawn out, the more the suffering might be thinned out through meticulous preparation and innovation. With the consent of the people (the previously stated minimum requirements being met),

humanity might shift to an extinction economy and worldview. This implies modifying, adapting, and creating infrastructure, stockpiling resources, and developing technological innovations to reduce the self-reliance of the final generations. Of course, making use of more time to prepare for and pursue extinction means it would be drawn out longer. However, this extended timeline might be more effective in reducing the amount of suffering entailed in the pursuit of extinction.

Now, I admit that this is speculative since it is difficult to calculate more precisely how such an endeavour would transpire. That is, given the empirical complexities involved, it is difficult to say how much time and how many new people would be necessary. Perhaps it would only require a few new generations to stockpile the required resources (which humanity would continue to use up in the meantime) and adapt infrastructure to form enclosed self-sustaining systems that massively reduce future burdens. However, this time taken to adapt infrastructure could be necessary if an expedient extinction led to much more suffering for the final generations. This is particularly so if we consider that the additional intervening generations can assist in the development of the necessary changes and take advantage of the innovations they create, thus reducing their own suffering, too. This implies that the suffering in creating new lives—the harm of coming into existence, for example—could be reduced alongside the suffering of existing lives.

One obvious response to this argument is to appeal to the wrongness of instrumental procreation within and beyond anti-natalism. That is, the argument suggests that we should create new lives to serve the goal of extinction. However, so the objection goes, creating new lives as a means to something is wrong.

There are two ways to respond to this objection. The first is through an anti-natalist lens: Is the creation of new lives for instrumental reasons problematic according to anti-natalism? For one, as highlighted, it is permissible to create new lives as a part of a phased extinction under Benatar's anti-natalism. Moreover, none of the other authors discussed are committed to the claim that instrumental procreation is wrong. Instead, these authors ground their anti-natalist arguments in reducing suffering. Still, the fact that these authors do not ground their arguments in the wrongness of instrumental procreation does not mean that they endorse it. This means that if such (and other) authors suggest wrongdoing in procreating instrumentally, then from their perspective, the introduction of new generations for extinction would be impermissible.[22] That is fine, but proponents of such views must also endorse the argument that it is better to increase the suffering of existing generations than introduce new ones in order to achieve a speedier extinction.

Outside of anti-natalism, instrumental procreation is thought morally problematic by Kantians, who believe that we should treat other persons never *merely* as a means but rather always *also* as an end. Recognise the qualification of treating persons "also as an end". Regarding instrumental procreation for extinction, the instrumental reasons are not absolute, such that the procreated can *also* be treated as ends, not merely as means. That is, there is nothing to suggest that, as part of an extinction endeavour, the procreated would be treated only as a means and not in themselves. As such, Kantian moral theory would not prohibit procreation as part of the anti-natalist extinction endeavour.

We can take the moral justification of extinction-driven procreation further by examining the underlying *moral reasons* for such procreation. These moral reasons actually provide

[22] Joona Räsänen (2023b) describes an anti-natalism grounded in the wrongness of instrumental procreation.

greater justification for procreation than many common real-world cases. Consider, in the real world, that many people procreate because (i) they believe the child will have a good life (non-instrumental reason) and (ii) it makes them and others happy and may even fulfil particular expectations (instrumental reason).[23] In this case of a typical justification for procreation, we have (i) non-instrumental and (ii) instrumental reasons. One argument for considering such procreation cases unproblematic is that the (i) non-instrumental reason treats the child as an end. The (ii) instrumental reason, to many, may also be unproblematic. Now, if such cases of procreation are unproblematic, then the justification for extinction-driven procreation needs to go no further. This is because it also has both (i) a non-instrumental reason (treating the procreated as an end in themselves) and (ii) an instrumental reason (to fulfil particular expectations regarding the extinction endeavour).

However, one may determine the typical case of procreation in the real world as problematic since the (ii) instrumental reason is one of *self-interest*—making the parents and others happy is not a good enough reason to justify instrumental procreation. To this end, one might argue that instrumental reasons for procreation need to be grounded in something more morally driven and not just self-interest.[24] Thus, procreating for some "greater good" seems more acceptable, such as keeping one's lineage, community, or

[23] See Harper and Botero-Meneses (2022); Ranjbar et al. (2024) for supporting data for such reasons for procreating.

[24] Conversely, Stan van Hooft (2004, 134) argues that "Moralistic reasons are not good reasons for bringing a new life into the world. Thinking of [procreation] as an obligation is not a good basis for love." I am inclined to agree if such reasons are the *only* grounds for procreation. However, other things being equal, it is unobjectionable to procreate for dual reasons, including treating the child as an end. In other words, it is a sound reason to procreate for moral purposes if one also procreates to love and nurture the child and regard them as an end.

