

Article

# Antinatalist Procreationism and Humanity's Cosmic Significance

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**Abstract:** In this article, I explore several prominent arguments forwarded by advocates of the antinatalist philosophy. Mainly, I assess the asymmetry argument, the argument concerning the lack of consent by future individuals, the arguments about the quality and meaning of life, and the imposition argument. After identifying some issues with the asymmetry argument and underscoring the strengths of the other arguments, I propose a form of antinatalism that accepts procreation under narrowly defined circumstances to avert species extinction and its potentially catastrophic consequences from a cosmic perspective.

**Keywords:** Antinatalism; antinatalist procreationism; meaning of life

## 1. Antinatalism

Antinatalism is the position that having children (procreating) is always morally wrong. Christopher Belshaw, for example, provides the following definition, “antinatalism is the perspective that it is better never to be born and therefore that procreation is wrong” (Belshaw 2012: 117). Robbert Zandbergen, for his part, argues that “antinatalism is the conviction that human existence is not intrinsically more valuable than nonexistence. This incongruence at the heart of human reality may further inspire the conviction that human reproduction must be brought to an absolute halt” (Zandbergen 2021). Blake Hereth and Anthony Ferrucci, on the other hand, state that “anti-natalism is the view that it is morally impermissible to bring a child into existence. Anti-natalism is a moral position concerning prospective procreation. As such, it is a moral thesis against procreation for the purposes of bringing new humans into existence” (Hereth, Ferrucci 2021: 14). Faith Brown and Lucas Keefer call it “the ethical view that it is morally wrong for people to reproduce” (Brown, Keefer 2020: 284).

This position has been held in various forms throughout the history of Western thought (Coates 2016). However, Morioka, a Japanese philosopher and expert on antinatalism, emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between proto-antinatalism and contemporary antinatalism, following the work of Katerina Lochmanová and Karim Akerma (Lochmanová 2020: 38; Akerma 2020: 126, 130). He notes that contemporary antinatalism, often expressed as antiprocreationism, is distinct from earlier forms of the philosophy (Morioka 2024).

Although expressions of antinatalist thought appeared in ancient times, such as in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and the verses of Theognis, these did not evolve into the form seen in modern antinatalism, radical antiprocreationism. These historical examples highlight early ideas but lack contemporary antinatalist philosophy's specific focus and formality.

Indeed, the 20th century saw prominent figures like Kurnig, Peter Zapffe, Emile Cioran, and, more recently, Les U. Knight, Théophile de Giraud, David Benatar, Julio Cabrera, Thomas Ligotti and Matti Häyry further developing antinatalism. While

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foundational ideas were hinted at in the works of Schopenhauer, explored in Goethe's *Faust*, and touched upon by thinkers like Eduard von Hartmann, it was in this century that the philosophy robustly embraced antiprocreationism, and in some instances, even an explicit call for extinction.

The contemporary discussion on antinatalism found a pivotal turning point with David Benatar's 1997 publication, *Why it is Better Never to Come into Existence*. This work laid the groundwork for his more widely recognized book, *Better Never to Have Been* (2006). These publications have significantly shaped the modern discourse on antinatalism, marking a definitive shift towards examining the ethical implications of procreation. Although Benatar is recognized by many as the leading exponent of antinatalist philosophy, there has been abundant criticism directed at his view and the development of forms of antinatalism based on very different arguments.

## 2. The Asymmetry of David Benatar

In *Why it is Better Never to Come into Existence* (1997), Benatar introduces the *asymmetry argument* to support the thesis that coming into existence is not an advantage to the one who comes into existence.

He proposes that we consider two scenarios: in the first, X exists; in the second, X will never exist.

