

Still Better Never to Have Been: A Reply to (More of) My Critics

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## Still Better Never to Have Been: A Reply to (More of) My Critics

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**Abstract** In *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence*, I argued that coming into existence is always a harm and that procreation is wrong. In this paper, I respond to those of my critics to whom I have not previously responded. More specifically, I engage the objections of Tim Bayne, Ben Bradley, Campbell Brown, David DeGrazia, Elizabeth Harman, Chris Kaposy, Joseph Packer and Saul Smilansky.

**Keywords** Anti-natalism · Betterness · Procreation · Quality of life · Suicide · Value

### 1 Introduction

In my book, *Better Never to Have Been* (Benatar 2006), I argued that coming into existence is always a serious harm and that procreation is thus always wrong. I also argued for two related conclusions: First, that it is wrong *not* to abort foetuses at the earlier stages of gestation. Second, it would be better if, as a result of there being no new people, humanity became extinct.

I fully expected that there would be deep resistance to these conclusions. This pessimistic prognostication proved warranted. There has been a minority of people who have found that my conclusions resonate with their own views, although the minority is not quite as small as one might imagine. Indeed I have been pleasantly surprised at how many such people there are, judging by the number who have communicated with me.<sup>1</sup> Most people, however, both philosophers and others, have

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<sup>1</sup> One of the few advantages of being a pessimist is that one can be only *pleasantly* surprised.

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rejected my views. These include people who openly admit to not having read the book and who refuse to do so, but who nonetheless feel confident to criticize it (for example, “Notes & Comments”, *The New Criterion* 2008). Some of those who claim to have read it have dismissed the arguments without demonstrating the purported errors in them (see, for example, Belshaw 2007; Nagasawa 2008). I have already responded to some of these and other reviews elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> In this paper I plan to reply to some more recent and more serious philosophical responses. I shall argue that these responses also fail, but at least they include arguments that can be evaluated.

## 2 Why It Is Better Never to Have Been

Before responding to some criticisms of my argument, I shall first briefly outline my arguments for the view that coming into existence is always a serious harm<sup>3</sup> and that procreation is thus wrong. Clearly I cannot repeat the arguments in all their detail here and thus a summary will have to suffice. (Those already familiar with the argument can skip this section and proceed directly to the next.<sup>4</sup>) I advanced two main arguments.

### 2.1 The Asymmetry Argument

The first argument turns on an asymmetry between harms and benefits.<sup>5</sup> Using pains and pleasures as exemplars of harms and benefits more generally,<sup>6</sup> I suggested that it is uncontroversial that:

1. The presence of pain is bad; and
2. The presence of pleasure is good.

However, it does not seem that symmetrical claims can be made about the *absence* of pain and pleasure because:

3. The absence of pain is good even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone; but

<sup>2</sup> Reviews and responses are being collected here: [http://www.philosophy.uct.ac.za/staff\\_benatar\\_betternevertohavebeen.htm](http://www.philosophy.uct.ac.za/staff_benatar_betternevertohavebeen.htm).

<sup>3</sup> There are a few competing definitions of “harm”. In most instances in which I use the word in this paper, it makes no difference which of these definitions one employs. One context in which one’s definition of harm can (but does not have to) make a difference is in the case of the so-called “non-identity” objection to the claim that coming into existence can be a harm. For more on this see Benatar (2006, pp. 19–28; 2010, pp. 80–84).

<sup>4</sup> However, it may be helpful to such readers to refer back to the names I give in this section to the four asymmetries that I believe are explained by my basic asymmetry.

<sup>5</sup> This argument is discussed in Benatar (2006, Chapter 2).

<sup>6</sup> Some people, failing to see that pains and pleasures were intended only as *exemplars* of harms and benefits have mistakenly identified my argument as hedonistic. [See, for example, Brown (2011, p. 46), and possibly Bradley (2010, p. 1)] Another common error is to identify my argument as a utilitarian one. While my arguments are compatible with most (but not all) forms of utilitarianism, they do not presuppose utilitarian foundations and are equally compatible with deontological views.

4. The absence of pleasure is not bad unless there is somebody for whom this absence is a deprivation.

Let us call this asymmetry between the combination of (1) and (2) and the combination of (3) and (4), the *basic asymmetry*. I have argued that the basic asymmetry is very widely accepted, even if only implicitly. It is also the best explanation for a number of other asymmetries that are accepted by an overwhelming majority of people:<sup>7</sup>

(i) *The asymmetry of procreational duties*

While we have a duty to avoid bringing into existence people who would lead miserable lives, we have no duty to bring into existence those who would lead happy lives.

(ii) *The prospective beneficence asymmetry*

It is strange to cite as a reason for having a child that that child will thereby be benefited. It is not similarly strange to cite as a reason for not having a child that that child will suffer.

(iii) *The retrospective beneficence asymmetry*

When one has brought a suffering child into existence, it makes sense to regret having brought that child into existence—and to regret it for the sake of that child. By contrast, when one fails to bring a happy child into existence, one cannot regret that failure for the sake of the person.

(iv) *The asymmetry of distant suffering and absent happy people*

We are rightly sad for distant people who suffer. By contrast we need not shed any tears for absent happy people on uninhabited planets, or uninhabited islands or other regions on our own planet.

In arguing that the basic asymmetry is the best explanation for these other asymmetries, I considered and rejected alternative explanations for the other asymmetries. I also explored various ways of establishing symmetry between present and absent pleasures and pains, but argued that these fail. If we then employ the basic asymmetry in order to compare existing and never existing, we confront the situation in Fig. 1.

(3) is a real advantage over (1). However, while (2) is good for X in scenario A, it is not an advantage over (4) in scenario B. There are thus no net benefits of coming into existence compared to never existing.

## 2.2 The Quality-of-Life Argument

The asymmetry argument shows that it is better never to come into existence. It does not show how great a harm it is come into existence. The second argument reveals

<sup>7</sup> While all the following asymmetries were mentioned in Benatar (2006), the names I give to them below are new.

Scenario A (X exists)	Scenario B (X never exists)
(1)  Presence of Pain  (Bad)	(3)  Absence of Pain  (Good)
(2)  Presence of Pleasure  (Good)	(4)  Absence of Pleasure  (Not bad)

**Fig. 1** The basic asymmetry

the magnitude of that harm.<sup>8</sup> However, the second argument can also be understood as a separate argument for the conclusion that coming into existence is harm.

The first step of the argument establishes that self-assessments of quality of life are extremely unreliable. There is ample empirical evidence that most humans have an optimism bias, which leads them to overestimate the quality of their lives. Quality of life assessments are also corrupted in other ways. First, humans are prone to “adaptation”. That is to say, if something bad happens to them, there will be an initial dip in self-assessment of well-being, but this will soon return to close to the original baseline assessment even without any actual improvement in well-being. Second, people’s assessments of the quality of their lives are influenced by comparisons with the quality of life of others. Insofar as some harm affects all people it tends not to influence self-assessments of well-being.

The second step of the quality-of-life argument is to show just how many bad things are missed in self-assessments, suggesting that the quality of people’s lives is much worse than they typically think. Being brought into existence with such a life is a significant harm.

The third step of the argument is to show that even if the earlier steps are thought to fail, there is nonetheless good reason to criticize procreation. In support of this conclusion I showed just how much suffering there is in the world and how liable any new life is to at least some of these serious harms. Thus any procreators impose the risk of those serious harms on those they bring into existence. They play a procreational “Russian Roulette”, in which their children stand to pay the price. If the asymmetry argument works then the gun is fully loaded. But even if the asymmetry argument fails, and the gun is only partly loaded, taking such risks for one’s offspring is morally problematic.

<sup>8</sup> The second argument is presented in Chapter 3.

### 3 Impersonally Better or Better for a Person?

Some of those who have responded to my argument seem to be uncertain what exactly I am claiming when I argue that the absent pain of non-existent people is good and that absent pleasure of non-existent people is not bad. More specifically, they wonder whether these are impersonal evaluations or whether they are judgments about what is good (and not bad) for the person who would otherwise have existed (see, for example, Harman 2009, p. 780). An impersonal evaluation, as it is usually understood, makes no reference to the interests of a particular person. Instead it is an evaluation that something is good or bad without being good or bad *for somebody*.

To clarify what I had hoped would already have been clear, I am *not* making an impersonal evaluation. I am concerned instead with whether coming into existence is in the interests of the person who comes into existence or whether it would have been better for that person if he had never been. I am interested in whether coming into existence is better or worse *for that person* rather than with whether, for example, the world would be better if he exists.

Part of the confusion arises, I think, because people have difficulty making sense of the idea that never existing can be better *for a person* who never exists. This, it is argued, is because in the case of those who never exist there is no subject for whom never existing could be a benefit. Thus David DeGrazia, for example,<sup>9</sup> writes that:

Only actual beings have interests. Now, if one does bring a child into existence when one should not have done so because the child's prospects were so poor, then there is a victim of one's wrongful choice: the actually existing child. But it does not follow from this, nor does it make much sense in my judgment, to claim that some indeterminate, merely possible child benefits from a decision not to bring him into existence. (2010, p. 323)

Now it is obviously the case that if somebody never comes into existence there is no actual person who is thereby benefited. However, we can still claim that it is better for a person that he never exist, on condition that we understand that locution as a shorthand for a more complex idea. That more complex idea is this: We are comparing two possible worlds—one in which a person exists and one in which he does not. One way in which we can judge which of these possible worlds is better, is with reference to the interests of the person who exists in one (and only one) of these two possible worlds. Obviously those interests only exist in the possible world in which the person exists, but this does not preclude our making judgments about the value of an alternative possible world, and doing so with reference to the interests of the person in the possible world in which he does exist [see Benatar 2006, p. 31 (and p. 4)]. Thus, we can claim of somebody who exists that it would have been better for him if he had never existed. If somebody does not exist, we can state of him that had he existed, it would have been better for him if he had never existed. In each case we are claiming something about somebody who exists in one of two alternative possible worlds.

