

## **The Ends of Humanity: Future Generations and Meaningfulness**

### **SOME ARGUMENTS**

Prefatory argument (not up for debate): All harm and suffering should be minimized or eliminated. Intentional violence increases harm and suffering. So, intentional violence is not permissible. (moral prohibition on suicide, genocide, murder, etc.)

No shortage of concerns about human extinction: AI, climate change, nuclear war (see Romo 2023, Davies 2019, and Chappell 2023).

Socrates (Plato's *Phaedo*): "Philosophy is preparation for death." Why restrict this to personal death? Why not consider the collective death of humanity? (cf. Scranton 2013)

### ***An Asymmetry Argument for Anti-Natalism and Extinction***

1. There is an asymmetry between the presence/absence of pain and the presence/absence of pleasure: the presence of pain is bad and the presence of pleasure is good, but the absence of pain is good while the absence of pleasure is *not bad*.
2. If there is such an asymmetry, then coming into existence has disadvantages relative to non-existence.
3. If coming into existence has disadvantages relative to non-existence, then one ought not bring more people into existence (i.e., procreate).
4. Therefore, one ought not bring more people into existence.
5. If one ought not bring more people into existence, then we should collectively see to it that we bring about human extinction by means of ceasing procreation.
6. Therefore, we should collectively see to it that we bring about human extinction by means of ceasing procreation. (Benatar 2006)

### ***Problems for the Asymmetry Argument***

- Premise 1: while there might be an asymmetry, doesn't the good weigh more than the bad? maybe the good is worth having even if it doesn't outweigh the bad? (see page 3)
- Premise 3: how do we compare the experience of existent people to non-existent possible people?

## ***A Misanthropic Argument for Anti-Natalism and Extinction***

1. 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.
2. Humans cause vast amounts of pain, suffering and death.
3. Therefore, we have a (presumptive) duty to desist from bringing new humans into existence. (Benatar 2015)
4. If we have a (presumptive) duty to desist from bringing new humans into existence, then we should collectively see to it that we bring about human extinction by means of ceasing procreation.
5. Therefore, we should collectively see to it that we bring about human extinction by means of ceasing procreation.

## ***Problems for the Misanthropic Argument***

- Premise 1: the “presumptive” part seems vague: what does it take to undermine the first-glance obligation here?
- Premise 2: while it’s a descriptive claim that appears to be supported by human history, it’s not impossible that one day our descendants might get it together and behave according to a higher standard– “humans have...” vs. “humans will always...”
- Premise 4: again, the “presumptive” part raises questions: are there features of future human generations that override this presumption?
  - seems a shame to just give up all of our ongoing projects and values
  - also, isn’t a bit of humility called for here? we surely don’t know (a) what the point of this existence is (and maybe we will), (b) what we are capable of in a positive sense, and (c) what role we might have to play in bringing about future non-human descendants.
    - enter the “collective afterlife thesis” (page 3)

## ***An Antidote to Anti-Natalism? “The Collective Afterlife Thesis”***

- The knowledge that there will be future generations of humans who will carry on with our projects and values is a significant source of, and possibly a necessary condition for, meaning for our lives. (Scheffler 2013)
  - A significant source of meaning for us is the knowledge that our activity is part of the causal chain in an ongoing human history that will extend long after our lives.
  - Consider the “infertility scenario”: suppose human beings become suddenly and incurably infertile.

## ***The Collective Afterlife Argument Against Extinction***

1. If the collective afterlife thesis is true, then there are some goods that are worth having, even if they do not outweigh the bad. (cf. Scheffler 2013)
2. If there are some goods that are worth having even if they do not outweigh the bad, then if those goods are tied up with entities that cause vast amounts of suffering and death, then the presumptive duty to desist from bringing them into existence is defeated.
3. Human beings are entities that cause vast amounts of suffering and death and are tied up with goods that are worth having even if they do not outweigh the bad.
4. Therefore, if the collective afterlife thesis is true, then the presumptive duty to desist from bringing human beings into existence is defeated.

## ***Problems for the Collective Afterlife Argument***

- Premise 1: the collective afterlife thesis is very anthropocentric—are there reasons to extend the scope beyond human beings?
- Premise 2: if the entities in question are responsible for so much suffering and death, how much good would be required to defeat the presumptive duty to desist from bringing them into existence?
  - what sorts of goods are we considering here? presumably, intrinsic goods, but what plausible candidates are there? knowledge-acquisition?
  - suppose a genetically engineered symbiont were created that would give you all of the knowledge that there is to have, but would leave you in physical agony for the remainder of your days—was the presumptive duty to not create it defeated?

## ***A Future-Minded Argument for Eventual Replacement and Extinction***

1. Human beings are the product of evolutionary forces that include a long lineage of rewarding violence and high reproductive drive.
2. If human beings are the product of evolutionary forces that include a long lineage of rewarding violence and high reproductive drive, then the project of enhancing humans to reduce harmful consequences of their existence will likely face insurmountable constraints, and will likely not eliminate the harms of their existence completely.
3. Artificially developed minds will not have the same evolutionary constraints, and will not likely bring about the harms that humans are prone to causing.
4. Both options—enhanced humans and artificially developed minds—will have the capacity to carry on with humanity's noblest goals and values.
5. We ought to prefer the option that is least likely to bring about the harms that humans are prone to cause.
6. Therefore, we ought to prefer replacement of humans by artificially developed minds. (cf. Shiller 2017)

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