

The Antinatalism Magazine

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The Antinatalism Magazine

The Antinatalism Magazine is the world's first magazine dedicated to philosophy of antinatalism. *The Antinatalism Magazine* aims to develop and promote the philosophy of antinatalism, and to facilitate discussion on the philosophy of antinatalism. Publication interests of *The Antinatalism Magazine* includes, but not limited to, philanthropic antinatalism, misanthropic antinatalism, antinatalism advocacy, activism, movement, organization and strategy, religious antinatalism, criticism of antinatalism, hedonistic antinatalism, non-human animal (zoophilic) antinatalism, wild animal suffering, wildlife antinatalism and suffering focused ethics.

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The Non-Identity Problem²

Francois Tremblay

I've mentioned the Non-Identity Problem (NIP) many times because it is the linchpin of any position which seeks to undermine antinatalism. It is a fairly reasonable argument, and, if true, would undermine the whole enterprise of this book, which is to expose the child and woman sides of the triangle of procreation. If the NIP is true, then there can be no child side of the triangle.

The argument is very simple: future persons do not exist, therefore it is meaningless to speak of their rights or states of being. And if that's the case, then it is meaningless to say things like "procreation fails to take into account the values

² This contribution is an excerpt from Francois Tremblay's new book *A New Approach to Procreative Ethics* (www.lulu.com/shop/francois-tremblay/a-new-approach-to-procreative-ethics/paperback/product-22675897.html)

of the child" or "it is better not to have been" (to borrow the name of Benatar's book). How can it be better not to be, if future persons do not have states of being to compare with actual persons? How can procreation take into account values that do not exist?

There are three major answers to the NIP.

1. Objection from causal linkage

This objection consists of saying that the NIP is really just a semantics game, and that it serves to obscure the cause and effect relationship between the intent to procreate, fetuses, and children. In order to illustrate this, let me use the analogy of a machine being built in a factory.

Suppose that an engineer is supervising the manufacture of a new piece of factory equipment, which is expected to produce some sort of finished product, let's say computers. Someone else pours over the blueprints and come up to the engineer and tells him that the equipment will produce defective computers that will short-circuit on their users.

Now, if the engineer replied to this by saying, “your warning is completely useless because the defective products don't exist yet, therefore there's no point in talking about it right now,” what would we think of such a response? We would think it to be bizarre, because the causal chain between the error in the blueprint and the defective computers is clear to us, and the fact that the defective computers do not yet exist has no bearing on it. They may not exist at that moment, but they will exist eventually, if the project is completed.

Likewise, if the defective computers end up killing someone, we would not come to the conclusion that the engineer or the factory are not responsible because the computers did not exist at the time. As long as one can prove that they were aware of the defect, they would be held responsible. This is just simple logic.

Any future child does not exist right now, by definition. But we know that children will be born in the future, as they have been born for as long as humanity has existed. And we can predict that those children will live similar kinds of lives to those that have been lived in the past, or those we live right now. They will live in the same world we live in, and like us they will have desires, values and feelings. That's all we need to establish in order to talk about the children's side of the procreation triangle.

We can put this in the context of a fetus, as well. We generally believe that women shouldn't drink or take drugs while they're pregnant. But why should this be the case? After all, the fetus (at least early on in the pregnancy) is not a person, it's only a future person. Sure, the fetus is an actual physical object, but it's not a person. It has no interests or values. If the NIP is correct, we cannot make any causal connection between a person and something that is not a person yet, and that includes fetuses. But that goes against all the scientific evidence available on the subject.

One further confirming piece of evidence is that NIP-style arguments aren't used in any other field of inquiry or scientific discipline. For example, we think it makes perfect sense to talk about concerns regarding how damage to the environment will affect future generations, even though

those future generations don't exist yet. No one pipes up to say, "those future generations you're talking about don't exist yet, so they have no values and interests, and it makes no sense to talk about 'their lives' being affected by future conditions." If they did, their argument would be called nonsensical.