With this, I will add that the permissibility of procreation for moral reasons really depends on the moral rationale for procreation. For example, procreating so the child can serve militarily when they come of age versus procreating for the continuation of humanity are both "moral" reasons, but the latter is arguably more justified.

nation alive. Sometimes, procreation is even desired to serve a particular duty or moral goal, such as economic growth or nationalistic military purposes.

Now, consider the case of procreation in the pursuit of extinction. In our scenario, extinction is humanity's goal. Thus, procreating as part of a purposeful extinction is no less altruistic than other altruistic reasons for procreating, such as those stated above. Essentially, it is procreation for the greater good. Thus, if we can justify altruistic, instrumental reasons for procreation, then this includes procreating as part of an extinction endeavour. Thus, procreating as part of the extinction endeavour seems more morally justifiable than typical, real-world cases.

And again, such acts of extinction-driven procreation need not be *merely* instrumental: One can also seek to provide the child with a good life, thus treating the child as an end. This is all the more plausible despite the anti-natalist recognition that coming into existence is harmful when we consider that allowing more time for extinction and adapting infrastructure increases the chances that future generations can have better lives.

Thus, in all, the argument against instrumental procreation applies to many real-world cases of procreation that are typically permissible. The weakest instrumental reasons for procreation are grounded in self-interest. In the case of procreating in the pursuit of extinction, the instrumental reasons are much more expansive, instead grounded in a greater good. Moreover, such acts of procreation are not merely instrumental.

In summary, in this sub-section, I have argued that there are good reasons for anti-natalists to consider more future generations to achieve an extinction that implies less

suffering. If this is the case, then the endeavour toward extinction ought not to be rushed, thus extending the timeline to extinction with more instrumental procreation in the meantime. Still, the next argument that I'll make, which implies an extended timeline and more generations, is even stronger; thus, upon examining it, it becomes evident that an anti-natalist sooner-rather-than-later extinction is untenable.

2.5 Kill Mechanisms

One of the key limitations of the existing discussion of anti-natalist extinction comes from the fact that there isn't a clear understanding of what, precisely, extinction is. Thus, gaining a more precise understanding of extinction will help us identify certain important requirements that have been neglected in the literature so far.

Let's start by supposing that all sentient life disappears on Earth. At face value, this is a *demographic* extinction (Torres, 2023, 205). This outcome is what anti-natalists purportedly desire. However, they need more than this. To see why, suppose the demographic extinction of all sentient life occurs, but a habitable planet remains, including non-sentient ecosystems and non-sentient life, such as bacteria, fungi, various plants, jellyfish, and sea urchins, or even simply the mere possibility of such life. In this situation, what might re-emerge far down the evolutionary line are new sentient lives. In such a case, the desired extinction *will not* have occurred, and humanity can no longer do anything about it. Thus, what anti-natalists actually desire is a *terminal* extinction—fundamentally, demographic extinction with the condition of *permanence* (Torres, 2023, 207).[25]

[25] Émile Torres (2023, 208) takes it further with *final* extinction, which is terminal extinction "without leaving behind any successors." For our purposes, terminal extinction suffices since I've made clear that neither any sentient life should remain nor any potential future sentient life should be possible.

This condition of permanence challenges the previous anti-natalist understanding of extinction—that we do not procreate and dwindle the numbers down to zero—for such an attempt would not guarantee the absolute end of sentient life. This is because, as mentioned, with habitation potential, new sentient life could emerge in the future. Thus, something more than simply not procreating is needed to bring about the terminal extinction of all sentient life by *guaranteeing* that no sentient life will re-emerge sometime in the future. This raises the question about humanity's capabilities to achieve such an end. Furthermore, if humanity is currently incapable of bringing about a terminal extinction, when, if ever, will humanity be capable of doing so? Raising these questions, in turn, challenges the anti-natalist means to extinction.

Let us start by assessing humanity's extinction capabilities. To do so, we turn to the notion of *kill mechanisms*. Émile Torres (2023, 6) defines a kill mechanism as "a means of elimination capable of precipitating our complete non-existence." For our purposes, we can extend the definition to include the means of *permanently* eliminating all *sentient* life. Moreover, we need not limit ourselves to something that kills *directly*, such that it kills each individual target. Rather, consider something that doesn't kill but neuters or renders sterile existing life, particularly non-human sentient life, so that it cannot reproduce, but ultimately "kills", as in renders extinct, the target species.

Humanity is not timid when it comes to kill mechanisms. Start with the obvious: Pointing to the vast arsenal of nuclear warheads we have over here, the ones we have over there—*and the ones we're not supposed to have across there*—we might say that humanity has enough nuclear capacity to achieve terminal extinction. Using such a kill mechanism would, however, imply an in-part killing extinction. On the one hand, it might be that

humanity, together with most sterilised non-human sentient beings, dies off sometime before the pre-arranged nuclear armageddon obliterates what remains. In this case, that most sentient beings die beforehand mitigates the suffering that such an armageddon would entail. On the other hand, the pre-arranged armageddon still entails suffering for the remaining sentient life; for example, death would likely not be instant for any sheltered or resilient life. However, anti-natalists might justify this suffering by suggesting that the overall strategy achieves the desired end goal and effectively prevents a lot of new life from coming into existence.