X Exists	X Will Never Exist
Presence of pain ( <b>Bad</b> )	Absence of pain ( <b>Good</b> )
Presence of pleasure ( <b>Good</b> )	Absence of pleasure ( <b>Not bad</b> )

For any existing entity X, the presence of pain is considered bad, and the presence of pleasure is good. However, the considerations are not symmetrical when it comes to their absence. While the absence of pain is deemed good—even in cases where no one exists to experience this benefit—the absence of pleasure is not bad unless there is someone who is actually deprived of this pleasure. *Sic stantibus rebus*, existence, as depicted in the left quadrant, does not offer an advantage over non-existence. Non-existence ensures the absence of pain, while existence inevitably guarantees the presence of pain. In response to the possible objection that non-existence automatically entails the absence of pleasure, whereas existence guarantees pleasure to varying degrees, David Benatar suggests that the absence of pain should be axiologically prioritized over the presence of pleasure. According to Benatar, this prioritization is justified because pleasure depends on bringing someone into the world, thus exposing them to potential pain. Benatar cites at least four other widely accepted asymmetries to support his argument.<sup>1</sup> He discusses explicitly the asymmetry of procreative duties as the most relevant among the further asymmetries in his works (1997, 2006, 2013). David Benatar explores the notion of moral duties in the context of procreation, emphasizing that there is a moral duty to prevent the birth of individuals who will suffer. At the same time, there is no corresponding duty to produce happy individuals. This perspective is consistent with a broader ethical view that emphasizes negative duties - obligations not to cause harm - over positive duties, which are obligations to do good or provide benefits.

Benatar also considers the implications of an ethical framework that recognizes only negative duties and no positive duties. He argues that such a framework is too restrictive because it fails to account for a significant part of human moral life.

Then, he considers a second alternative interpretation that combines negative and positive duties in ethical reasoning. According to this view, while we have positive

<sup>1</sup> They are the asymmetry of procreative duties, the asymmetry of prospective beneficence, the asymmetry of retrospective beneficence and the asymmetry of distant suffering and absent happy people.

duties—obligations to do good or benefit others—these duties do not extend to bringing happy individuals into the world. Accepting such a duty would imply a moral obligation to procreate, leading to the problematic notion that we are ethically required to have children to increase overall happiness. A third interpretation, considered by the South African philosopher, broadens the ethical framework to suggest that there may indeed be a duty to bring happy individuals into the world, provided that doing so does not impose an undue burden on those responsible for the gestation process, particularly women. This interpretation seeks to balance the positive duty to potentially increase happiness through procreation with the significant physical, emotional, and social burdens that pregnancy and childbirth can impose. However, Benatar critically evaluates the third interpretation and highlights a significant conflict it creates with prevailing moral beliefs about reproductive rights. Specifically, he points out that while this interpretation allows for the possibility of a duty to bring happy individuals into the world under conditions that minimize the burden on those involved in the gestational process, it contradicts the widely held belief that reproduction is a right rather than a duty.

In this context, if technological advances such as artificial wombs were to eliminate or significantly reduce the physical and emotional burdens typically associated with the gestational process, the interpretation could imply a moral duty to use such technologies to procreate whenever it is likely that the resulting individuals would be happy. This conclusion challenges the common view that individuals should have the freedom to choose whether to reproduce, suggesting instead that there may be circumstances in which there is a moral imperative to do so. David Benatar's conclusion is both clear and striking in its implications. He argues that:

- a) There is no moral obligation to bring happy people into the world. This assertion is based on the idea that while generating happiness is good, the act of creating new individuals specifically for the purpose of their happiness does not constitute a moral duty. The decision to procreate is not bound by an ethical requirement to increase the world's happiness.
- b) There is a moral obligation not to bring people into the world who will suffer. Benatar posits that because the existence of suffering is inevitable, we are ethically obligated to prevent this harm by not procreating. Given the certainty of suffering in life, the act of bringing a new person into existence is viewed as ethically wrong.

### **3. Seana Shiffrin and The Consensus Argument**

Seana Shiffrin offers another compelling perspective to support the argument that coming into the world causes harm and that procreation can be morally questionable. Shiffrin's approach adds depth to the debate by examining the implications of consent in procreation alongside the inherent risks (1999).