<sup>9</sup> Others who have this worry are: Harman (2009: 781) and Bayne (2010: 48; 53).

This line of thought applies not only to the locution that it is always better never to come into existence. It also applies to related locutions, including claim (3) of the basic asymmetry—that the absence of pain is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anybody. The judgment that it is good could be made impersonally, but I am making it with reference to the interests of the person who would exist in an alternative possible world. Similarly, when we claim that we avoid bringing a suffering child into existence for that child’s sake, we do not literally mean that non-existent people have a sake.<sup>10</sup> Instead, it is shorthand for stating that when we compare two possible worlds and we judge the matter in terms of the interests of the person who exists in one but not the other of these worlds, we judge the world in which he does not exist to be better.

Some literalists might resist such a move. They might insist that for one possible world to be better than another *for somebody* that person must exist in both possible worlds. The problem with this approach is that it exhibits a procrustean insistence that unusual cases—which cases of bringing people into existence certainly are—must conform to more typical cases in which we make judgments about what is better for somebody. This sort of dogmatism is exactly what gives rise to the non-identity problem, which is, after all, a *problem*. The way to resolve this problem, to employ Ludwig Wittgenstein’s analogy of the fly, is to find the way out of the linguistic bottle (Wittgenstein 1953, §309). More specifically, I suggest, we must recognize that procreational cases are different from ordinary cases and that our language has to take account of those differences.

#### 4 Criticisms of the Basic Asymmetry

The aspect of my argument that has arguably been the target of most criticism has been my basic asymmetry. One response has been to deny it directly. Thus, it has been suggested that if we can claim that absent pain is good for a person then we can make the symmetrical claim that absent pleasure is bad (Harman 2009, pp. 781–782). According to this argument, we should deny (4) of my basic asymmetry. The suggestion here is that it would “be bad, for the non-existent person we might have created, that his pleasure not occur, because it would have been good for him if it had occurred” (Harman 2009, p. 782). The mistake in this objection is that it misconstrues my basic asymmetry as a logical rather than axiological claim. We certainly *can* (logically) state that just as the absent pains in Scenario B are good, so the absent pleasures are bad. The problem, I have suggested, is that we *should not* claim this. Among the reasons for this is that we would then not be able to make all the value judgments we do in the four asymmetries that I say are explained by the basic asymmetry.

Another, more common response to the basic asymmetry is to attack it indirectly by denying that a rejection of this asymmetry entails a rejection of some of the other asymmetries. Thus a number of critics of the asymmetry, nervous of its implications, attempt to weaken it by denying that it is the best, or at least the only explanation of the

<sup>10</sup> This is the response to, for example, David DeGrazia’s claim that it does not make sense to avoid having a child for that child’s sake. See DeGrazia (2010, p. 323).

other asymmetries. Instead, they argue, these other asymmetries can be explained without recourse to what I take to be the basic asymmetry. In defending this claim some people have presented purported alternatives to only some of the four other asymmetries. This leaves their argument wanting. I have suggested that the basic asymmetry explains *all* of the other asymmetries. If my critics think that there are better, or at least other explanations for those asymmetries, they must show how *all* rather than only *some* of those asymmetries can be explained in other ways. Other people have recognized this argumentative burden and have attempted to provide alternative explanations for all. They face a further burden. My basic asymmetry has the virtue of simplicity. It provides a single, unifying explanation for all the other asymmetries. In this way it is preferable to a strategy of mustering a range of explanations for the various asymmetries.

I begin by considering some of the alternatives to my basic asymmetry that have been proposed.

#### 4.1 Elizabeth Harman

Elizabeth Harman is one of those who offer an alternative explanation of only one of the asymmetries (i)–(iv). She writes that “we clearly have strong reasons to avoid causing people to suffer” but that our “positive reasons to cause people to have good experiences are much weaker” (Harman 2009, p. 781). This is a variant of an argument I considered and rejected in my book and thus it is interesting that Professor Harman has not engaged my response to it.<sup>11</sup> Speaking about duties rather than reasons, I noted that “for those who deny that we have any positive duties, this would indeed be an alternative explanation of the one I have provided. However, even of those who do think that we have positive duties only a few also think that amongst these is a duty to bring happy people into existence” (Benatar 2006, p. 32).<sup>12</sup> In other words, the explanation that we have stronger reasons to avoid suffering than to cause pleasure is a less satisfactory explanation because it is open to only some rather than all people who accept the asymmetry of procreational duties.

#### 4.2 Chris Kaposy

Chris Kaposy offers what at first glance may appear to be a similar argument to Professor Harman’s but is in fact a different one. He argues that the best explanation for (i) the asymmetry of procreational duties and (ii) the prospective beneficence asymmetry is “not so much the positive value of absent suffering, but instead the positive value of *avoiding* being the cause of suffering” (Kaposy 2009, p. 105). He draws a distinction “between the value of *absent pain* and the value of *avoiding*

<sup>11</sup> DeGrazia considers the exact version I discussed (2010, p. 322) but he too does not consider my response.

<sup>12</sup> Those who think we have positive duties but deny that these include a duty to bring happy children into existence could reconsider and accept that we have such a duty. However, that is a considerable commitment with significant implications. It is one thing to state that one could adopt this position. It is another thing actually to adopt it and follow through on the implications.



*pain*” (Kaposy 2009, p. 106) and suggests that we can have an obligation to avoid causing pain without the absence of pain necessarily being a good thing. It might, he writes, be “an indifferent thing” (Kaposy 2009, p. 106).

In other words, Professor Kaposy denies (3) in the basic asymmetry. (3) does not claim that the absence of pain is intrinsically good. It claims that it is better than the presence of pain—that is, it is comparatively good.<sup>13</sup> Denying (3) is thus not only an unusual view, but also an extreme one. Those who take Professor Harman’s view that the asymmetry of procreational duties is explained by our having stronger reasons (or even a duty) to avoid harm than to bestow benefit need not deny that the absence of harm is good. They can accept (3) and deny (4) and then claim that (in Scenario B of Fig. 1) the absence of pain is good and that the absence of pleasure is bad but that we have stronger reasons (or a duty) to avoid pain than to cause pleasure.

Why might one deny (3)? Professor Kaposy seems to have two related arguments. They are not clearly distinguished, but both are strange. Consider his second argument first:

[I]magine being forced to undergo hunger pains by being held in captivity and denied food. Since it is wrong to put someone in that kind of situation, we can see that it is a duty to avoid being the cause of such pain. However, the absence of hunger pains is more of a neutral state than a good state. If one is fed enough to stave off hunger pain, one avoids an evil, but in order to attain a positive, good or pleasurable state, more seems to be required than just keeping evil at bay. (2009: 106).

We see here that Professor Kaposy thinks that absent pains are not even good when they are absent in an existent person. The mistake he makes here is that he fails to distinguish between the experiential quality and the axiological value of absent pains. Not being hungry is indeed experientially neutral—it is neither pleasure nor pain. That does not mean, however, that it is axiologically neutral.<sup>14</sup> It is (comparatively) good not to be in pain. Pain is bad and its absence is good.<sup>15</sup> Almost everybody—Professor Kaposy is a curious exception—accepts this in the case of existing people. Very many people (at least until they see where it, combined with other claims in the basic asymmetry, leads) also accept this in the case of non-existent people. Those who do not think it extends to non-existent people but does not apply to existent people cannot draw on Professor Kaposy’s argument above.

Professor Kaposy’s other argument for rejecting (3) fares no better. He states that the reason why we think, in the prospective and retrospective beneficence asymmetries, that the absent suffering of the person is or would have been good is that this suffering is something that we can vividly contemplate. It is thus something that could be (or could have been) avoided. This, he thinks, stands in contrast to the absent suffering on an uninhabited island. I had raised the case of

<sup>13</sup> For more on the relative sense of “good” and “bad” see Benatar (2006: 41–42).

<sup>14</sup> Professor Kaposy’s failure to see this distinction explains why he mistakenly thinks that I contradict myself in stating that “Neutral states include the *absence* of pain” (Kaposy 2009, p. 106).

<sup>15</sup> If Professor Kaposy is merely denying that absent pain is good in itself (and is not denying that it is good relative to the presence of pain), then he is not denying (3) and it is thus unclear how what he says constitutes an argument against my basic asymmetry.

absent pleasure on such an island, but he shifts the focus to the absent suffering and suggests

that there are enough features of this example to suggest that this non-suffering is an indifferent matter. Their potential suffering is a remote counterfactual that we do not even think about. Depending on the narrative you choose, absent suffering can seem just as indifferent as the absent pleasures of the non-existing. (Kaposy 2009, p. 106)

Now there are two things that might be meant by this. One is that people do not happen to think about the absent suffering (or pleasure) of people in uninhabited places. The other is that even if people did (or were led to) think about the absent suffering in such places they would judge that absence to be neither good nor bad but rather indifferent.

If Professor Kaposy intended the first interpretation then I think that he would very likely be correct. The psychological phenomenon of “moral distance” is well known. People do not tend to think of distant suffering or its absence. However, this first interpretation is simply irrelevant. It does not undermine any of the four asymmetries that I said are explained by the basic asymmetry. That people do not actually think about distant suffering or its absence tells us nothing about how they would evaluate it if they did think of it, or about how they should evaluate it.