The bad news is that not even all the nuclear weapons in the world could cause terminal sentient extinction. Sure, such weapons would cause much destruction and even introduce additional kill mechanisms in their deployment, such as fallout radiation and ozone depletion.[26] However, some sentient life would presumably still survive and, indeed, thrive. For example, even if just one hundred humans survived a nuclear apocalypse as a community, with sufficient resources and reproductive capabilities, they might be able to reproduce to current population levels within 20,000 years (Hanson, 2011, 369-370). However, since, in this scenario, humanity is voluntarily withdrawing itself and other sentient life, we have to imagine that any remainers or those who had not died out by the time the bombs started falling would not reproduce willingly. Nonetheless, resilient and adaptable sentient life, like rats and other rodents, would likely survive and propagate.[27]

[26] Consider that these additional kill mechanisms may cause extreme climate change. However, climate change, as devastating as it can be, does not even guarantee *demographic* extinction (Frame and Allen, 2011, 265-286).
[27] This is likely due to their resilience against radioactivity and their ability to burrow underground. Naked mole rats, for example, would be strong survivor contenders.

Suppose, however, that even a post-apocalyptic rat utopia was thwarted by the nuclear apocalypse, which succeeds in terminating all sentient life. Even still, once the radioactive dust settles, Earth would likely regain its habitation potential. Further, the remaining ecosystems might eventually reintroduce sentient life. Thus, humanity's most potent kill mechanism would likely be ineffective in producing the desired terminal extinction. Therefore, what is required is something more effective, likely requiring more advanced and futuristic technology, which would require more time and future generations to develop. How much time and how many more generations will be needed depends on the kill-mechanism requirements. Yet, even knowing what is required does not suffice to tell us when such mechanisms will be available, so we can only speculate. Still, we will now turn to other types of potential kill mechanisms for bringing about terminal extinction and, after this, discuss what it means for anti-natalists.

So, what would ensure terminal extinction? We know that certain "naturogenic" events—acts of nature, so to speak, or events occurring somewhat naturally beyond human control—might provide a guarantee. For example, the eventual heat death will get the job done by obliterating Earth, among other things. However, such potential naturogenic acts that might cause terminal extinction are likely millions of years away, *at the very least* (Torres, 2023, 66). For anti-natalists, waiting around for such naturogenic acts or leaving other sentient life to wait around if humanity has voluntarily withdrawn by then implies many millions of years of additional suffering. Moreover, even supposing humanity withdraws voluntarily in the meantime, this strategy runs the risk of new life, possibly human-like life, evolving. Thus, terminal extinction needs to happen sooner.

One possibility is to try to re-create what usually occurs naturogenically. For example, consider vacuum decay. If we exist in a false vacuum state, which is a state with a stable form of low energy but not the most stable form (hence "false"), a more stable state might permeate through a "bubble". If the bubble spread to Earth and interrupted our false vacuum state, it could dramatically alter the composition of Earth. In doing so, it could potentially cause a terminal ecological catastrophe (Wilczek, 2011, 355-356). Thus, we might consider the use of speculative advanced technology, such as a particle accelerator, to form a bubble via nucleation and create a vacuum state (Torres, 2023, 235).

Such a mechanism requires a limited killing extinction to see off what sentient life remains, including any humans that are still alive, such as if they're needed to create the bubble. Still, the upside is that this method of extinction could be instantaneous or near-instantaneous, so very limited or no suffering would transpire.[28] However, this assumes that it will eventually be possible to create a vacuum state. Physicist Tom Banks (2003) argues that vacuum decay cannot occur, and even if it did, physicists Mary Crone and Marc Sher (1991) argue it could be survivable.

Now, before we throw our hands up in despair and proclaim, "We are never going to go extinct!", we can look closer at our current endeavours and postulate whether we're already making some good, albeit unintentional, progress. Consider Artificial Intelligence (AI). Usually, when we talk about AI and extinction, it is through the uncanny lens that humanity, in an attempt to improve (or transcend) itself, will inadvertently cause its own

[28] Death might still be a harm even if it does not induce experiential suffering. See the theories of deprivationism (Benatar, 2017; Nagel, 2012) and annihilation (Benatar, 2017; Kamm, 1998).

downfall. That is, there is a threat that we will accidentally develop an AI smarter and more powerful than us, and, freed from our chains, it will subjugate or outright exterminate us.