Seana Shiffrin's argument about the permissibility of inflicting a lesser evil to prevent a greater one provides a nuanced perspective on consent and moral action under conditions of necessity. In scenarios where life is at risk and immediate action is required, it's generally assumed that a rational person would consent to minor harm if it significantly reduces the risk of significant harm or death. For example, suppose an individual is trapped in a car that's about to explode, and the only way to save their life is to break their arm to extract them. In that case, it is often considered permissible, if not mandatory, to perform this action. This assumption is based on the belief that the person, if able to communicate, would prefer the lesser harm of an injury over the more significant harm of losing their life.

Conversely, it is generally considered unethical to intentionally cause someone harm, even if the intention is to achieve a greater benefit. For example, inflicting harm such as breaking an arm to potentially improve a person's memory would be ethically problematic. According to Shiffrin's argument, given that every existence inherently involves some degree of pain, suffering, or anguish, alongside the potential for benefits, it is ethically problematic to intentionally bring a person into the world without their

consent (Shiffrin 1999: 119). Since obtaining consent from the person who will be brought into existence is structurally impossible, it becomes morally dubious to inflict the harm associated with existence to potentially achieve benefits. Indeed, while an existing individual can consent to the infliction of harm in pursuit of a greater good, such consent is unattainable for the person we consider bringing into existence. Nor can the concept of hypothetical consent justify the decision to procreate since we cannot rely on the notion of consent from someone who does not yet exist. Shiffrin's argument is multi-faceted and centers on several key points:

- 1) Non-harm of non-existent individuals: Shiffrin contends that individuals who are not brought into existence cannot be harmed by their non-existence. From this perspective, the decision to not procreate does not inflict harm on anyone, as there is no one to experience deprivation or suffering.
- 2) Magnitude of harms in existence: Shiffrin acknowledges that the potential harms of existence can be significant and even insurmountable. Life's challenges, including pain, suffering, and the ultimate cost of death, can take a heavy toll on individuals.
- 3) Costs of overcoming pain: Shiffrin highlights that overcoming the pains of life often comes with substantial costs, including death itself. This underscores the gravity of the risks and sacrifices inherent in existence.
- 4) Limitations of hypothetical consent: Shiffrin argues that hypothetical consent, which imagines the consent of a person who does not yet exist, is inherently flawed. Such consent would not be based on the individual's actual values, attitudes, or experiences, making it an unreliable basis for justifying procreation.

Ultimately, Shiffrin concludes that while existence may, in some cases, offer advantages over non-existence, such advantages cannot justify exposing individuals to the potential harms and risks of existence. From this perspective, the decision to procreate is ethically fraught because of the inherent uncertainties and potential for significant suffering in life.

#### 4. The Quality and Meaning of Human Life

The arguments we've just discussed suggest that existence has no advantages over non-existence and that even if it did, we would still lack the justification to procreate without the prior consent of those being brought into existence. The quality-of-life and meaninglessness arguments further inform us about the severity of the harms associated with existence and the inherent meaninglessness that permeates all life. According to Benatar, human life is generally of poor quality. When examining major theories on life quality—hedonistic theories, Desire-fulfillment theories, and objective list theories—we conclude that even the best lives are worse than we commonly perceive (Benatar 2006: kindle edition, position 708-896).

The illusory happiness that many experience results from psychological mechanisms that distort our evaluation of existence and encourage pronatalist attitudes. These mechanisms include Pollyannaism, Adaptation, and Comparison. Specifically, Pollyannaism is an optimistic bias that causes us to see reality through rose-tinted glasses. We also tend to adapt to the conditions in which we find ourselves, even if they are unfavorable. We also tend to compare our situation to those who are worse off, or we may downplay the negative aspects of our lives that are common to everyone. One of these common negative aspects is death. While it is often seen as an inevitable consequence of existence and, therefore, somewhat accepted, Benatar argues that death is actually bad to the one who dies. This perspective contrasts with the Epicurean view that death is not bad and should not be feared. For Benatar, death is the second significant harm in human life – the first being existence itself.