Likewise, no one talks about a physicist's prediction about an experiment as being useless because the experiment hasn't happened yet. No one comes up to a physicist and says "well, your paper about this theoretical particle is stupid because there's no point in talking about a particle that we don't know exists yet." Again, that would just be silly.

Based on this, it is clear to me that people who use the NIP are disingenuous debaters. I highly doubt that any of them

would be willing to use the NIP in any other context but antinatalism.

2. The NIP doesn't actually apply to most antinatalism arguments

The NIP is usually brought up in response to the Asymmetry. Remember that the Asymmetry compares the suffering and pleasure contained in two states of affairs: one where a person X exists and one where that person X does not exist. It is not a comparison between two individuals (one which exists and one which does not exist), but a comparison of two states of affairs. Neither side of the Asymmetry is concerned with the state of a future person.

To make this clearer, imagine a person who is deciding whether to commit suicide. What exactly are they comparing? They are not comparing their current state with the state of their future dead self, for there is no such thing as a “dead self” (selfhood only applies to living organisms).

No, I imagine that they are looking at their anticipated future, and thinking whether they would rather have that or end their life at that moment: basically, comparing the state of their life (so far) to the anticipated life they might lead if it continues.

In both cases, we're not comparing people, but states of affairs. Neither the antinatalist nor the suicide base their argument on the state of future/dead persons. If the concept of suicide makes sense (regardless of your position about it), then there's no reason why the concept of antinatalism wouldn't make as much sense. The main difference in both

examples is that we're flipping the order of existence and non-existence: in the case of birth, we go from a state where person X does not exist to a state where person X begins to exist, while in the case of suicide we go from a state where person X exists to a state where person X no longer exists.

3. Objection from basic moral talk

I have already argued that the NIP makes discussion of any future-talk impossible. This fact has another far-reaching consequence. Take any mundane moral statement, such as “you shouldn't punch Robert in the face” (note that whatever position you hold on meta-ethics is irrelevant here). It seems very clear: if you uphold this moral principle to me, and I then go and punch Robert in the face, you would find this reprehensible.

But if I was a proponent of the NIP, I could then reply something like this:

“When you said that, neither future-me (the person who punched) or future-Robert (the person who got punched) existed. So your principle couldn't possibly have applied to either of them, as it's pointless to talk about people that don't yet exist. At best, your principle only applied to me and Robert at the exact moment you said the sentence. Anything else is gibberish.”

I don't expect you to agree with this reply, as it is absolutely insane. But it is perfectly in line with the NIP. The only reason why we can say that my present self and my future self are the same person is because we acknowledge the causal linkage between them. I know I am the same person

than the me from five, ten or twenty years ago because I know that my selves in the past are the cause of my current self.

As I discussed, the NIP denies the possibility of causal linkage. It cannot connect a future person to an actual person, or a blueprint to a machine. If it cannot do that, then it cannot recognize a present self and a future self as the same person, either.

Another consequence of the NIP is that we cannot make an meaningful statement about fictional persons, since after all fictional persons do not actually exist. For instance, most people in Western countries would agree with the statement “Santa Claus is fat and jolly,” even though there really is no such person as Santa Claus (if you still believed in Santa Claus until now, then I apologize for breaking the bad

news). Although this objection does not apply specifically to the way NIP is used against antinatalism, it further highlights its contradictions with reality. Talk of fictional persons is so important in our daily lives that any arguments which denies its existence should be rather suspicious, to say the least.

Interview with Tim Oseckas

Andreas Nilssen Möss

1. What was your own «evolution of thought» into antinatalism? Where did you hear about it, and did you accept it straight away or did it take time?

I was first exposed to the ideas of antinatalism through the writings of Peter Wessel Zapffe. I encountered his essay 'The Last Messiah' in the book 'Wisdom in the Open Air: The Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology' (Reed and Rothenberg, 1993). As I searched for more information about Zapffe, I discovered the world of antinatalism and read all the books and articles I could find including 'Better Never to Have Been: The harm of Coming Into Existence' by Benatar, 'Confessions of an Antinatalist' by Crawford, 'The Conspiracy Against the Human Race' by

Ligotti, 'Every Cradle is a Grave: Rethinking the Ethics of Birth and Suicide' by Perry, works by Schopenhauer and more recently 'Antinatalism: Rejectionist Philosophy from Buddhism to Benatar' by Coates. I have also just found an English translation of Julio Cabrera's 'A Critique of Affirmative Morality: A Reflection of Death, Birth and the Value of Life' and look forward to reading this as well as Tremblay's 'A New Approach to Procreative Ethics'.