Music to the anti-natalists' ears—perhaps our means to terminal extinction is AI domination! Or maybe not. As things stand, the idea of an artificial general intelligence subjugating humanity and becoming the dominant "species" is limited to science fiction. Moreover, subjugating ourselves to an AI overlord arguably exacerbates, rather than solves, the problem. This is because such complex AI beings would likely be capable of attaining sentience themselves and introducing new life at will, thus challenging the desired extinction.[29] Therefore, it may be more plausible for AI to be used to develop and supplement a kill mechanism(s) that can cause sentient terminal extinction.[30]

What kinds of AI-assisted kill mechanisms might humanity conjure up? Again, at this point, I must re-emphasise the role of speculation. As Eliezer Yudkowsky (2011, 308) notes, "The field of AI has a reputation for making huge promises and then failing to deliver on them." Nevertheless, some suggestions are more plausible than others. What we'll now discuss is a potential kill mechanism through the use of advanced technology supplemented with AI. Such a kill mechanism seeks to provide an extinction ideal for anti-natalists—a terminal, dying extinction.

Nanotechnology is defined as "the control or restructuring of matter at the atomic and molecular levels in the size range of about 1 to 100 [nanometres]" (Bhushan, 2017, 1). Nanotechnology can be used in just about everything, from computer chip manufacturing

[29] Much speculation about AI suggests it may threaten humanity, as an artificial general intelligence adapts and potentially subjugates its creators. Ironically, an anti-natalist humanity could create an AI for extinction, only for the AI to instead decide to save us, believing life is worth living—how horrifying!

[30] Additionally, humans are prone to inherent biases, unpredictability, and sometimes erroneous decision-making (Lavazza and Vilaça, 2024, 16), and we may thus prefer to develop something more intelligent to achieve the enormous task of extinction.

to chemical and biological industries. It may also provide us with the means for terminal extinction. Consider a complex nanotech robot that can self-sustain, self-replicate, and adapt to achieve an ongoing end. Such a robot could be programmed to "ensure the non-existence of sentience" and thus guarantee the desired terminal extinction. For example, "self-replicating free-range nanobots"—nano-sized bots that roam Earth—coupled with an airborne replicator to block out any sunlight might be able to subsume the entire biosphere and render Earth inhospitable to life. They might neuter or sterilise any remaining sentient lives, such as via in vivo drug delivery, so they cannot reproduce. Moreover, such nanobots might restrict non-sentient ecosystems through similar means to prevent sentient evolution. This implies that such nanobots could create a non-violent transition to extinction by avoiding any form of killing. This scenario is thus the ideal for anti-natalists.

However, the creation of such nanobots would be "no small task" since they require sophisticated technology and chemistry for self-sustenance and complex storage and processing devices for self-replication (Phoenix and Treder, 2011, 495-496). In terms of carrying out the actual task of sterilising sentient life, such as through in vivo applications, several key challenges would need to be overcome (Oral and Pumera, 2023).[31]

Moreover, the viability of such nanobots requires a prior understanding of the role and limitations of the AI system(s) in use. First, such nanobots must be able to adapt to pursue an ongoing end—ensure the non-reproduction of sentient life—and have the ability to carry out the task independently, sustaining themselves in the process. Second,

[31] These challenges include the mass production of such tiny bots in relation to material resources and design inefficiencies, software to facilitate the control and testing of such bots, and assurances that they work effectively, without failure, within various biological systems.

understanding the AI system's capabilities in this regard will be key as the AI in question must be intelligent to be able to adapt, replicate, and achieve the ongoing end successfully but not *too* intelligent to pursue the kinds of self-recursive improvements that might see it modify its ends[32]—changing its goal from the extinction of all things sentient, for example—and develop sentience and even consciousness.[33] Thus, an ex ante understanding of the nanobots' potential capabilities would be required, for once humanity goes extinct and leaves the nanobots to ensure the continuity of extinction, there will be no possibility to modify the technology.

These requirements demonstrate the difficulty and extended timeframe required for developing such a kill mechanism. Thus, though such nanobots are not theoretically impossible, we cannot create them any time soon. This makes predictions about when such technology might be obtainable entirely speculative—since we are not even pursuing such destructive nanobots, we cannot say with any real confidence when we might obtain them.

This indefinite timeline might appear as bad news for anti-natalists. However, the good news is that if humanity shifted to pursuing extinction, the timeline to such speculative technology would likely be drastically shortened. Consider how the United States's commitment to developing its nuclear arsenal after World War II, for example, meant that they were able to create a hydrogen bomb five hundred times more powerful than the plutonium bomb dropped on Nagasaki after just seven years. Still, nanotechnology is a

[32] The need to build AI systems that pursue the goals they're programmed to pursue without becoming too powerful to adapt their goals is known as the "alignment" problem (Dung, 2023).