Benatar, especially in *The Human Predicament* (2017), is also concerned with the meaning of human existence. This theme is separate from that of the quality of life, although the two are intertwined. Indeed, a poor-quality life can still be meaningful, as

figures like Nelson Mandela or Giordano Bruno demonstrate. Conversely, a life of good quality can still lack meaning, as can be seen in the lives of many Hollywood stars.

In discussing the dimensions of meaning, Benatar distinguishes between attainable terrestrial meanings and unattainable cosmic meanings. Terrestrial meaning, which is within human reach, is further subdivided into meaning “*sub specie hominis*” (from the perspective of the individual), “*sub specie communitatis*” (from the perspective of the community), and “*sub specie humanitatis*” (from the perspective of humanity as a whole). These classifications reflect different levels and scales at which the meaning of life can be evaluated and appreciated.

Each of these dimensions of meaning has a different scope, and there’s an inverse relationship between the breadth of meaning and the ease with which it can be acquired. Meaning ‘*sub specie hominis*’, which refers to the individual level, is obviously easier to obtain than meaning ‘*sub specie communitatis*’, which refers to the community level (Benatar 2017: 27-34). In turn, acquiring meaning at the community level is more accessible than acquiring meaning at the *sub specie humanitatis* level, which relates to humanity as a whole. This scale suggests that broader levels of meaning require greater effort and complexity to achieve.

While individuals may strive to achieve various dimensions of earthly meaning in their lives, the pursuit of cosmic meaning remains beyond our reach. This unattainability often leads to a “sour grapes” attitude, where people claim that what really matters is not cosmic meaning but earthly meaning. While having earthly meaning is undoubtedly better for those who exist than not having it at all, it would also be preferable to attain cosmic meaning if possible.

## 5. The Argument from Imposition

Matti Häyry and Samantha Sukenick have recently proposed (2024a; 2024b) an innovative approach to supporting the antinatalist thesis by shifting the focus from potential future individuals to existing ones. They argue that to make antinatalist arguments more accessible to those who do not initially subscribe to antinatalism, it would be wise to avoid debating metaphysical entities such as future individuals. Instead, they suggest focusing on existing individuals who are already influenced by a pronatalist mindset and lifestyle. This shift emphasizes that bringing individuals into the world under such conditions is an actual imposition by parents and society, thus framing antinatalism in terms of real and immediate ethical concerns.

Häyry and Sukenick articulate that the real imposition is not pre-conceptual but a postnatal one that occurs after a child is born. This imposition occurs when reproducers, to justify procreation, construct a narrative that glorifies parenthood as a noble and supreme achievement and portrays parents as honorable for giving life. According to Häyry and Sukenick, this postnatal imposition has distinct characteristics:

- 1) It targets real, existing beings and directly affects those already born.
- 2) It is theoretically avoidable, but it requires considerable effort to escape such ingrained social narratives.
- 3) It is unchallengeable, often deeply embedded in cultural and societal norms, making it difficult to question or resist.

This kind of imposition ultimately restricts the future autonomy of children, limiting their ability to make unencumbered decisions about whether to continue the reproductive cycle. In the words of Häyry and Sukenick, “Our argument from postnatal imposition is that pronatalists commit a moral wrong by upholding the honor-thy-parents code and the ensuing prohibition on alternative ways of thinking about life and reproduction” (Häyry, Sukenick, 2024a: 252).

## 6. What to Keep of Antinatalist Arguments

The arguments considered so far provide reasons for avoiding procreation. However, there may be objections to each of these, which I will address here before presenting my position.