Additionally, I have been influenced by The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement (VHEMT) and the ideas of Les Knite (www.vhemp.org) who founded the modern movement, and Al Ma'Arri, a blind Arab poet and free thinker from 1000 years ago who expressed antinatalist thoughts and interestingly wrote a poem suggestive of modern vegan thinking, possibly as an extension of his antinatalism.

Prior to my discovery of antinatalism I confirmed my commitment to not procreating in 2008 at the age of 30 by having a vasectomy. I knew I didn't want to have children and felt this act was necessary to ensure I was not responsible for adding another human to the planet. I had in fact previously seen the surgeon several years prior around 2005 to discuss the procedure without knowing about antinatalism as a philosophy. Perhaps the decision was influenced by my study of Buddhism and the concept of Dukkha, existential and absurdist philosophy, my own experience questioning the value, worth, and purpose of life, working as a nurse and seeing suffering, and generally questioning the values, traditions, culture, and habits of the society I was thrown into. Becoming vegan has also influenced my opinion about humans and wishing for their extinction because of the significant harms they inflict on other animals.

2. I remember when I first talked to you that you said you were open about your position on antinatalism. A lot of people keep these beliefs to themselves (if you didn't know). Why are you open about your views, and is it difficult?

I'm generally someone who is outspoken about my views especially as they relate to preventing and reducing suffering in the world, so I've felt it important to speak up against procreation and advocate antinatalism as a solution to suffering and solving the problems created by humans, the most harmful and destructive species on the planet. I don't find it difficult to be open about my views, but do find responding to people oppositional to antinatalism and supportive of pronatalism challenging at times, particularly their denial of the harms associated with

life-death. Expressing my views has also impacted on my relationships with some friends and family members, which I think is what most people worry about. People seek congratulations on a pregnancy or birth get upset when they don't receive the positive feedback and social reinforcement they're seeking. Antinatalists are seen as 'downers', and I don't think most people don't want to be perceived that way. I believe it takes courage to risk the conflict and rejection that arises when ideologies clash, to risk changes in relationship, and a general non-conformist attitude.

3. What kind of responses do you get when talking about antinatalism to people completely new to the topic? In what way do you consider there to be a stigma against it?

A common response I get is, “if you think life is so bad, why don’t you kill yourself?” Some people, particularly vegans and other social justice activists defend their procreative acts thinking they’ve acted morally by bringing into the world a child that MIGHT help improve the world. Others on first hearing about the philosophy get it, even after procreating, and admit the truth of antinatalism.

There is definitely a stigma against those who speak up against procreation, and they’re dismissed and labelled as ‘downers’, ‘depressives’, ‘crazy’, ‘disturbed’, etc.

4. Do you have any advice to anyone who wants to be open about being an antinatalist and is scared?

Check where the fear or anxiety about speaking openly about antinatalism is coming from and reflect on what’s motivating one’s antinatalist views and explain that to

others. Usually it's care, concern, compassion, and empathy (philanthropy), or dislike for the harms and problems humans inflict on others (misanthropy), or both.

Share links and books with people providing education about antinatalism. Be encouraging and not hateful.

Nobody will listen to hateful rants or tirades

5. You have been active with vegan activism. From what

I see in some of your facebook pictures, you've been

involved in actual organized demonstrations and

sometimes quite large ones. What is Animal Liberation?

How did you get involved with this, and for how long

have you been doing this?