Imagine that people on a distant planet were suffering and imagine further that we could do nothing to avoid that suffering (perhaps because of the distance). Perhaps we would not think about that suffering even if we became aware of it. We can grant even that we would not think much about it *because* we could not avoid it. However, from the fact that we are indifferent, it does not follow that the presence or absence of that suffering is neither good nor bad. If we were asked whether the presence of that suffering was bad we would surely say, and be bound to say, that it is bad (even if we nevertheless did not care much about it).

Thus the problem for Professor Kaposy is this: If we interpret his claim the first way, then although true it is irrelevant. If we interpret his claim the second way, it is relevant but false.

Unlike Professor Harman, Professor Kaposy does not consider only some of the asymmetries I said were in need of explanation. He responds to (iii) the retrospective beneficence asymmetry and (iv) the asymmetry of distant suffering and absent happy people by denying that they are relevant. Regretting the existence of a suffering child and of inhabitants of a foreign land, he states, are “clearly examples of *actual* suffering” and accordingly “are not examples of the positive value of the absent suffering of those who *never* exist” (Kaposy 2009, p. 105). He concludes that these cases fail to support the basic asymmetry.

This is a very strange argument. The basic asymmetry is between the presence and absence of pain and the presence and absence of pleasure. Accordingly, it is not only the absence of pain but also actual pain that is relevant. Asymmetries (iii) and (iv) show different evaluations of actual pain and the absence of pleasures. They are relevant to the basic asymmetry because one possible way of rejecting the asymmetry is by claiming that the absence of pleasure is bad—a symmetrical

judgment to the judgment about actual pain. Since in both (iii) and (iv) asymmetrical judgments seem to be made about actual suffering and the absence of pleasure, they lend support to the basic asymmetry.<sup>16</sup>

### 4.3 David DeGrazia

David DeGrazia is another philosopher who attempts to provide alternative explanations for all four of the asymmetries that I insist are explained by the basic asymmetry. Focusing first on the asymmetry of procreational duties, he suggests that perhaps Jeff McMahan's account of it is more plausible than mine. According to Professor McMahan the asymmetry of procreational duties is basic or fundamental and is not explained by anything deeper. That certainly does not sound like a satisfying account to me. Surely it cannot simply and inexplicably be the case that we have a duty to avoid bringing suffering people into existence but we have no duty to bring happy people into existence? I understand that at some point in an explanatory regression there can be no further explanation. Some claims may be foundational and have no deeper explanation. Nevertheless the claim that we have a duty to avoid bringing suffering people into existence but no duty to bring happy people into existence is a claim that invites an explanation. To hold that it has no further explanation sounds like a parent responding to a child's reasonable question about why something is the case with the reply "It just is!" David DeGrazia seems to realize this and thus suggests another explanation "which may be more attractive to those who find [Jeff] McMahan's thesis ad hoc".<sup>17</sup> However, the alternative he considers is one I considered and rejected above—that "we have much stronger duties not to harm than to benefit" (DeGrazia 2010, p. 322).

Next Professor DeGrazia considers the prospective beneficence asymmetry. His response to this asymmetry is to reject it rather than explain it. He writes that "even if we deny ... that nonexistence is a harm ... we might reasonably hold that coming into existence with good prospects is a benefit" and he infers that if "this is correct, then one can have a child for the child's sake" (DeGrazia 2010, pp. 322–323). The first problem with this argument is that the conclusion does not follow from the premise. It is possible for somebody to think that a person was benefited by being brought into existence without thinking prospectively that this benefit is a reason to bring that person into existence. This is because nobody would have been harmed—or even deprived of a benefit—if one failed to bestow that benefit. Indeed, until one bestows the purported benefit there is nobody on whom to bestow it.

<sup>16</sup> It has been suggested to me that perhaps Professor Kaposy means that (iii) and (iv) are not relevant to (3), or to the asymmetry between (3) and (4). It was further suggested that if he means that then he is correct, because (3) and (4) are merely about the absence of pain and pleasure. This suggestion cannot rescue Professor Kaposy. Remember that he writes that (iii) and (iv) are "clearly examples of *actual suffering*" and accordingly "are not examples of the positive value of the absent suffering of those who *never exist*". But this is only partially true. (iii) and (iv) are about both *actual suffering* and the *absence of pleasure*. Although (iii) and (iv) have no bearing on (3), they do have bearing on (4)—and on (2). Since the basic asymmetry is between Scenario A [that is, the combination of (1) and (2)] and Scenario B [that is, the combination between (3) and (4)] both (iii) and (iv) are relevant.

<sup>17</sup> Professor DeGrazia considers the exact version I discussed (DeGrazia 2010, p. 322).

Now it might be alleged that something symmetrical could be said about a suffering child. If one avoids bringing such a child into existence there is nobody who is thereby benefited. In response to this, however, we can appeal to the claim that we have stronger duties and hence stronger moral reasons to avoid harm than to bestow benefit. Professor DeGrazia thinks that this might explain the previous asymmetry, but whether or not it does, let us assume that the claim about the asymmetrical strength of our reasons or duties is true. If that is the case, then there is a stronger duty and hence a stronger moral reason to avoid the harm (even if nobody benefits) than to bestow the benefit.

Perhaps it will be responded that this does not entail that we have *no reason* to bring happy people into existence (when considering only the interests of those people), but only that we have a *weaker* reason. However, if one thinks that the purported benefit of being brought into existence provides a reason to have a child, then at least sometimes one would have a duty to have a child. This would be in cases where the reason to have the child were not defeated by any other considerations. In other words, rejecting the prospective beneficence asymmetry might well be at odds with the widespread belief that we never have a duty to bring a child into existence because it will lead a happy life.

Professor DeGrazia accepts asymmetries (iii) and (iv) but he thinks that they need not be explained by my basic asymmetry. Instead, he argues, they are explained by whether or not there is a subject of the harm or benefit. We regret the existence of a suffering child, he states, because that child exists, but we do not regret not having brought a happy child into existence because there is no subject that is thereby harmed. Similarly, we are sad about distant people who suffer because there are subjects of that harm. By contrast, he argues, absent happy people on uninhabited planets do not exist and thus there are no actual victims.

One problem with this argument is that even if Professor DeGrazia can thereby avoid the basic asymmetry, he jumps from the frying pan into the fire. This is because the claim that it is relevant whether there exists a subject of harm, combined with the view that we have stronger duties not to harm than to benefit, yields the anti-natalist conclusion via a different route. Let us assume for the sake of argument that the basic asymmetry is false and that the good things in life are real advantages over their absence if one never existed. It is still the case that existence holds real harms. Now either we bring some person, X, into existence or we do not. If we do then there is somebody—a subject—who suffers the harms of life. If we do not, there is nobody who is deprived. If we have stronger duties to avoid harm than to bestow benefit then we should desist from bringing X into existence. In so desisting we prioritize the avoidance of harm over the bestowal of benefit.

To this Professor DeGrazia might reply that as long as the benefits of existing outweigh the harms, existence is a net benefit and thus a duty not to harm does not apply in such a case. The problem with such a response, however, is that it would succumb to another challenge to procreation, which has been advanced by Seana Shiffrin (1999). The purported benefits of being brought into existence can only be bestowed by also inflicting the harms of existence. The problem, Professor Shiffrin argues, is that whereas, in the absence of evidence of a person's wishes to the contrary, we are permitted and sometimes even required to inflict lesser harms on a

person in order to prevent his suffering greater harms, we are not permitted in the absence of a person's consent, to inflict harms on him in order to bestow a benefit. In creating people we certainly cannot obtain their consent.<sup>18</sup> According to my quality-of-life argument (outlined above, and defended further below) the harms of existence are serious ones. This makes their infliction on non-consenting beings for their purported benefit even more problematic than it otherwise would be.

#### 4.4 Tim Bayne

Tim Bayne is another who thinks that there is an alternative and better explanation of the four asymmetries (i)–(iv). This alternative, he suggests, is an asymmetry between good and bad *lives* rather than an asymmetry of good and bad *experiences*.<sup>19</sup> The problem with this suggestion, however, is that the asymmetry to which he appeals does no explanatory work. It is, in half the cases, merely a restatement of the asymmetry it is purportedly explaining.

Consider first the asymmetry of procreational duties. He says that this can be explained by appeal to the intuition that while we have a duty to avoid creating miserable lives, we have no duty to create good lives. But that is exactly what the asymmetry of procreational duties states. It states that while we have a duty to avoid bringing into existence people who would lead miserable lives, we have no duty to bring into existence those who would lead happy lives.

The same problem arises in the retrospective beneficence asymmetry. Dr Bayne says of this asymmetry:

There is an asymmetry here, but it is not the one that supports Benatar's asymmetry. The kinds of lives that we regret having brought into existence are not those of normal human beings, but those in which the goods of life are outweighed by its bads. (Bayne 2010, p. 51)

Again, this is exactly what the retrospective beneficence asymmetry says—that whereas we regret having brought bad lives into existence, we do not regret not

<sup>18</sup> It might be suggested that it is sufficient if a person *would* consent if he could. However, there are many problems with this suggestion. Whereas we might be able to employ such subjunctive consent in cases of existing beings incapable of consenting, it is much harder to say of a person who has never existed that he would consent if he could. The only condition under which a person who has never existed could consent is if he already existed, in which case the consent would post-date that to which the consent is required. Even if the suggestion is that we may bring people into existence if those people would *later* give consent to our having brought them into existence, further problems are faced. First, we cannot know which potential people would later consent to being brought into existence. Although most people might consent, many people would not and the infliction of harms on them without their consent is problematic. (For more on this, see Benatar 2006, pp. 152–155.) Second, given the evidence that the preference for having come into existence is an adaptive preference, we should be skeptical of giving it the moral weight that an argument from either subjunctive or retrospective consent accords it. (See Benatar 2006, p. 100).