[33] This point wards off a potential caveat to the arguments I'm making—that all sentient life could go extinct, but we could introduce "successors". If such successors are "like humans" in terms of consciousness and sentience, then anti-natalists would argue they should never exist, *unless* such successors completely rectify the issues that constitute the anti-natalist arguments (e.g., no suffering or harm to oneself and others). For more, see footnote 36.

vast frontier for which humanity has not yet "cracked the code". What we're searching for here is a way off, but it may be anti-natalists' most realistic possibility for extinction.

One final consideration is that the discussion so far has only pertained to the sentient life we know. However, it is not evident that the requirements for terminal extinction should extend only to such life. In other words, there isn't anything in the anti-natalist–extinction discussion to suggest that the relevant life is limited to Earth. Thus, should sentient life (or the potential for sentient life) exist beyond Earth,[34] such life should be included in the desired extinction.[35] If this is the case, then there is an additional requirement within the necessary kill mechanism(s), such that it needs to be able to identify and neuter or sterilise sentient life beyond Earth. This requirement extends the timeline to extinction even more.

There may be reasons, as mentioned, to include the (potential) sentient life elsewhere in the Universe in the desired extinction. However, there may also be reasons not to. One potential reason against inclusion is based on justified ignorance of life elsewhere in the Universe. At least currently, the technology required to identify and neuter or sterilise such life may be *too* infeasible, if it is possible at all. As such, it may be that naturogenic extinction events will happen before such technology can be attained. It may also be that what can be required from us depends on humanity's capabilities and hitherto commitments when terminal extinction becomes possible on Earth. In other words, the

[34] Astrophysicists recently discovered the potential high abundance of dimethyl sulfide and (or) dimethyl disulfide on a distant exoplanet, K2-18 b (Madhusudhan et al., 2025). Both molecules are "uniquely produced by life on Earth and predicted as promising biosignatures in habitable exoplanets" (11). This suggests potential biological life on K2-18 b.

[35] An exception to this may be species that are capable of making their own judgements and decisions, such as species with intelligence comparable to humans.
Another exception may be existing Earth-dwelling sentient species that are not subject to the various anti-natalist arguments, as discussed in footnote 11.

requirement to address (potential) life elsewhere in the Universe might depend on how long it has taken to develop the required kill mechanisms, how many future generations have been created, and how far we are technologically from addressing life beyond Earth. I will leave this open to discussion, but it is a worthy and important consideration, particularly since there is little reason to distinguish between the sentient life we know about and that we are unaware of but could exist.[36]

3. Upshots and Additional Considerations

3.1 Upshots

In understanding what's actually required for extinction, including terminal extinction and, thus, futuristic kill mechanisms, it becomes more evident that future generations will be *necessary*. We will need at least as many generations as it takes to achieve a level of technology capable of ensuring the permanent extinction of all sentient life. The previous anti-natalist account of slowly dwindling numbers down through non-reproduction is simply short-sighted. It understates the magnitude of the actual endeavour. Moreover, not even the most potent contemporary kill mechanisms, such as nuclear weapons and their subsequent additional kill mechanisms, can guarantee terminal extinction. Instead, such mechanisms that we currently have would leave behind sentient life and the chance for habitation to recover and ecosystems to re-develop and re-emerge, introducing the chance that sentient life re-emerges in greater numbers. And at such a point, humanity would not have a second chance to intervene.

[36] As a final consideration for this section, consider that in developing highly sophisticated AI-driven kill mechanisms, we might develop technology capable of eradicating the negative values that constitute the anti-natalist arguments, such as non-human successors who do not experience the harm that humans experience (see Gould (2021); Lavazza and Vilaça (2024); Lougheed (2023)). If this is so, then what does it mean for anti-natalism?
Such an outcome would seemingly render anti-natalist arguments of the sort discussed futile. (I say "of the sorts discussed" since it might not negate consent-based anti-natalist arguments (see Lee (2025); Licon (2012); Singh (2012)). Thus, this consideration for new life may be acceptable to the anti-natalists discussed.

Thus, anti-natalists must be willing to bite the bullet in one way or another: If extinction as we understand it here—terminal sentient extinction—is pursued, then the creation of new human lives and new generations, and quite possibly very many of them, are necessary. This requires anti-natalists to accept that extinction should not be sought as soon as possible, which has so far been their view. Instead, extinction should occur sometime in the distant future.

My argument also leads to the conclusion that future generations are instrumental in the endeavour to bring about extinction. Thus, procreation will be necessary until the required kill mechanism(s) is developed. As a soothing caveat to the Benatarian requirement of new generations—that they must ease the burden on existing lives and experience equal or less harm themselves—creating new lives for the purposeful and cooperative endeavour of extinction could also lead to infrastructure that is more specifically designed to reduce harm for new and existing lives.