Animal Liberation is a movement to free other animals

from human systems of oppression, slavery, domination,

control, exploitation, commodification, and killing. The

movement seeks to end the breeding, exploitation, abuse, killing, and dismemberment of other animals for any purpose including: consuming their body parts and secretions; wearing their skins and hair; ‘testing’ on their bodies in so called ‘research’; forcing them to engage in ‘sports’ and ‘entertainment; killing them for recreation in forms such as ‘hunting’ and ‘fishing’; breeding them for financial profit to win ‘shows’ and to keep them as ‘pets’; forced labour, and; imprisonment in zoos and aquariums.

The movement is informed by an anti-speciesist view that challenges human supremacy and anthropocentrism.

I originally became involved in this movement around 2003 through volunteering with a group called Animal Liberation Victoria after I became vegan. I became aware of what was happening to other animals and I wanted to do something to help stop the needless horrors and the brutality. So I participated in several protests early on and

became more active around 2011 participating in Open Rescue investigations taking video footage of victims and rescuing them from places of exploitation. I also got involved in public outreach and nonviolent direct actions to disrupt violent businesses such as shutting down a pig killing and dismemberment factory in 2015 and disrupting a major national 'dairy' lobbying group by occupying their office with other activists in 2016.

5. Would you consider there to be a bigger «taboo» around antinatalism than veganism, or do you think its equal?

Yes, I would agree that the taboo around challenging natalism is held more strongly than that of veganism as I have encountered many vegans who still support natalism and defend it vehemently, although I have also encountered

vegans who support antinatalism. I think people feel more of a threat when human procreation and the perpetuation of the human species is challenged than when their support for non-veganism is challenged, although, from experience, some react just as strongly when their views on pronatalism or specieisism are challenged. People supporting both ideologies use the four ‘Ns’ of ‘normal’, ‘natural’, ‘necessary’, ‘nice’ in an attempt to justify their actions and support for procreation and non-veganism. Plus they use classic psychological defense mechanisms like denial when their behaviour and underlying beliefs are challenged.

6. What do your vegan friends and peers in general think about antinatalism? Do you see a relationship between veganism and antinatalism? Could someone who is convinced of veganism be convinced of antinatalism, or vice versa?

I have vegan friends who also support antinatalism, some of whom have had created children and realised their mistake.

Peers in general are more often than not supportive of procreation, but I do know several who admit feeling regret for creating children, probably more from a lifestyle position though. Veganism as a philosophy is opposed to humans breeding other animals for their uses especially because of the significant harms associated with those uses.

Antinatalism as a philosophy is generally focused on humans not breeding humans for themselves, however it can easily be extended to other animals and therefore there is no reason why it should not be. I think if vegans can see that humans breeding other animals as means towards their end is harmful, then it isn't much of a step to see that humans breeding human animals as means towards their own ends is also harmful. Humans may not be breeding

humans to eat their body parts, wear their skin, test on their bodies, exploit them for entertainment, however children are treated like 'pets' and accessories in many ways and the harms experienced by those children and later as adults (if they live that long) can also be significant (e.g. disease, trauma, rape, murder, death). I think more people are making these connections, as I'm seeing more vegans in antinatalist forums and more antinatalists in vegan forums. Some people can be convinced more than others depending on their openness to questioning their conditioning and behaviour.

What some vegans in support of procreation seem to neglect, is that in forcing a child into existence and raising them to be vegan, they are exposing them to the trauma and suffering humans inflict on other animals which leads to grief, sadness, anger, frustration they would not have experienced had they not been born. I see that as part of

the harm of coming into existence, witnessing the suffering of others which adds to our own suffering through compassion and another good reason for people including and especially activists for not bringing somebody else into this world. This could be another angle to use in trying to convince vegans that procreation is harmful, in addition to the fact that even vegans have an ecological and suffering footprint.

Antinatalists I think can be convinced to become vegan if they can see that being born is not only a harm to humans but other sentient animals, especially those forced into existence by humans and experience significant harm as a consequence. And if the antinatalist concern is with suffering, and empathy and compassion is driving force behind one's antinatalism, they can be convinced that veganism is driven by the same motivations to prevent

needless suffering and death as antinatalism but just extends that concern beyond human suffering.