<sup>19</sup> Because I write about pleasures and pains as exemplars of good and bad things within a life, Dr Bayne's point could be expressed a little differently—as a focus on good and bad lives rather than on good and bad *features* of (rather than merely *experiences* within) a life.

having brought good lives into existence. Dr Bayne's purported explanation is not an explanation but rather a repetition of the asymmetry it is purporting to explain.<sup>20</sup>

Something different—and strange—occurs in Dr Bayne's treatment of the other two asymmetries that I say are best explained by my basic asymmetry. In the case of the prospective beneficence asymmetry, he seems to deny it rather than explain it. He writes that:

it doesn't seem strange to cite a potential child's *overall* interests or well-being as a basis for avoiding bringing it into existence; in particular, it doesn't seem strange to think that if the potential child's (expected) pain would be such as to overwhelm its (expected) pleasure, then one should not bring it into existence. But it *does* seem strange to cite a potential child's expected pains as a basis for avoiding bringing it into existence *without at the same time* being prepared to cite its expected pleasures as a basis for bringing it into existence. (Bayne 2010, p. 51)

I previously considered Professor DeGrazia's rejection of the prospective beneficence asymmetry, and I shall not repeat the problems with that move. Instead, I shall note here only that Dr Bayne has not provided an alternative explanation of this asymmetry and that this is a problem insofar as one does and should accept this asymmetry.

Finally, consider Dr Bayne treatment of the asymmetry of distant suffering and absent happy people. Dr Bayne says that here too:

the objects of our evaluation appear to be entire lives. We are sad for inhabitants of foreign lands whose lives are so characterized by suffering that we think that they would be better off dead, and we are happy—or at least not sad—for inhabitants of foreign lands whose lives are such that we do not think that they would be better off dead. (Bayne 2010, p. 52)

The problem here is that Dr Bayne has not explained the asymmetry at all. He informs us that we are sad for those distant people who suffer—a repetition of the “distant suffering” component of this asymmetry—but he states nothing about our not being sad about absent happy people in uninhabited places. If he *had* explained that, it would similarly have been with a restatement of that feature of the asymmetry.

Dr Bayne anticipates the objection that his explanation is not really an explanation. He writes:

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<sup>20</sup> It is true, of course, that when most people accept the retrospective beneficence asymmetry they do so thinking that not *all* children brought into existence count as suffering children whose existence is to be regretted. However, this fact is not going to help Dr Bayne. Obviously my anti-natal *conclusion* is one that most people would reject. What my *argument* does is show how my conclusion in fact follows from other views people do accept. People accept the retrospective beneficence asymmetry (which is neutral on how many regrettably existences there are) and this asymmetry is best explained, I argued, by my basic asymmetry. Dr Bayne fails to provide an alternative explanation of the retrospective beneficence asymmetry by citing the retrospective beneficence asymmetry, even if in doing so, he were to note that most people think that some lives are not to be regretted.

Benatar might object that we haven't really *explained* these four genetical judgements by invoking an asymmetry between good and bad lives but have simply redescribed them. (Bayne 2010, p. 52)

But his response to this serious objection is very unsatisfactory. He says that he is "unpersuaded" because my asymmetry would "add nothing to what we already have, but would incur costs" (Bayne 2010, p. 52). He says that it would add nothing because I provide no explanation of my asymmetry—that I have "no story to tell as to how it could be a good thing for S to avoid pains by failing to exist without it also being also being a bad thing for S to avoid pleasures by failing to exist" (Bayne 2010, p. 52). And he says that my asymmetry has additional costs because it "is at odds with our judgements that we do not harm normal people by bringing them into existence" (Bayne 2010, p. 52).

Both of these charges can be met. First, my asymmetry certainly does add something. It actually explains all four of the asymmetries that I claimed it explains. Dr Bayne's "explanation", by contrast, is not an explanation at all. In two cases it is a restatement, in one it denies the asymmetry and in another it ignores it. There is no reason to treat Dr Bayne's ineffective "explanation" as "brute" when a deeper and actual explanation is possible. My asymmetry also has the added advantage of solving various other intractable problems. I shall say more about this later.<sup>21</sup> It is true that I have not (yet) told a story about my asymmetry. However, all explanations have to end somewhere and we have seen that even in the absence of a further explanation, mine ends deeper than does Dr Bayne's. That noted, I think that there may be a story to be told, although I am not yet sure what it is. I think it has something to do with the fact that my asymmetry is continuous with a widespread recognition that, all things being equal, the avoidance of harms has greater value than the bestowal or attainment of benefits.<sup>22</sup> This in turn is because harms, all things being equal, are worse than benefits are good. I shall say more about this later.<sup>23</sup>

Does my basic asymmetry have important costs? It certainly does entail that coming into existence is always a harm and this is indeed at odds with the dominant pro-natalist views. This is, of course, a cost to those who are convinced that having children is morally acceptable. But that view—and the rejection of my asymmetry—has its own costs. Most important of these is that it justifies the perpetuation of the species and the vast quantities of unspeakable suffering that are concomitant upon it. These costs are much more serious ones. Hardnosed optimists might retort that the continuation of the species will also ensure all the future pleasure that humans will enjoy. However, there are good reasons, which I shall explore later,<sup>24</sup> for prioritizing the avoidance of the harms.

<sup>21</sup> See the section entitled "Further Thoughts about the Basic Asymmetry".

<sup>22</sup> This is something that my argument has in common with the arguments of Professors Shiffrin (1999) and Fehige (1998).

<sup>23</sup> See my response below (in "What is the Quality of Human Life?") to Professor Harman's claim about "higher order pleasures".

<sup>24</sup> In the section on "What is the Quality of Human Life?".

#### 4.5 Ben Bradley

Ben Bradley suggests that my other critics have failed to identify the most fundamental problem with my asymmetry argument. The fundamental problem, he alleges, is that my asymmetry is incoherent (Bradley 2010). This, he argues, is because it wreaks “havoc with the logic of preferability or betterness” (Bradley 2010, p. 2). In support of this conclusion he notes correctly that although I think that the presence of pleasure in Scenario A is good, I do not think that it is better than the absence of pleasure in Scenario B. In other words, quadrant (2) in Fig. 1 is good, but it is not an advantage over quadrant (4). This claim, Professor Bradley argues, is incompatible with the two extant accounts of “betterness”. In fact he then examines two accounts of “good” rather than of “betterness”, although both understand “good” in terms of “betterness”.

According to the Albert Brogan and G. H. von Wright view, “ $p$  is good iff  $p$  is better than  $\sim p$ ” (Bradley 2010, p. 2, citing Brogan 1919, p. 98 and von Wright 1963, p. 34). Roderick Chisholm and Ernest Sosa, rejecting this account, say instead that “a state of affairs is good provided it is better than some state of affairs that is indifferent” (Bradley 2010, p. 3, citing Chisholm and Sosa 1966, p. 246). Both accounts are alleged to be incompatible with the claim that (2) is good but not better than (4) (on the plausible assumption that (4) is not also “good”). If (2) is good then on both accounts, it is insisted, it must be better than (4). If it is not better then it is not good. Thus the implication is that I must either give up the claim that (2) is good, the claim that (4) is not bad, or the claim that (2) is not better than (4).

Assume first, for the sake of argument, that the basic asymmetry, including my claim that (2) is not better than (4), is indeed incompatible with the two stated accounts of good. This would not show that I am mistaken. After all, it would hardly be surprising if extant accounts of good had not considered the unusual case of comparisons between existing and never existing. This very sort of problem, we have already seen, explains how the non-identity problem arises. It arises because people want to view cases of procreational harm via a conception of harm that is developed in non-procreational contexts. There is clearly something different about the procreational context and thus we are ill advised to use a conception of harm that has been developed in isolation from the unusual case. We can claim the same thing about conceptions of good. It would be entirely understandable if common accounts of good had been developed only with an eye to usual cases. But that does not mean that we must rigidly apply those accounts to the unusual cases that were ignored in formulating them. To insist otherwise is to be guilty of the conceptual procrusteanism to which I referred earlier. In other words, if the two accounts of good cannot explain unusual cases, they should be rejected.<sup>25</sup>

It may be, however, that Professor Bradley’s conceptual procrusteanism extends even to his claim that the two accounts of good are incompatible with my basic

<sup>25</sup> Professor Bradley suggests that I must put something in place of the Brogan-von Wright and Chisholm-Sosa definitions and theorems (if I reject them). It is not clear to me that I must do so. A complete account of “good” or of “betterness” must take many things into account. I have stated just some of the things that it needs to take into account. One can note this without claiming to have the full account.



Scenario A (X exists)		Scenario B (X never exists)
(5) Absence of Pain (Good)	(1) Presence of Pain (Bad)	(3) Absence of Pain (Good)
(6) Absence of Pleasure (Bad)	(2) Presence of Pleasure (Good)	(4) Absence of Pleasure (Not bad)

**Fig. 2** The basic asymmetry amplified

asymmetry. Consider Fig. 2, a diagrammatic amplification of my basic asymmetry (in which (5) and (6), previously implicit are now made explicit):

Now recall that according to the view of Professors Brogan and von Wright, “ $p$  is good iff  $p$  is better than  $\sim p$ ”. If (2) is  $p$ , what is  $\sim p$ ? The options are:

- (a)  $\sim p$  is (6),
- (b)  $\sim p$  is (4),
- (c)  $\sim p$  is (6) and  $\sim p$  is (4).