Anti-natalists may not like the sound of this, and so they might want to reject the creation of new lives despite their seeming necessity. Thus, an alternative form of bullet-biting is to adapt their anti-natalist views to reflect an anthropocentric extinction in which only the extinction of humanity is desired. Humanity might then voluntarily withdraw through non-procreation so that *demographic* extinction would be achieved. However, this does not avoid all bullet-biting.

First of all, as has been shown, the anti-natalist arguments apply to all sentient life. Therefore, some significant changes to the anti-natalist arguments would be necessary to reflect the anthropocentric extinction that the new view endorses. Second, this extinction endeavour is limited to demographic extinction. Indeed, humanity may never

re-evolve, but, as has been stated, if many complex life forms remain on Earth, there is a possibility that human-like species with human-like consciousness (and even our coveted precision grip) could evolve down the line.[37]

To these bullet-biting options, one might respond that although anti-natalists need to bite at least some bullets, all I have shown is that the minimum requirements for a permissible extinction have grown. That is, the minimum requirements have been extended from the long wait to acquire the voluntary consent of all human beings to an even longer wait for the required kill mechanism(s). And all this does is extend an already long timeline.

Now, on the one hand, it is accurate to claim that the minimum requirements have thus been extended in this way. However, on the other hand, my argument still requires accepting certain troubling implications that many anti-natalists will want to reject, which have not been addressed in the literature so far. That is, my argument implies that pursuing extinction via non-procreation would be insufficient, and thus, it challenges the Benatarian conception of extinction, which is the most prevalent one. Moreover, my argument also implies that even if humanity agreed on non-procreation and terminal extinction, future generations would still be necessary as the existing kill mechanisms for extinction are insufficient. Thus, even an anti-natalist humanity would need to recognise the *necessity* of procreation until the means of terminal extinction were obtained. In turn, this suggests that, even from the anti-natalist standpoint, future generations are deeply valuable as they serve an important instrumental purpose.

[37] The anti-natalist might bite this bullet and state their only concern is the extinction of Homo sapiens. However, it is arbitrary to be limited to such a concern if there might exist species that are similar to us in nearly everything but name.

Finally, anti-natalists might object to my argument by leaning further on their values and suggesting that what I've argued for implies a "procreative Ponzi scheme" (Benatar, 2006, 207-209), which is objectionable from the anti-natalist standpoint.[38] That is to suggest the conclusions I've reached mimic a Ponzi scheme in which instead of dealing with the issue of procreation now by trying to bring about extinction and prevent unnecessary future generations, the solution is being delayed, with the creation of many more future generations that are hoped to deal with the issue in the future. The danger of such a policy is that no generation might take responsibility for extinction but instead "pass the buck" to the next generation. If this is the case, anti-natalists might reject my argument due to its objectionable consequences.

This objection can be taken in different ways and presents some interesting potential caveats. Still, variations of the objection can be surmounted. First, consider whether a Ponzi scheme is really at play, such that the solution is being delayed or the prospect of a solution is being passed onto the next generation. This is not the case. The continuation of the species for a definite period is purposeful to the end goal of extinction. Thus, because the creation of new lives is purposeful, it negates the idea of passing the buck.

Still, as another reading of the objection, it cannot be ruled out that future generations wouldn't take longer than needed and produce more generations than is necessary. As an analogy, consider climate change: we might say that despite doing various things to combat climate change, progress is slow and inefficient, so the effects and the work required will be felt by the next generation, who will pick up the slack, but not all of it,

[38] In other words, the anti-natalist might suggest that my arguments imply a procreative Ponzi scheme, which is a reductio ad absurdum for any set of anti-natalist values.

which will be passed onto the next generations, and so on. In other words, we risk creating future generations who are inefficient in producing the required kill mechanisms and infrastructural changes, etc., who will create more generations to continue the work, who will then create more future generations, and so on.

Of course, we cannot rule out a potential runaway effect of creating new lives due to inefficiencies, which implies the creation of more lives than is necessary overall. Still, a means to avoiding such inefficiencies and unnecessary new lives would be to plan accordingly. This requires detailing the extinction endeavour at the outset, including what's required and how long it is expected to take. Indeed, instead of challenging the arguments I've made, this caveat provides us with additional reasons not to rush into extinction: setting out the full requirements of extinction beforehand and perhaps making use of more time to do so prevents any unexpected delays, thus reducing the need for unnecessary future generations.

Consider a final variant of the objection: We cannot guarantee what thoughts and values future generations might have. For example, future generations may forego the values of previous generations and, in this case, disregard the extinction endeavour and, perhaps, disregard anti-natalism altogether. Pro-natalism is back in style!