7. You're also an anarchist. Do you see being an anarchist is connected to being an antinatalist or a vegan, and why?

I see anarchism as being opposed to all hierarchies and systems of domination, oppression, and 'authority'. Hence, I view speciesism/anti-veganism and human supremacism/anthropocentrism as a form of hierarchy that leads to the domination and oppression of other animals by humans and the harms they experience as a consequence. I see human procreation also leading to systems of oppression and domination, and I think our childhood is one of our earliest experiences of authority in the form of Adultocracy and childism, discrimination against children. We start off

giving no consent to our birth, have no body autonomy, then we are forced into adult systems including ‘parenting’ that seek to condition, control, and dominate our thoughts and behaviour. I spent my teenage years experiencing the authoritarian dictatorship of my mother’s partner, so I learned to rebel early against systems of oppression and ‘authority’ and resist conforming. Additionally, if we are opposed to systems of hierarchy and oppression and other harmful systems that exist such as patriarchy or capitalism, then it’s best to avoid bringing new humans into those systems where they will not only also become victims of oppression, but also become preservers of those systems as long as they exist as privileged or oppressed, or as a consumer, parent, ‘student’, worker, or soldier.

8. Do you think it's possible for future organized antinatalism activism in the same way the vegan movement have been doing?

I'd like to see antinatalist protests in front of maternity wards and counter protests to anti-abortion/'prolife' activists at abortion clinics, and at hospitals where people are suffering and dying, at funeral venues, in war zones, wherever people are suffering, and also public education outreach. But I think a lot more support is needed for antinatalism to get to that point. Antinatalists not only challenge procreation, but ultimately the continuation of society, 'civilisation', evolution, and the entire human species, which I think people find a great threat to their identity, their religious world views, capitalism, etc., and it makes them question the purpose, value and worth of human existence. As Zapffe referred to, people have strong

psychological defense mechanisms that prevent them from seeing reality fully, and when those defences are triggered, we know how people can react. I think Terror Management Theory explains well why ideologies such as pronatalism when threatened, provoke such a strong reaction from people to preserve their 'immortality' projects. Procreation and preserving the species is indeed one such project.

9. What are your feelings on meat-eaters and breeders?

Do you contempt them, or do you mostly see them as uninformed (or similar)?

I see non-vegans and those who procreate as being mostly culturally and socially conditioned and uninformed, but also as people with psychological defense mechanisms utilised to keep them ignorant or in denial of the harms they perpetuate. So, I see education definitely has a role to

play in raising awareness of the harms associated with non-veganism and procreation, but it's limited because people have to be open to accepting new information and questioning their conditioning and ideas around procreation and the way humans treat other animals. I'll also add that I'm continually frustrated and disappointed with humans in general and my hope is that they disappear from the planet sooner rather than later, which may happen given the suicidal course they are following at the moment destroying our environment and each other.

10. Where did you hear about Peter Wessel Zapffe, and what is your view of him?

I first encountered the ideas of Peter Wessel Zapffe in the book 'Wisdom in the Open Air: The Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology' where his essay 'The Last Messiah' was

published along with several other short works.

Immediately his ideas made sense to me as a man who spoke honestly about our human condition and the conclusion that we must stop procreating. And his ideas around nature conservation also make sense given the existential need we have for those spaces in helping us get through the life-death we have not chosen and that when we destroy nature we bring more suffering on ourselves.

*His interest and participation in mountain climbing, apart from being a form of diversion or sublimation, may have been a confrontation with life-death, a testing of the boundaries through risking injury and death. I'm looking forward the English translation of Zapffe's main work *Om Det Tragiske* this year. I see Zapffe being the main inspiration behind my antinatalism and I hope his book once published will reach a much wider audience. I'm glad to see authors like Ligotti and Coates make reference to*

him in their books and his influence growing through exposure.

I'm assuming Zapffe was not vegan, but I appreciate his reflection on the suffering of other animals in 'The Last Messiah' with, "[b]ut when the animals came to the waterhole where he out of habit waited for them, he no longer knew the spring of the tiger in his blood, but a great psalm to the brotherhood of suffering shared by all that lives." Because of this insight, the archer then refused to kill and eat the animals when, "[t]hat day he came home with empty hands...". He also refers to the "foul meal" he carries "...inside himself, yesterday it was an animal running freely about by its own will...". I wonder if he had been exposed to veganism, if he would have also chosen that path in support of and as an extension of his antinatalism.