The Brogan-von Wright view is compatible with the first, but not the second and third of these options. Thus, I could endorse the Brogan-von Wright view, by treating (6) as the relevant negation of (2). Some might be tempted to reject this, claiming instead that the third option is the appropriate one. They might argue this because both (6) and (4) are cases of an “absence of pleasure”, which is the negation of the “presence of pleasure”. But this overlooks a crucial fact: The negation of (2) is ambiguous, and only one of the possible senses of negation is relevant, on my view.

To recognize the ambiguity, consider the distinction between external and internal negation (see Slater 1979). (2) states that “there exists a person X who has pleasure”. The external negation of this is “it is not the case that there exists a person X who has pleasure”. But this negation is ambiguous between “there exists a person who does not have pleasure”—that is (6), the internal negation—and X does not exist and thus does not have pleasure—that is (4). Both (6) and (4) are negations of (2), but they are not both the negations relevant to the axiological evaluation of (2). (2) is the presence of pleasure *of a person who exists* (at some time). The relevant negation of that, I have argued, is the absence of pleasure of a person who exists (at some time).<sup>26</sup> Professor Bradley may disagree, but that does not mean that

<sup>26</sup> And the relevant negation of (3) is (1), and judging (3) to be good is thus also compatible with the Brogan-von Wright view.

my view is either incoherent or wreaks “havoc with the logic of preferability or betterness”. Insisting that (6) and (4) must be axiological equivalent is where the procrustean vice again manifests.

Consider next the Chisholm-Sosa view, according to which “a state of affairs is good provided it is better than some state of affairs that is indifferent”. On this view as well, (2) can be judged “good” because it is better than (6), and (3) can be judged good because it is better than (1). Now, (6) and (1) are both bad rather than indifferent, but this is not a problem. Any state of affairs that is better than a bad state of affairs and is not itself either merely a less bad or indifferent state of affairs, must also be better than an indifferent state of affairs.<sup>27</sup> (2) is not bad at all. It is also better than an indifferent state of affairs—the presence of pleasure in an existent person is not merely indifferent—and thus must be good. I have argued that the absence of pain in Scenario B is neither bad nor indifferent and that it is better than the presence of pain in Scenario A. Thus it too is good. Again, Professor Bradley might disagree with my evaluation of (3), but, once again, that does not mean that my view is either incoherent or wreaks “havoc with the logic of preferability or betterness”.

Professor Bradley briefly considers the possibility that I might invoke the distinction between the absence of pleasure in an existing person and the absence of pleasure in a never existent person (Bradley 2010, p. 3).<sup>28</sup> However, he rejects such a response because he assumes, incorrectly in my view, that we must treat the absence of pleasure in those who never exist in the same way that we treat the absence of pain in those who never exist. More specifically, he mistakenly thinks that the reason I argue that absent pleasure in Scenario B is not bad is that “the absent pleasure is not a state of any person” (2010: 4). That, however, captures only half the reason. The reason why absent pleasures are not bad if there is nobody who is thereby deprived is because:

- (a) there is nobody;
- (b) who is deprived (of *a pleasure*).

The asymmetry cuts across the distinction (a) between somebody and nobody, and (b) between pain and pleasure.

There is a further (related) reason to think that Professor Bradley is unduly confident that my asymmetry should be rejected because it (purportedly) conflicts with the stated accounts of good. To understand what this further reason is, it will help to recall first the case of Sick and Healthy that I described in *Better Never to Have Been* (2006: 42–43, 47). Sick is prone to regular bouts of sickness, but also has the capacity for quick recovery. Healthy, lacks the capacity for quick recovery but *never* gets sick. The presence of a capacity for quick recovery is *good* for Sick, but the absence of that capacity in Healthy is *not bad* for Healthy. In other words, the capacity for quick recovery, although good for Sick is not an advantage that Sick enjoys over Healthy. It is not better to be Sick than to be Healthy.

<sup>27</sup> There is a very reasonable transitivity assumption here.

<sup>28</sup> He also considers whether I could appeal to the notion of incomparability. I shall not consider that option here because there is no need to, given that, as I shall show, he too hastily rejects the first possible reply.

Now it might be objected that this case is not analogous to the comparison of Scenarios A and B.<sup>29</sup> The capacity for quick recovery, it might be argued, is an instrumental good, whereas pleasure is an intrinsic good. Because the two accounts of good are accounts of *intrinsic* goodness, they do not apply, according to this objection, to the case of Sick and Healthy but do apply to the basic asymmetry.

The reasoning behind this objection seems to be something like this: If pleasure, for example, is intrinsically good, then its presence must be better than its absence. In other words, the absence of something that is good “in itself” must be worse than its presence. Thus (2) must be better than (4). By contrast, the absence of an instrumental good need not be worse than the presence of an instrumental good. Because the value of instrumental goods is derived from the further goods to which they are instruments, something might be instrumentally valuable for one person and not for another. Sick’s capacity for quick recovery is instrumentally good for him because he gets sick, whereas Healthy’s absence of that capacity is not bad because it has no instrumental value for him.

The problem with this reasoning, however, is that it assumes an unduly narrow and rigid notion of intrinsic value.<sup>30</sup> Insofar as the presence of pleasure in Scenario A is said to be intrinsically good, I am suggesting that it must be in the sense of being (intrinsically) good *for* the person whose pleasure it is, rather than that it be good simply that the pleasure exists. In other words, what is intrinsically good for people is that existent people have pleasure—or, to put it yet another way, that if there are people, they have pleasure.<sup>31</sup> This then allows the possibility that the absence of pleasure is not bad if there is nobody for whom the absence is a deprivation. Once this is the case, then the relevant difference between intrinsic and instrumental goods is eliminated. Although the existence of pleasure remains an intrinsic good for people, and the capacity for quick recovery remains an instrumental good for Sick, it is no longer the case that the absence of one, even though not the other, must be bad. Instead, the absence of both can now be “not bad”—if the absence of the pleasure does not deprive anybody of that pleasure.

#### 4.6 Campbell Brown

Campbell Brown, like Professor Bradley, is concerned with the “betterness” relationship (along with the “equal in value” and “at least as good” relationships) and he too accuses my basic asymmetry of incoherence (albeit a different incoherence). He begins his argument by stating that my view “may be stated as the conjunction of two principles” (Brown 2011, p. 46):

(P1) If a person exists in both of two worlds, then which of these worlds is better for her depends on both the pleasure and pain she experiences in these

<sup>29</sup> I considered this objection in Benatar (2006, pp. 42–43).

<sup>30</sup> The notion of intrinsic value is much less clear and more contested than this objection seems to allow. See, for example, Kagan (1998), Zimmerman (2010).

<sup>31</sup> I do not think that something’s being good *for somebody* precludes its being an intrinsic good (in some sense). Even though the good is good for somebody it is good in itself for that person rather than good as means to something else.

World A (Jemima exists)	World B (Jemima never exists)
(1) Absence of Pain (Good)	(3) Absence of Pain (Good)
(2) Absence of Pleasure (Bad)	(4) Absence of Pleasure (Not bad)

**Fig. 3** The basic asymmetry applied to Jemima

worlds. Other things being equal, the more pleasure she experiences in a world, the better it is for her; and the more pain, the worse

- (P2) If a person exists in at most one of two worlds, then which of these worlds is better for her depends solely on the pain she experiences in these worlds. The more pain she experiences in a world, the worse it is for her. (Brown 2011, p. 46)

He then asks us to consider

three worlds, *A*, *B*, and *C*, and a person, Jemima, such that:  
 in *A*, Jemima doesn't exist;  
 in *B*, Jemima exists but experiences neither pleasure nor pain;  
 and in *C*, Jemima exists and experiences only pleasure. (Brown 2011, p. 47)

He then notes that it “follows from (P2) that *A* and *B* are equally good for Jemima, and so are *A* and *C*. But it follows from (P1) that *C* is better for Jemima than *B*.” (Brown 2011, p. 47) This, he writes, “seems simply incoherent” (Brown 2011, p. 47).

I shall not follow his argument further because it fails at the very outset—in its statement of my view. This is because (P2) is not part of my view. It is easy to see why Dr Brown thinks it is. He has looked at the relationship that I say holds between (2) and (4) in Fig. 1 above, and he has extrapolated a principle from that. However, that figure does not capture my complete view. I had claimed that the “absence of pleasure is not bad *unless* there is somebody for whom this absence is a deprivation” (Benatar 2006, p. 30). This implies that the absence of pleasure is bad when it does deprive somebody. This is directly relevant to Dr Brown's World B (in which Jemima exists but experiences neither pleasure nor pain). Consider what my view says about Dr Brown's Worlds A and B (Fig. 3).

If one compares these two worlds, we find that (P2) does not capture my view. Jemima exists in at most one of these two possible worlds, but which of these worlds is better for her does not depend solely on the pain she experiences in these

worlds. Indeed, in this particular comparison the pain is moot, because there is none of it in either world and the appropriate evaluations of these absences is the same. Instead, which of these worlds is better for her depends on the fact that the absence of pleasure in World A is bad, whereas the absence of pleasure in World B is not bad.<sup>32</sup> It follows that World A is worse for Jemima.

Dr Brown suggested that my view is incoherent, but his argument for this conclusion rests on a misconstrual of my view. It would have better never to have misconstrued.

#### 4.7 Further Thoughts About the Basic Asymmetry

Critics of my basic asymmetry seem not to have noticed that support for that asymmetry comes not only from the direct arguments for it in Chapter 2 of Benatar (2006), but also indirectly from the discussion (in Chapter 6) of problems in moral theory about population. There I showed that my argument that coming into existence is always a serious harm solves the non-identity problem, avoids the repugnant conclusion and avoids the mere addition problem (Benatar 2006, pp. 168–178).