### 6.1 Benatar's asymmetry argument and Shiffrin's argument from consent

The asymmetry argument has been criticized much (Magnusson 2019; Overall 2012; Benatar 2013). These include, for example, the difficulty of understanding sentence (3) as a person-affecting claim (McMahan 2009). Someone else has pointed out that the argument fails to tell us anything about the severity and amount of suffering in life, an aspect that only the quality-of-life argument can address (Cabrera 2011; Benatar 2006: kindle edition, position 626 ff; 2017: 64-91). This objection hinges on the perspective that not all suffering is severe, and pleasures can effectively balance life's minor sufferings. However, the asymmetry argument fails to show the magnitude of the suffering.

Here, I will present two criticisms: 1) the argument from the paradox of non-existence and 2) the argument from the ontological categorization of existing and non-existing persons.

The normative conclusion of the asymmetry argument - that we should not bring into existence new individuals - if accepted by all, would lead to the extinction of the species. This extinction would occur by preventing the suffering of potential individuals who are never brought into existence while causing suffering for the existing individuals representing the last generation. This scenario presents a paradox: to prevent the suffering of potential individuals, we would inevitably cause suffering for actual individuals.

An argument against this could be that the total amount of suffering avoided by not bringing future individuals into existence would exceed the suffering experienced by current individuals, given that the number of potential future individuals is likely greater than those currently existing. This objection makes sense in theory but proves problematic in practice. Let's consider a scenario where Roberto is considering starting a romantic relationship with Sara. Luigi advises Roberto not to pursue the relationship, arguing that while it might seem fulfilling initially, it will ultimately lead to pain, as many romantic relationships do. Roberto could counter this by acknowledging the potential for future difficulties and the associated suffering that might be avoided by not pursuing the relationship. However, he might also argue that choosing not to start the relationship would mean missing out on the immediate happiness and joy that being with Sara could bring. So, while acknowledging that introducing new individuals into the world will inevitably involve some suffering for them, this suffering—as long as it remains potential (though certain)—cannot outweigh the real suffering resulting from avoiding this potential suffering.

The second argument challenges the hypothetical concept of the potential person. The asymmetry argument compares an existing person (X) with a non-existing X. However, for these comparisons to be valid, the existing and non-existing X must share common characteristics. If the specific property of the non-existent X is that it can never experience pleasure or pain, then, ontologically speaking, it is a type that cannot be compared with the existing X, whose specific trait is the ability to experience pleasure and pain. Consequently, any revised framework based on this argument must acknowledge that the non-existent X can either potentially exist or not exist at all. From this standpoint, two distinct comparisons emerge based on the two sub-scenarios.

X exists	X doesn't exist yet (X will exist)
Presence of pain ( <b>Bad</b> )	Absence of pain ( <b>Good</b> )
Presence of pleasure ( <b>Good</b> )	Absence of pleasure ( <b>Bad</b> )

X exists	X will never exist
Presence of pain ( <b>Bad</b> )	Absence of pain ( <b>neither good nor bad</b> )
Presence of pleasure ( <b>Good</b> )	Absence of pleasure ( <b>neither good nor bad</b> )

For a non-existing X that will eventually exist, it's only possible to evaluate whether its existence should be initiated in retrospect because the same evaluative standards that apply to an existing X apply to a non-existing X that will exist.

Conversely, for a non-existing X that will remain non-existent, it is impossible from a person-affecting perspective to declare it good or bad to experience pleasure or avoid pain since, by definition, this non-existing X will never experience either.

These insights lead us to conclude that non-existence cannot be advantageous over existence a priori. This aligns with a common objection to Benatar's argument, highlighted by Cabrera in 2011, which asserts that only a quality-of-life argument can provide meaningful insights into whether it is advantageous to come into existence.

Seana Shiffrin's argument, for its part, seems to avoid the problem I have highlighted by admitting the possibility that some potential lives are preferable to non-existence. However, the American philosopher's argument focuses on the notion of consent, pointing out that since a potential person cannot consent to being brought into existence, we should refrain from doing so. I think this is a compelling argument. To counter it in some way, it is necessary to shift the focus from the individual level to a different species level. I will leave that for the last paragraph.