The Big Lie³

Manu Herrán⁴

For me, "life" has always been synonymous with "happiness". I grew up in a large family and have always associated the noise of family gatherings with the happiest moments. My relationship with animals, and in particular dogs and cats, has always been about joy, laughter and games. Pain has always been a test, surpassable, that made me stronger. Death was something that happened to others, while I was endowed with a transcendent perspective on existence.

³ Aug 2017. Updated Sept. 2017.

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But, as I discovered later, it was a rather aesthetic transcendent perspective of existence. Everything I believed about life was wrong. Or rather, it was totally true, but only a tiny part of reality: It was true only for me and a small group of lucky people like me.

I remember as a child sometimes finding myself having disturbing thoughts, a trace of suspicion that everything around me might be a fragile decoration that hid a terrible truth on the other side.

"I am a member of the privileged species in the privileged moment in the privileged place. Others are not so lucky."

Over time I have realized to what extent I am an extraordinarily fortunate being. I belong to the dominant

privileged species (the human species). I was born in the time of the greatest prosperity and guarantee of rights in all known history. And if this were not enough, I was born in the middle-upper class of a relatively quiet and safe country. In short, I am a member of the privileged species, in a privileged moment, in a privileged place. The others have not been so lucky.

The fact of being privileged and basically relating to other privileged beings has made me think, for most of my life, that this was normal. But the truth is that we humans in general suffer a lot. Of course, we use our intelligence and other resources within our reach to suffer as little as possible, but we can't always avoid suffering. In the Second World War 75 million people⁵ died in very painful circumstances. More than 300 million people⁶ in the world

⁵ https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anexo:Guerras_por_n%C3%BAmero_de_muertos

⁶ www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs369/en/

suffer from depression and more than 800,000⁷ commit suicide each year.

*"The problem is not to die. Everyone dies.
The problem is having a miserable life or a
terrifying death."*

Surely animals in nature usually suffer more than humans. Only one in five lion cubs reaches two years⁸ of age. And they do not die with palliative care, analgesics and anesthetics, but from hunger, thirst, diseases, or being devoured or attacked by other animals. The mortality rate of lions may seem high, but on the contrary: most species⁹

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/WHO-report.html>

⁸ https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panthera_leo

⁹ <https://foundational-research.org/the-importance-of-wild-animal-suffering/>

have a reproduction strategy known as "r" (r-selection) in which many descendants are generated, each of which has a very low probability of survival.

Animals on industrial farms have no better luck. We boil live lobsters and crabs before eating them. Nearly one million chickens and turkeys are boiled alive¹⁰ as well each year in U.S. slaughterhouses, often because fast-moving lines fail to kill the birds before they are dropped into scalding water (2013 estimate).

I insist on stressing the suffering because the problem is not to die. Everybody dies. The problem is having a miserable life, or a terrifying death. Among disappeared detainees, executed, tortured and political prisoners, the number of

¹⁰ www.dailynews.com/general-news/20131030/chickens-turkeys-being-boiled-alive-as-processing-lines-speed-up#disqus_thread

victims of the Pinochet dictatorship¹¹ exceeded 40,000 people. More than 4,000 people were tortured in the Basque Country in the last 50 years¹², according to a report. Since the coup in Egypt, 60,000 people have been arrested and many tortured¹³. More than 11,000 children have died in the civil war in Syria¹⁴ and hundreds have been executed or tortured. Figures of tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people suffered in some way or another Inquisition¹⁵. About 50,000 patients¹⁶ die each year in

¹¹ https://elpais.com/diario/2011/08/20/internacional/1313791208_850215.html

¹² www.elespanol.com/espagna/20160627/135737052_0.html

¹³ www.eldiario.es/desalambre/vivir-torturado-Egipto_0_596341029.html

¹⁴ www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2013/11/131124_siria_guerra_muerte_ninios_informe_men