Saul Smilansky is the only one to have mentioned this, although judging by his amusement he seems to have misunderstood the significance of this point. He writes that sometimes the discrepancy between my views and common sense become “quite amusing” (Smilansky 2008, p. 571). In support of this he writes that “the thought that ... absolutist pro-extinction views ... become significantly more acceptable because they may help us to deal with some of Derek Parfit’s population puzzles seems as attractive as the idea that you could comfort parents grieving over their recently deceased child with the thought that now at least there will be less of a queue for the bathroom” (Smilansky 2008, p. 571).

This suggestion seems like an attempt to amuse, but it is no analogy for what I wrote. I am not trying to comfort anybody. I had argued that the basic asymmetry is the best explanation for other asymmetries that are widely accepted. My critics have attempted to find a way for us to resist the basic asymmetry by saying that we *could* explain the other asymmetries in different ways. I do not think we can, but whether or not I am correct, it can still be argued of the basic asymmetry that it solves otherwise intractable problems in moral theory about population. If there are two hypotheses and one solves problems while the other causes them, it is surely a virtue of the one that it solves them. It is a reason to prefer that hypothesis. By contrast, the fact that an hypothesis upsets people is no reason to reject it. The heliocentricity hypothesis upset a lot of people by shattering human pretensions. That was no reason to reject it. I do not see why a moral hypothesis that shatters other human pretensions—pretensions about the great importance of human continuity—should be discarded because it upsets those who harbour those pretensions.

<sup>32</sup> I might add that it is very hard to comprehend Dr Brown’s World A. I presume that when he states that Jemima exists, he does not mean in a vegetative state—that she is fully conscious. There are no actual cases of people who lead fully conscious lives and yet experience neither pleasure nor pain. Moreover, as I indicated above, a conscious life deprived of all good things would in fact be quite bad, if only on account of the sheer boredom.

## 5 What Is the Quality of Human Life?

Very few of my critics have responded to my quality-of-life argument—a second argument for my anti-natalist conclusion. Critics are at liberty, of course, to focus on some but not other arguments. They are mistaken, however, when they think that everything rests on the asymmetry argument. Professor Kaposy is one who makes this mistake when he writes that my claim about “the harm of coming into existence rests on a claim that there is an asymmetry between pleasures and pains” (Kaposy 2009, p. 103) and when he states that if this asymmetry is undermined, then my support for the wisdom of Silenus—that it is best never to be born—is also undermined (Kaposy 2009, p. 108).

Other critics, however, have engaged the quality-of-life argument, recognizing that anti-natal conclusions are not blocked by a rejection of my basic asymmetry argument. The most detailed response thus far is from Professor DeGrazia.<sup>33</sup> He accepts my arguments that people are prone to exaggerate the quality of their lives, yet he denies that this “provides much support” for my “pessimistic conclusions” (DeGrazia 2010, p. 325). In support of this he challenges my arguments that life is very bad irrespective of which of the three leading accounts of well-being one accepts.

Consider first the hedonistic view, which suggests that a life is better or worse depending on the extent to which it is characterized by positive or negative mental states. I argued that on account of the various psychological tendencies I had outlined, we tend to overlook the extent to which we experience negative mental states. Among the most common (even if not always the worst) of these, I cited “hunger, thirst, bowel and bladder distension (as these organs become filled), tiredness, stress, thermal discomfort (that is, feeling either too hot or too cold) and itch” (Benatar 2006, p. 71).<sup>34</sup> Professor DeGrazia argues that he is unsure how often he feels these things because most of the time he is not attending to how he feels physically (DeGrazia 2010, p. 325).

When he states this, one suspects that he is making the very computational errors to which I have referred. He must be aware, for example, of when he is hungry or thirsty and there must be something unpleasant about those mental states.<sup>35</sup> Thus he must be aware of these states when they occur. Insofar as he is not attending to them, it must be the case that he is not attending to their sum. But that is the very underestimation that I suggested impedes people’s ability to make reliable judgments about how prevalent they are.

<sup>33</sup> Professor DeGrazia has also been, among my critics, the most generous in his praise of my book, despite his criticisms. For this I am very grateful.

<sup>34</sup> Professor DeGrazia focuses on these in his argument, ignoring the more serious negative mental states I mention.

<sup>35</sup> Professor Harman denies that “we do each have experiences on a regular basis that can be described as ‘being hungry’, ‘being tired’, and ‘being thirsty’ that are actually *bad experiences*” (Harman 2009, p. 782). Instead she thinks that “these experiences are often neutral or even good” (Harman 2009, p. 782). She does not state why she thinks this and it very difficult to fathom what her reason might be. I can see how being hungry, tired or thirsty might be instrumentally good, but that cannot be what she means because paradigmatic pains can also be instrumentally good but that does not make them experiences that feel good or even neutral.

Indeed, Professor DeGrazia concedes that if he checked frequently he might find that he usually does not feel just right. However, he denies that that would matter. This is because he denies that hedonism need “focus so much on bare sensations” (DeGrazia 2010, p. 325). Instead, he suggests that hedonism treats wellbeing as *overall life satisfaction* (DeGrazia 2010, p. 326). He concludes that because “most people are more or less satisfied with their lives, embracing this version of hedonism would support an assessment of human life that is far more optimistic” (DeGrazia 2010, p. 326) than mine is.

Is this a plausible version of hedonism and, if it is, is it a plausible account of a person’s quality of life (as distinct from an account of a person’s perceived quality of life)? I think that it fails on both counts. To see why this is so, consider some of its implications:

1. A person judges his overall life satisfaction to be poor. At a later time, forgetting his earlier assessment or underestimating how bad it was, he judges his overall life satisfaction at that earlier time to have been better. If subjective assessments of overall life satisfaction are infallible, as they seem to be on Professor DeGrazia’s account, then we are left with the odd implication that the quality of life during a particular period improved after that period had ended—not because anything during that period changed,<sup>36</sup> but rather because one recollects it differently. By contrast, if one recognizes that subjective assessments of life satisfaction can be wrong because, for example, people can forget, then we open the way to thinking that judgments about life satisfaction can be mistaken because they rest on errors like failing to remember bad sensations.

Perhaps it will be suggested, in response to this, that judgments about overall life satisfaction are not judgments about satisfaction with *parts* of a life. The problem with this, however, is that Professor DeGrazia is appealing to judgments of life satisfaction made by people who include those only partly through their lives. How can they make judgments about their satisfaction with their whole lives when much of their lives lie ahead? Because the worst part of many people’s lives is often at the end, those who think that they are satisfied with their whole lives may not have faced the most trying test of that judgment until close to their death.

2. Next consider two lives, one of which has many more negative sensations than the other—more pain, frustration, disappointment, and so forth. If the people living each of these lives have the same overall life satisfaction, we could not say, if we accept Professor DeGrazia’s interpretation of hedonism, that one life is worse than the other even though it has many more negative mental states. That is hard to believe.
3. A person’s life is not going well. It has many negative sensations and the person is regularly aware of them. There are two ways we can improve this person’s overall life satisfaction. The first is to remove the source of dissatisfaction—the negative sensations. The second is to make the person less attentive to the

<sup>36</sup> And not because some later development made it the case that the earlier period could now be seen as necessary for some later good.

negative sensations in computing his own overall life satisfaction. This might be done by cultivating his self-deception. According to Professor DeGrazia's preferred version of hedonism it makes no difference which of these courses of action we choose. In contrast to this, it seems that it *does* matter which action we choose. Although being less attentive to negative sensations in computing one's overall life satisfaction would make one's life go better, it does not seem to make it as good as it would be if the negative sensations were removed and for this reason one had greater life satisfaction.

Professor DeGrazia also thinks that our lives are less bad than I think they are, when judged by the standards of desire fulfillment theories. First, he disagrees with my claim that rather "little of our lives is characterized by satisfied desires and rather a lot is marked by unsatisfied desires" (Benatar 2006, p. 74). "Trusting that the reader will agree" with him, he suggests that I present "no compelling argument to the contrary" (DeGrazia 2010, p. 326).

I am sure that the average reader would indeed agree with Professor DeGrazia that many people have more satisfied than unsatisfied desires, but that, of course, does not count against my position. I acknowledged the existence of this dominant view and argued that it was mistaken. Those who hold the orthodox view have less felt need to engage with the arguments that I did provide for the view that there are more unsatisfied than satisfied desires. I shall not repeat all my arguments and examples here,<sup>37</sup> but I shall provide a brief outline.

Desires are either satisfied or they are not. Because we typically want more than we get, more desires are never satisfied. For example, billions of people want to be younger, cleverer, better looking, to have more sex (and to have it with more or better looking people), to have a better job, to be more successful, to be richer, to have more leisure time, to be less susceptible to disease, and to live longer. Even when our desires are satisfied, they are rarely satisfied immediately and often take a very long time to be satisfied. The desires thus remain unsatisfied between when they arise and when they are eventually satisfied. When they are finally satisfied, the satisfaction either lasts or it does not. The latter is more common. Even when the satisfaction of a desire does last, new desires typically emerge. Thus the general pattern is a constant state of desiring punctuated by some relatively short periods of satisfaction. Therefore, there is very good reason to think that we spend more time unsatisfied than satisfied.