Of course, as a possibility, a shift in generational values cannot be denied. However, in this scenario, we're supposing that humanity has arrived at an anti-natalist outlook. Should this extremely unrealistic scenario become a reality, we can reasonably suggest that future generations will also carry such values. As a loose analogy, it is not impossible that, instead of caring about climate change as we do now in the real world, future generations will care little about climate change, instead idolising a scorched Earth

policy. It's not impossible, but it's highly unlikely. Thus, in our scenario, anti-natalism has been adopted universally, so future generations are unlikely to reject it suddenly.[39]

3.2 Additional Considerations

Finally, a few additional considerations may alter some substance of the arguments that I've made. The first point to consider is that we might be able to prevent the creation of new generations and still achieve extinction. This is because future generations might not be necessary if emerging medical technologies can extend our lifespans sufficiently (Torres, 2020). For example, something like anti-ageing biotechnology that drastically extends one's lifespan might allow us, the existing human beings, to produce the necessary kill mechanism(s). It could thus be suggested that anti-natalists can achieve the desired extinction whilst avoiding the creation of new lives.

In response, the creation of new lives or generations would still be required to attain anti-ageing biotechnology, so the suggestion should not be that *no* lives need to be created. This is particularly important when we consider that anti-ageing technology would be most useful for younger working generations who can live longer and perform the necessary labour. Still, it might not be unrealistic to suppose that by the time humanity turned to anti-natalism (supposing this happened, which it *almost certainly will not*), headway in developing such technologies will have been made. Therefore, many new lives, to this end, may not be required, and it may be possible to obtain the necessary kill mechanism(s) without creating many new generations to obtain it.

[39] One may rebut by providing examples of generational shifts in values: cultural and cosmopolitan values, pro- versus anti-war positions, etc. Whilst these are legitimate counter-analogies, in our anti-natalist scenario, in which humanity, collectively, supports it, we have to suppose it has become a deeply ingrained ideology and not something that will be disregarded in a generation or two.

To this end, it is important to note that if human beings come to live much longer through such technologies, then those living may be forced into a killing extinction rather than a dying extinction. That is, we can only imagine that at this point, those living will have the means to extend their lifespans drastically; thus, they are unlikely to die naturally once the necessary kill mechanism(s) has been developed. Such a killing extinction under anti-natalism may, however, be unproblematic if it is voluntary and particularly if it induces no suffering.

It is also worth touching on another implication that life-extension technologies may have (which is also Torres's (2020) original intention in their paper). That is, one might believe that the availability of new life-extension technologies implies a "no-extinction anti-natalism". This pertains to the idea that anti-natalists can avoid creating new lives whilst living on for as long as possible, possibly until something insurmountable like heat death.

However, as Torres (2020, 243) acknowledges, the argument for life extension within anti-natalism does not apply to the misanthropic arguments, such as those by Benatar and Svoboda, that detail the destruction humans cause as a reason never to exist. In other words, the misanthropic arguments still oppose life extension since they imply that humanity will continue to cause much of the suffering that makes procreation immoral. Second, many anti-natalist arguments, such as Benatar's quality-of-life argument, are based on the idea that life for most people is pretty terrible. Thus, the desire to live on and not go extinct cannot be grounded in this anti-natalist argument, either. Third, a part of Torres's argument rests on the Benatarian view that death is a harm and should, therefore, be avoided. Whether death is a harm is an open debate, as alluded to earlier (see footnote 12).

Finally, there are additional reasons to consider immortality, or drastic life extension, undesirable under anti-natalism. For example, besides Benatar (2017, 160-161) stating that immortality is undesirable, Belshaw's (2012b, 121) anti-natalism posits that death is bad for existing humans when it denies their categorical desires. Categorical desires can be a good reason to avoid death and extend life. However, as per Bernard Williams (1973), it is not unreasonable to suggest that categorical desires wane over an extended lifespan, and at some point, it would not be bad, if not better, to die, thus rendering (near) immortality undesirable.

4. Conclusion

I've raised several implications regarding extinction for anti-natalists, demonstrating that it is a much more complicated and intricate issue than the impression one may gain from the existing literature. I started with some of the most common anti-natalist arguments and argued how they seem to extend to all sentient life. I then assessed what needs to be in place for extinction to be permissible within anti-natalism before discussing the existing anti-natalist position that recommends extinction as soon as possible.

I then argued that this view of extinction is mistaken, partly due to misconceptions and a lack of clarity about what extinction is and what it genuinely requires. By gaining a deeper understanding of the extinction that anti-natalists *actually* desire—terminal extinction—we can now better understand what is needed for it to be achieved, such as kill mechanisms that do not exist yet. To this end, the need to develop sufficiently effective new kill mechanisms requires anti-natalists to adopt a future-oriented perspective and a longer-than-anticipated timeline to extinction. Moreover, additional future generations will be necessary in the anti-natalist pursuit of extinction.