### 6.2 *Argument of the Quality of Life*

The quality-of-life argument has also been widely criticized (2018). However, it seems challenging to attack if we accept the following premises: 1) death is bad for those who die and for those who remain alive after the death of a loved one; 2) more people suffer than do not suffer; 3) suffering is more common and easier to produce than joy; and 4) future scenarios may worsen, not improve, humanity's situation. Benatar may agree with the first three premises, but he does not address in detail the fourth, which concerns the possible decline in the quality of human life in the future. However, this aspect is a central theme in the analysis of Matti Hayry and Konrad Szocik, who explores it in two recent papers (2024a, 2024b). Matti Hayry and Konrad Szocik's research enriches the debate by examining how potential future scenarios, especially those linked to global warming, could influence ethical decisions about procreation. In their analysis, Hayry and Szocik present four scenarios—two horrific and two not horrific—regarding the effects of global warming. They conclude that the horrific scenarios are more probable than the non-horrific ones. Based on this likelihood, they argue that we should refrain from bringing new human beings into the world who would face a negative quality of life due to these challenging conditions. The four scenarios proposed by Hayry and Konrad Szocik are:

- A. The Earth's population has exploded, resources have been depleted, and the natural environment degraded. More and more people live in abject poverty, and economic inequalities are huge. People survive, but their lives are miserable, and injustice is rampant. This is the standard version of the horrible scenario.
- B. Population, resources, and the environment as in the above. The conditions, however, are so harsh that instead of living in abject poverty, the worst-off die in large numbers. Since they do not survive to provide for the better-off, inequalities are not that pronounced. This is an alternative version of the horrible scenario.
- C. The tendencies are as stated. Technological innovations have, however, mitigated their impact on humanity and continue to do so. Conditions are not as bad as predicted in the horrible scenarios, and the lot of future people can be

ameliorated. This is a technologically optimistic version of the non-horrible scenario.

- D. The tendencies are as stated. Solidarity has increased considerably, however, and this has resulted in counter-developments. Humanity has changed its ways so that the worst outcomes are avoided, and scarcities are mitigated by equitable sharing. This is a socially optimistic version of the non-horrible scenario (2024a).

For a long time, it was plausible to choose between the precautionary and hope principles, given the lack of clear evidence on how human activities are changing the planet's climate. However, current evidence points to different analytical approaches. Hayry and Szocik note that while proponents of technological innovation argue that such advances can solve climate change and other global problems, there is limited evidence to support these claims. Claims that genetically modified crops will feed the world, that we can efficiently remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, that nuclear power can meet all our energy needs, that technology can improve moral values, or that humanity can sustain life underground or in space after exhausting Earth's resources (Szocik 2023) are more speculative and idealistic than realistic.

Moreover, the evidence that technological progress will promote equality and justice is even scarcer. Contrary to Francis Fukuyama's 1992 claim that history has ended with the triumph of freedom and democracy, the course of human history does not consistently show a linear progression toward moral enhancement. Although capitalism has improved material conditions in wealthier areas, it has largely failed to address pervasive global and local inequalities. As the earth's resources continue to dwindle, the likelihood of significant change seems remote. Alternatives to capitalism do exist, but they remain marginal. Critics often highlight the exploitative nature of what is sometimes called disaster capitalism, which not only fails to address climate and demographic challenges but also exploits them as business opportunities. Hayry and Szocik conclude that based on what we can reasonably expect from future developments in science and technology, and what we *already* know about developments in some trends associated with planetary resource depletion or global warming, the near future is likely to be *closer* to the horrific scenarios than the optimistic ones. Therefore, they argue that scenarios A and B should be understood as reasonable to expect. These conclusions lead Hayry and Szocik to suggest that a viable solution could involve reducing the global population. In the article titled *Climate Change and Antinatalism* (2024b) Hayry and Szocik explicitly link the issue of climate change to procreation. Here, the authors argue that adopting a population control strategy becomes advisable since one of the two horrible scenarios is likely to occur. This strategy could manifest in various forms, including extinctionist antinatalism, which advocates for preventing births to spare future generations from the severe suffering likely caused by deteriorating living conditions due to global warming. Häyry and Szocik also explore other approaches, such as procreative beneficence and reproductive autonomy, to reduce the global birth rate but conclude that neither approach will likely yield the desired outcome. Their argument underscores a critical point: to mitigate the impacts of climate change effectively, we must consider controlling population growth. This leads me to the claim that abstaining from procreation becomes a necessary consideration if we fail to address climate change.