Moreover, we would have even more unsatisfied desires if we did not tend to restrict some of our desires to the realm of the possible. For example, any desire to live for a 1,000 years would obviously be defeated and thus people sometimes tailor their desire and say that they want to live to an old age, which they then understand relative to the current human limits of longevity. To see why this is not good news for optimistic proponents of desire satisfaction views, imagine that, as a coping mechanism, concentration camp inmates curtailed their desires. Instead of desiring regular nourishing meals, warm clothes and comfortable bedding—desires that would certainly be thwarted in their circumstances—their desires become limited by

<sup>37</sup> They can be found here: Benatar (2006, p. 74f.).



their conditions. They desire only an extra piece of potato in the watery “soup”, an intact pair of shoes, and a blanket that is not lice-infested. We would hardly claim that the life of an inmate was going well if these modest desires were fulfilled (even if it were going well relative to other inmates). If we knew that psychological attributes such as comparison and adaptation had led to the artificial restriction of inmates’ desires, we would be ill advised to judge an inmate’s well-being by the extent to which his *constrained* desires were satisfied. Thus any desire fulfillment theory that considers an unconstrained desire set must judge our lives to be even worse than they are if judged only in terms of our constrained desires. Those desire fulfillment theories that (perhaps for this reason) do restrict themselves to constrained desires are less plausible accounts of the quality of life.

My critics need to engage these arguments rather than merely claiming that they are not compelling.

Professor DeGrazia also writes that “desires need not be summed up one by one, with each counting equally” (DeGrazia 2010, p. 326). Instead, he recommends a “global structure” with some desires being more important than others. Thus, he writes, even “if one has lots of lesser desires that are unsatisfied, one may have several global desires ... that are satisfied and that count substantially in the hierarchy of desires” (DeGrazia 2010, p. 326).

Professor Harman makes a similar move, although she makes it more generically rather than specifically with reference to desires. She appeals to the Millian notion of “higher quality pleasures” and says that even if she grants to me that “ordinary lives contain many minor distresses that we do not normally pay attention to” we might nevertheless claim that “there are certain positive features of our lives that are *much more valuable* than these negative features are bad” (Harman 2009, p. 783).<sup>38</sup>

These moves are insufficient to rescue an optimistic view of life’s quality. First, Professor DeGrazia focuses here, as he did in discussing the hedonistic view, on the examples I provided of more minor harms people suffer. But these are only some of the examples I provided. Thus although our lives are pervaded by unsatisfied desires of lesser importance, there are also many very important desires that are unsatisfied (or are only temporarily satisfied). Professor Harman acknowledges that I “go on to point out that besides minor everyday discomforts, most lives contain some significant bad experiences” (Harman 2009, p. 783). However, she thinks that appealing to the existence of higher quality pleasures is “a powerful tool” against worries generated by these more significant harms. I shall consider both Professor DeGrazia’s and Professor Harman’s respective arguments.

Professor DeGrazia gives the following examples of desires that, he believes, are often fulfilled: raising a family, having a decent career, and staying healthy into old age (DeGrazia 2010, p. 326). There is both cherry picking and error in this list. It is true that a large number of people want to raise a family and succeed in satisfying that desire. However, people want much more than that, even in the family realm. They want *happy* family lives, with well-adjusted, well-behaved, good-looking, healthy, successful children and prosperous, caring, loving, sexually attractive but

<sup>38</sup> While she refers to higher order *pleasures* it does seem that she is using the term more generically to refer to positive features of a life.

faithful spouses. These desires are frustrated in millions of people. Even where these important desires are initially satisfied, they are often frustrated later. One's child becomes ill, or a delinquent, or proves to be a failure in some important way. One grows emotionally apart from one's spouse, or ceases to find him or her attractive or vice versa, or one's spouse is cold or cruel or violent towards one. Billions of people also lack a decent career, and extremely few people stay healthy into old age. Indeed, old age itself, as the joke goes, is where everybody wants to *get* but nobody wants to *be*. One's desire to remain young is frustrated either by growing old or by death. Ill health strikes almost everybody, if not in youth then in more advanced years. And *everybody* dies, even though almost everybody does not want to die. When people *do* lose the will to live, it is typically because other important desires—such as those for good health and vigour—have been so completely and utterly frustrated that death, previously feared, becomes a welcome release. We see then that there are very important desires that are doomed. Even if they are temporarily satisfied, in the long run they are frustrated. Thus, pointing to a hierarchy of desires does nothing to undermine my arguments.

It is also hard to understand why Professor Harman thinks that [with the possible exception of knowing that one's children are suffering horribly (Harman 2009, p. 783)] there are not “higher quality pains”.<sup>39</sup> First, as we have just seen, there are plenty of examples of very significant bad things that happen to people. Second, it is much more likely that the worst negative features of our lives weigh much more heavily than the best positive features. For example, if offered an hour of the worst suffering one can endure in exchange for an hour of the most sublime delights, most people would forgo the latter in order to avoid the former. This suggests that avoidance of the worst pain weighs much more heavily than the pursuit of the best pleasure. Nor is it clear why we should focus only on the *quality* of pains. The *quantity* and *duration* of pains is also relevant. Here we might note that the most intense pleasures (such as sexual or gustatory ones) are relatively short lived, whereas the worst pains can endure for much longer. There is such a thing as chronic pain but there is no such thing as chronic pleasure.<sup>40</sup>

Professor DeGrazia thinks that his desire-satisfaction account fits well with the view that *my valuing my life and its endeavors makes them valuable to me* (DeGrazia 2010, p. 326)—a view he endorses. He claims that while people can be “susceptible to distortions in prudential self-evaluation”, “there are limits to how wrong people can be about their well-being” (DeGrazia 2010, p. 326). He thus takes my view that people can be grossly mistaken about their well-being to be “excessively paternalistic”, and he claims that this paternalism “could be justified only by a compelling error theory” (DeGrazia 2010, p. 327).

I believe that I have provided such an error theory. I pointed to unambiguous and undisputed empirical data about people's propensity to optimism and the many mistakes they make in assessing the quality of their own lives. I showed how this

<sup>39</sup> She does not explicitly define what she means by “higher quality pains”. The concept seems intended to parallel “higher quality pleasures” and thus higher quality pains are pains that are qualitatively very bad.

<sup>40</sup> There are people who believe that they have an abiding sense of contentment or satisfaction, but that is not the analogue of chronic (occurent) pain.

leads to systematic and significant overestimation of one's quality of life. Moreover, I indicated this sort of self-deception is unsurprising from an evolutionary perspective because it militates against suicide and in favour of procreation (Benatar 2006, p. 69). We thus have reason to think that the self-deception runs deep. I might add that for this reason it also makes people resistant to appreciating the error theory.

People have been deeply mistaken about many matters.<sup>41</sup> There is also plenty of evidence for human irrationality (see, for example, Ariely 2009). Why then should we not accept that such error and irrationality can also occur in the realm of self-assessments of quality of life? It may be true that (a) my valuing my life makes it valuable to me, but that is a quite different matter from (b) my thinking I have an excellent quality of life making the quality of my life excellent. Valuing a life and determining its quality are different matters. I agree that one's own assessments can have *some* impact on the quality of one's life,<sup>42</sup> and they can influence how bearable one's life is, but they do not preclude radical error.

Consider next Professor DeGrazia's objections to my claim that the quality of our lives is very bad on objective list theories of well-being—theories which claim that the quality of our lives is determined by the extent to which they are characterized by objective goods (and not characterized by objective bads). I had argued that the lists of objective goods are typically constructed *sub specie humanitatis*. That is to say, they are constructed with the view to what is humanly possible. This, I argued, tells us only how well a life goes relative to other human lives. It does not tell us how good human life is. For this, we would need to adopt a broader perspective and examine our lives *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Professor DeGrazia takes issue with this and says that the perspective we adopt “must take into account what sort of creature human beings are” (DeGrazia 2010, p. 328). Understood in one way, I have no objection to this suggestion. For example, inhabiting an aquatic environment is good for fish and bad for humans because fish and humans are the kinds of beings they are. Fish are water-dwelling creatures and humans are terrestrial creatures. But this is not what I meant to deny in recommending that lists of objective goods be constructed *sub specie aeternitatis*.

There are many things that one would put on a list of objective goods *for humans* if one's sights were not limited to those goods that were within reach. There are many things that would be good for humans that are beyond their reach. For example, living for a few 100 years in the full vigour of youth, without any ill health would surely be good. Being vastly more intelligent and wiser than we are and being morally much better than we are would also be good. Yet such unattainable goods are not typically included on the lists of objective goods. If they were, our lives would have to be judged much worse than they currently are.

<sup>41</sup> Consider, for example, the fact that people have endorsed the following practices: burning witches, heretics and homosexuals; enslaving or torturing people, or engaging in acts of genocide. Nor are the errors restricted to moral judgments. People have believed in the divinity of idols that they created themselves, the flatness of the earth and in the therapeutic value of phlebotomy for dozens of conditions that are only exacerbated by bloodletting.

<sup>42</sup> I provide more detail about this in Benatar (forthcoming).

In response to this it might be suggested that because such goods are unattainable for humans, any life characterized by such goods would no longer be human. Thus, if we are to judge the quality of a human life, we must use standards that humans can attain. But this response seems to fetishize human life. To see why this is so, consider some imaginary species, which we might call *Homo infortunatus*. Members of this species have a quality of life worse than most humans. Their pain and suffering is plentiful, but life for them is not without some pleasures. In response to claims that members of this species lead poor quality lives, the optimists among them might retort that if their lives were significantly better, they simply would not be *infortunati*. That response would be unimpressive. There is a difference between (a) asking how good the lives of members of a species are, and (b) asking whether a much better life is compatible with being a member of that species. Perhaps a much better life than that of *Homo infortunatus* would no longer be that of an *infortunatus*. It does not follow that it is not that much worse. Similarly, perhaps a much better life than ours would no longer be a human life. It does not follow that human life is not that much worse than the better life.