¹⁵ <https://www.tms.edu/es/predicadores-y-la-predicacion/cuanta-gente-murió-durante-la-santa-inquisición/>

¹⁶ www.medicosypacientes.com/articulo/dr-gandara-50000-pacientes-mueren-con-sufrimiento-evitable-en-espana

Spain with avoidable suffering, because they do not have access to palliative care. Every day more than 2,000 children¹⁷ around the world die in painful accidents. In only one year and only in the European Union, 252 million pigs¹⁸ were sacrificed. 77% of these pigs were castrated without anesthesia¹⁹. During one year, 140,000 experiments²⁰ are carried out on non-human animals in Spain in which the animal dies or suffers great damage.

These are just some examples. Although I have not lived any of them, I can imagine what these atrocities are like and I am convinced that I do not want to experience them at all, nor do I want anyone to have to go through them. I

¹⁷ www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2008/pr46/es/

¹⁸ ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Pig_farming_sector_-_statistical_portrait_2014

¹⁹ www.agenciasinc.es/Noticias/El-77-de-los-cerdos-europeos-son-castrados-sin-anestesia

²⁰ www.mapama.gob.es/es/ganaderia/temas/produccion-y-mercados-ganaderos/informedeusodeanimalesen2015_tcm7-436494.pdf

would not risk living their lives. If I were offered to live any of those lives, I would of course reject it. Not only that: in fact, I would refuse to live any life that was not mine, unless it was a better life. So, if it were possible and offered it to me, I would refuse to be reincarnated at random. With the information I have, I consider that I have no interest in living a random life as a sentient being, whether animal or human. I would not take that risk. So what's the point of bringing new lives into existence and putting them at risk of experiencing some of those horrible experiences? It would only be a good idea to do so if we could reasonably assure their happiness. This way of posing the problem seeks impartiality in the form of what is known as "the veil of ignorance²¹", although the name is confusing to me and I think it's more appropriate to call it "veiled egoism" or "blind egoism".

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veil_of_ignorance

"Evolution has designed us to believe that life is worth living and is more important than avoiding suffering. We are designed to survive, not to enjoy."

Some may argue that most lives, both human and animal, are worthwhile, since most of them do not commit suicide. But there are very specific reasons why we should not commit suicide, even if this was the most rational option. In the first place, committing suicide is not easy. Technically, it is very difficult to do without suffering, so trying to commit suicide can make the situation even worse. On the other hand, for many it may be inconceivable. They simply do not raise the possibility. In addition, the very state of suffering can cloud reason and impede suicide.

Suicide can be a desperate but rational act. Those who commit suicide consider that their life is not worth it or that it is unbearable. If animals do not do it massively, I think it's because suicide is complex, difficult (in the physical and in the mental sense). And for many humans, in my opinion, the same thing happens. At a deep level, I believe there is no significant difference between the reasons why non-human animals whose future lives are expected to be negative do not commit suicide, and the reasons why most humans do not do so in similar circumstances. The reason is the same: we were not designed (metaphorically) to enjoy, but for the survival of our genes. Evolution has not created us with a good ability to commit suicide. Moreover, evolution produces the bias of believing that life is worthwhile, no matter what happens. We are designed to survive, not to enjoy. This is the great deception that evolution has caused in us: evolution has designed us to

believe that life is worth living, and that living is more important than avoiding suffering.

Evolution has even designed us to have the feeling that there is more enjoyment than suffering. People wonder about the cause of poverty, when scarcity is the natural state of things. Misery is the normal thing: for what it is necessary to inquire is about prosperity. Sadly, there is a lack of symmetry between enjoyment and suffering²². As Eduardo Mendoza said in the mouth of one of his novel characters (I quote from memory because I do not find the literal quotation, but the idea is faithful): it is frustrating to see how a stroke of good luck is not enough to make up for a lifetime of discomfort and misery; and yet a setback of fortune can ruin a lifetime of happiness in a minute.