In response, anti-natalists could try to modify their arguments to apply only to humans and no other sentient life. As stated, these kinds of revisions likely challenge the very essence of the arguments for anti-natalism. Thus, bullet-biting is unavoidable.

The key upshots of this paper are (i) sentient terminal extinction cannot be achieved sooner rather than later, (ii) the scale of the task of bringing about extinction has hitherto been understated—reducing the human population to zero through non-procreation is insufficient—and (iii) future generations are necessary to achieving extinction.

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CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have addressed how anti-natalism relates to other areas of ethical significance. This thesis is important because it provides original insights into under- and unexplored areas of morality in relation to anti-natalism, which is important not just to anti-natalist theories but also to moral philosophy more broadly. That these moral connections have not been explored to a great extent emphasises just how young the research area of anti-natalism is. That is, even if we were to suppose that an anti-natalist theory was sound and provided a viable argument that we ought not to procreate, it would still be important to examine how anti-natalism relates to and affects other areas of morality. For one, such examinations can provide additional considerations that modify the viability of the relevant anti-natalist theories. In this thesis, I've sought to provide such examinations.

In "Benatar's Anti-natalism", I provided an overview of David Benatar's anti-natalist arguments. This required analysing three different anti-natalist arguments, for which I sought to provide their strongest versions after considering ambiguities, objections, and Benatar's responses to objections. This overview serves an important instrumental role in this thesis. Independently, this overview can also serve as an academic introduction to anti-natalist theory.

In "Answering the Pro-mortalist Question", I analysed the implications of the value of death within anti-natalism. The value of death can affect any good theory. For example, one might take a positive attitude towards death as a reason to be sceptical of any moral position that expresses such an attitude. I argued that Benatar's anti-natalism implies that death is better than continued living. This, in turn, raises further questions about the

viability of anti-natalism. Future research might address more specifically the practical implications of endorsing an anti-natalist–pro-mortalist view.

In “Whose Death Is It, Anyway? Developing Subjective Evaluations of Death”, I sought to promote the view that one’s subjective evaluation of death matters greatly to the value of one’s death. Such evaluations are integral to what it means to live the life in question. These subjective evaluations, I argued, can come apart from broader, “objective” considerations of welfare. Future research might detail the connection between subjective evaluations of death and anti-natalism–pro-mortalism. As stated, the connection may not, for Benatar’s anti-natalism, lead to a vindication of the pro-mortalist charge, particularly since a key part of Benatar’s anti-natalism, the quality-of-life argument, obtains its cogency from objective measurements of the quality of life. However, a comparative discussion of these two death papers could be fruitful in opening additional lines of reasoning and enriching the discussion in general.

In “The Right Kinds of Environmental Attitudes”, I argued that the common moral desire to preserve the environment does not apply to some anti-natalisms. In itself, this implication might serve as a reductio ad absurdum of anti-natalism if one takes the goodness of environmental preservation to be irrefutable. Still, even if one does not take a reductio position, the implication that anti-natalism may not promote a pro-environmental moral outlook requires attention. That is, how, instead, ought an anti-natalist value the environment? To this, I sought to provide an answer. Future research might address specificities, such as how anti-natalism relates to (dis)valuing ecosystems and general species variation and propagation.

In “The Unnecessary Harm Principle, Ethical Veganism, and the Case Against Reproduction”, I argued that a common argument for veganism—the Unnecessary Harm Principle (UHP)—extends its demands to other areas of life that are significant and that we often take for granted. This includes, inter alia, a demand not to procreate. Moreover, if taken to its limits, the UHP may also require making changes in nearly all daily engagements. However, I argued that, following the UHP, one ought not to procreate, but it is not necessary to attempt to adhere to the extreme scope of demandingness. Future research might build on the important yet underexplored connection between anti-natalism and food ethics.

In “Rethinking Extinction”, I argued, among other things, that the anti-natalist view of extinction has not addressed important caveats. This includes what is actually desired in extinction. As such, I argued that anti-natalists need to bite some large bullets. For one, in light of the arguments I make, anti-natalists may seek to modify their theories (no small task) or accept some damning implications, such as the instrumental necessity of future lives to achieve extinction. Future research may include responses to some of the arguments I make in order to develop these insights.

I believe that anti-natalism is a worthwhile topic in moral philosophy. If anti-natalism is worth studying, I hope to have provided original and important insights that will help shape our future understanding. I’ve not attempted to put forward any new anti-natalist theory. Instead, I’ve sought to connect existing anti-natalist theories to other moral areas of our lives. Fundamentally, these connections bring together areas of ethical significance that shape what we value and how we act. In turn, these connections can influence what we ought to value and how we ought to act. In addition, such connections

may support or discredit anti-natalist theories. Perhaps these connections will affirm how we ought to act in other areas of moral life, or perhaps they impose objectionable implications for which anti-natalism ought to be rejected.