In the final part of his argument, Professor DeGrazia's responds to the "litany of reminders of the myriad forms of unequivocal suffering that take place in our world" (DeGrazia 2010, p. 328). He accepts the facts I presented but he denies the conclusion I draw from them. I had stated that while some people can be sure that their offspring will be among the more unfortunate, no couple can be sure that their offspring will be spared all of the many terrible things that can and do befall billions of people.

Professor DeGrazia has two responses to this. First, he thinks that more than a few people have good lives and thus the odds of having a good life are not as bad as my pessimistic view suggests. Second, "those who consider having children are often in a position to make reasonably confident predictions about whether their prospective children will have good lives" (DeGrazia 2010, p. 329).

Whereas my argument claimed that significant suffering could befall anybody who comes into existence, Professor DeGrazia has responded with claims about what proportion of people "have good lives". Now, either the phrase "good lives" refers to lives that are devoid of significant suffering or it refers to lives that are judged to be good even though they include such suffering. If it is the former, then Professor DeGrazia is simply wrong that many (that is, a large proportion of) people have good lives. This is because it is actually a very small proportion of people who are spared significant suffering *throughout* their lives. Some people do not see this because they look at slices of a life. They think that their own lives are going quite well, without thinking ahead and considering what might still lie in store for them. The older one gets the more likely things are to go wrong. There are so many terrible things that can happen to people, one has to be extraordinarily lucky to be spared all the non-inevitable harms. Other harms are unavoidable. Death is the most obvious. But others, such as bereavement, are avoidable only if one's own death is premature (or one does not care enough about anybody to be bereft by their death).

Perhaps, then, Professor DeGrazia does not restrict the term "good lives" to those lives in which no significant suffering exists. Perhaps he thinks, contrary to my own view, that lives can be good even though they include such suffering. If that

is the case, then his claims simply do not engage my argument. I said that great “suffering could await any person that is brought into existence”. If good lives can include such suffering then the incidence of good lives does not constitute a rebuttal of my claim. My argument was about starting lives that had a strong chance of containing significant suffering.

Perhaps Professor DeGrazia thinks it is not a problem to start lives that stand a strong chance of containing significant suffering on condition that they also stand a strong chance of being “good”. The problem is that this sounds like an insensitive position to take. One is considering having a child. One knows that there is a very strong chance that (whether or not one’s child’s life will be “good”) it will suffer significantly. Either it will suffer a life-long disease, or it will be raped and suffer the sequelae for the rest of its life, or it will be orphaned young, or it will be assaulted or murdered, or it will get cancer or AIDS, or it will fall victim to a neurodegenerative disease in the course of which it will steadily lose control of its muscles, or it will suffer a stroke and be unable to walk or to speak, or it will suffer from any one of the other catastrophic things that can happen to people but which are too numerous to itemize here. Contrary to what Professor DeGrazia suggests, there is nobody who can “make reasonably confident predictions” that their children will not suffer from any of these unspeakable burdens.<sup>43</sup> Those who would nonetheless proceed with procreation “bear the burden of justifying this procreational Russian roulette” (Benatar 2006, p. 92). Moreover, it is a form of Russian roulette in which most, if not all the gun chambers contain a bullet. I doubt that any such a burden can be met.

The force of the quality-of-life argument goes some way to addressing an objection, articulated by Dr Bayne and others, to the asymmetry argument. The objection is that having to accept that procreation is wrong is a major cost of my asymmetry. However, it turns out that this implication of my asymmetry argument is supported by the independent quality-of-life argument. When there is independent reason to think that procreation is deeply morally problematic, it becomes not a cost, but an advantage of the asymmetry argument that it supports the same conclusion.

## 6 Suicide and Speciecide

A few of my critics have claimed that I am committed to the desirability of suicide and even speciecide. They clearly intend this as a *reductio ad absurdum* of my position. However, I considered the questions of suicide and speciecide in *Better Never to Have Been* and argued that these are not implications of my view.

First, it is possible to think both that coming into existence is a serious harm and that death is (usually) a serious harm. Indeed, some people might think that coming into existence is a serious harm in part *because* the harm of death is then inevitable. For those who think that death is a harm, it could be quite reasonable not to add one

<sup>43</sup> There is a temptation for socio-economically privileged people who are not carriers of any (known) genetic diseases to think that their children will be spared terrible suffering. This naïve optimism is a manifestation of Pollyannaism, comparison and adaptation, and is refuted by a full list of all the bad things that can happen to anybody.

harm to another. They might reason that just as two wrongs do not make a right, so two harms do not make a benefit. Nor does the harm of death only rule out killings. It also explains what is unfortunate about natural deaths.

Second, I argued that although I think that procreation harms those brought into existence and that there is thus no moral right to procreate, there ought nonetheless still be a legal right to reproduce. The arguments for this apply, *a fortiori*, to a legal right not to be killed, thus ruling out specicide. Moreover, any actual project of specicide is unlikely to be successful and attempting it would cause untold suffering without securing the desired benefit. And even if it would work there are other reasons not to resort to mass murder. One might think that murder is wrong even if it reduces the amount of suffering in the world. We also need to consider the fact that there is disagreement about whether coming into existence is a harm. Although I think it is, it does not follow that I must forcibly impose my view on others by killing them without their permission. The arguments in this paragraph (unlike those in the previous one) do not extend to suicide, but there are nonetheless important other-regarding reasons not to take one's own life. One will cause untold misery to family and friends who are left bereaved.<sup>44</sup>

For these reasons, it is simply false to say that my view "elevates extinction to the highest priority and thus justifies violence against people that currently exist in order to achieve it" (Packer 2011, p. 228). Extinction would be good, but it is not the only or the highest priority to be pursued, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, and irrespective of how much suffering it causes along the way.

One particular defence of the claim that my position entails specicide is deeply flawed. It claims that extinction "would prevent a potentially infinite number of future humans and thus it prevents a potentially infinite amount of future suffering" (Packer 2011, p. 228). It thus concludes that whatever suffering is caused through bringing about extinction it will be outweighed by the suffering that is prevented.

One problem here is that bringing about extinction by killing does not prevent an *infinite* amount of future suffering. This is because extinction will later occur whether or not we aim to bring it about. Thus specicide will prevent an enormous but finite amount of suffering. This may be sufficient harm to make Mr Packer's case, but he needs to make it correctly. Second, his argument fails to acknowledge that specicide is likely to fail. It is ironic that he notes the "incredibly small probability of a successful movement for voluntary extinction" (Packer 2011, p. 229), but is completely silent on the incredibly small probability of a successful specicide. Third, this argument presupposes that we must do whatever would minimize overall suffering. There are some people who think this, but there are others, as I noted, who think that people's rights should constrain what we may do. Thus it simply will not suffice to claim that one "can accept that killing is wrong ... but still believe that the future of potential people is so overwhelmingly large that it would be better to murder the roughly 6.6 billion people currently alive" (Packer 2011, p. 229).<sup>45</sup> Yes, one *could* think that, but there is nothing in my anti-natalist

<sup>44</sup> For more on this matter, see Benatar (forthcoming).

<sup>45</sup> Sadly, the number of people on the planet has increased by a few million since he wrote this. At the time I am writing this note, there are over 6.9 billion people.

view that *requires* one to think it. For this reason, specicide is not an “unseen implication” of my view. It is not an implication at all, and thus should not be seen as one.<sup>46</sup>

Professor Harman also argues that my position does imply the desirability of suicide, although she qualifies this statement by saying that this is the case at least when considering what is best for ourselves. (She recognizes that there may be other-regarding reasons not to take our own lives.) If, she writes, our lives are “*very bad*, then it seems that we would each be better off to commit suicide” (Harman 2009, p. 784).<sup>47</sup>

However, Professor Harman’s inference is mistaken. First, the claim that life is very bad is a claim about life as a whole. In many lives the worst parts are not experienced at first. It thus might make sense for people who are still in the better parts of their lives to delay suicide until the worse aspects begin to manifest themselves. Second, it is quite possible to think that even a stage of life is very bad without thinking that it is bad *enough* to make death preferable. If one takes death to be an extremely serious harm then life has to be going worse than very bad in order to make death preferable.

## 7 Conclusion

I am grateful to those of my critics who have engaged seriously with my arguments, especially since so many other critics have not offered that courtesy. Amidst the smug, dismissive, and often vituperative responses, many of which attack only the conclusions and not the arguments,<sup>48</sup> it is a pleasure to see that some have actually considered my arguments and responded with other arguments. In this paper, I have shown that even these more thoughtful objections fail to refute my arguments. Given how deep runs the commitment to procreation and the perpetuation of our hapless species, I have every expectation that there will be further attempts to redeem that unfortunate project.

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<sup>46</sup> Mr Packer’s paper is replete with these sorts of errors.

<sup>47</sup> Professor DeGrazia makes a similar point (DeGrazia 2010, p. 324).

<sup>48</sup> There are dozens of examples of this, but as I write this conclusion, my attention has been drawn to Cowley (2011). Professor Cowley suggests that I am a “crack-pot” (Cowley 2011, p. 26). He clearly does this on the basis of my conclusions because he says absolutely nothing about my arguments. Indeed, labeling me a crack-pot is a convenient way of absolving him of the need to engage my arguments. What Professor Cowley does state is that he is embarrassed, as a philosopher, by “technicians” such as I. He would do well to consider the following: No technical philosophical arguments are necessary to see that there is a deep moral insensitivity in those who blithely dismiss the likelihood or the significance of the suffering of their prospective children. At the very least, this suffering needs to be considered—and considered very seriously. My arguments suggest that if we do take it seriously we must arrive at an anti-natal conclusion. The fact that people, in the grip of an evolutionary vice, are resistant to this conclusion is no grounds for dismissing it.

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