²² <https://foundational-research.org/the-case-for-suffering-focused-ethics/>

I know that these ideas can be extravagant or depressing, but unfortunately, I think they reflect reality better than the usual belief that life is wonderful and that everything will be fine. Although talking about these issues can be sad, reflecting and being prepared can avoid great suffering in the future, for ourselves and for other loved ones, and even for others we will never know. Perhaps reading and being interested in avoiding intense suffering is the best decision you can make in your entire life. Expect the best, but be prepared for the worst.

Do you want to be happy?

We all want to be happy. And happiness is not a matter of years. A short life can be happy while a long life can be miserable. A short and happy life will always be preferable to a long and miserable life although, as I said, we are programmed to make our life as long as possible, at all

costs. This is the deception to which evolution subjects us, but which I think we can and must get rid of.

"Happiness is not a matter of years. A short and happy life is always preferable to a long and miserable life."

I do not intend to encourage the idea of ending indiscriminately the lives of others or one's own life, nor do I advocate the idea of the "button of the destruction of the universe", although an empty world would be better²³. Even if lives have a clearly negative net worth, and deaths would be without suffering, there are many reasons why it's a bad idea to try to finish lives systematically. With "ending lives systematically" I mean lives of a large group of

²³ <https://foundational-research.org/how-could-an-empty-world-be-better-than-a-populated/>

individuals: those who fulfill certain characteristics, for example, belonging to one, several or all sentient species, perhaps also human, so that individuals are considered statistically, and not individually. It is not a good idea. What I intend to do fundamentally is to promote the idea that suffering is very relevant, and that ending extreme suffering is the most relevant of all. We need to stop extreme suffering, but not in any way.

What are the reasons why it is a bad idea to try to *systematically* terminate lives whose future net worth is predictably very negative? There is a first group of motives that I consider to be intuitive, related to the respect for individual freedom, or to seek the convergence of different value systems, as well as the indecision to do something that may be totally contrary to our most basic impulses (for example, our most basic impulses of survival or empathy). Another second group of motives would be practical, such

as avoiding social alarm, and generally avoiding a greater evil -such a mistake that leads to disaster-, or that is, simply, technically or politically difficult to do, if not impossible.

There is a third group of motives, perhaps unintuitive but logical, based on the consequences of our actions. On the one hand and on a "short-term" basis, humanity is demonstrating its ability to end all suffering as it is demonstrating its ability to end all forms of life, for example with nuclear war. But to do so, humanity must exist. In particular, the voluntary human extinction movement²⁴ would be one of the worst possible ideas in this sense, as it would leave the rest of sentient animal species in a world full of suffering.

²⁴ www.vhemt.org/

On the other hand, and in the "long term", the disappearance of all sentient life would only delay the problem, since foreseeably evolution would open up again, creating new sentient beings in an endless cycle. This is in my opinion the definitive argument against the "button of the destruction of the universe", and is the reason why it is interesting that humanity continues to exist in general, and effective altruists in particular: someone has to take care to ensure to avoid future suffering, somehow building an earthly paradise²⁵.

Why do I say that ending extreme suffering is the most relevant of all? As explained by the Organisation for the Prevention of Intense Suffering²⁶: "Suffering is rarely if ever a good thing in itself, even though it can lead to personal growth and sometimes allow us to appreciate

²⁵ <https://www.hedweb.com/>

²⁶ www.preventsuffering.org/

happiness that follows it even more. But the intense suffering of torture or certain chronic diseases can make life literally unbearable. This suffering, which cries out to be relieved, is on a whole different level, and it makes minor forms of suffering pale in comparison. There is nothing else that has greater urgency than preventing or relieving the intense suffering of sentient beings."

That is why I defend euthanasia, assisted suicide and palliative care whenever there is intense suffering that does not lead to a greater good. We are all going to die and if we find ourselves in an irreparable situation, it does not make any sense to extend our lives by a few weeks or months, not even a few years, if this is going to add much suffering to our lives. It will always be better to live a little shorter life, but with less suffering. For the same reason I also call for responsibility on the issue of reproduction. Bringing new lives into the world without being able to ensure that

they will be happy, not just these children, but the children of their children and so on, does not seem like a good idea.

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