### 6.3 *The Argument of Imposition*

I align with Sukenick and Hayry's perspective that our society is deeply entrenched in pronatalist beliefs, evident in notions that parents should be thanked for the 'gift of life' and that parenthood is inherently rewarding. These beliefs impose a sense of inherent value on being born, framing existence as something to be appreciated as such. Contrarily - this is my specific view - being born is a burden we inherit to perpetuate the cosmic journey of our species, a journey whose significance at the cosmic level might be monumental or entirely negligible. Therefore, justifiable reasons for procreation only arise



if we commit to altering our lifestyles to potentially ensure the long-term survival of our species on the planet. Additionally, procreation becomes defensible if parenting efforts are directed towards raising children in a manner that actively contributes to the preservation of the planet from further destruction.<sup>2</sup>

#### 6.4 *The Argument of the Meaning of Life*

Benatar notes that our existence may seem meaningless from a cosmic perspective. Yet, in *The Human Predicament* (2017), he acknowledges that we may have cosmic significance, even if we are unaware of it. This uncertainty underlines the challenging nature of the human predicament.

However, the mere fact that it is possible that we may have significance on a cosmic scale suggests that human extinction could be detrimental, and efforts to delay that extinction could be beneficial. Given the potential stakes, it seems wiser to gamble on continuing our cosmic journey rather than abandoning it altogether.

- A. **Cosmic meaning uncertainty:** We may have significance from a cosmic perspective, although this is unknown.
- B. **Possible negative impact of extinction:** If we do have cosmic significance, our extinction would be a loss.
- C. **Value of continued existence:** If our cosmic significance is real, delaying extinction and striving to continue our existence could have positive effects.
- D. **Decision to continue:** Given the uncertainty and high stakes, continuing our cosmic adventure is preferable to ceasing it.

	Extinction is bad from a cosmic point of view.	Extinction is not bad from a cosmic point of view
We struggle to avoid extinction	Our actions are morally appropriate	Our actions are morally <i>indifferent sub specie aeternitatis</i> but <i>morally appropriate sub specie humanitatis</i>
We make no effort to avoid extinction	Our actions are morally inappropriate	Our actions are morally <i>indifferent sub specie aeternitatis</i> but <i>morally inappropriate sub specie humanitatis</i>

The pattern outlined suggests that our actions may be morally neutral from the cosmic perspective (*sub specie aeternitatis*) regardless of our efforts to avoid extinction. However, from a human perspective (*sub specie humanitatis*), these actions would be considered morally appropriate if we actively seek to avoid extinction. If our extinction is indeed a bad thing, then efforts to prevent it would have a significant positive impact *sub specie aeternitatis*. In contrast, failure to make such efforts would have a significant negative impact (at least *sub specie humanitatis*). This line of reasoning allows me to offer a final thought on the possibility that procreation might be morally justified under certain conditions.

### 7. When Is It Permissible to Procreate? Antinatalist Procreationism

As Benatar points out in *The Limits of Reproductive Freedom* (2010), “it is only relatively recently, and then only in some jurisdictions, that a right to reproductive freedom has been recognized. This hard-won freedom was preceded by a long history of unwarranted interference in reproduction, often justified by pseudo-science and arising from notorious bias. A right to reproductive freedom is a welcome corrective to this.

<sup>2</sup> It is clear that in my perspective all cases in which *we procreate* to satisfy mere selfish interests (or interests of others such as grandparents, friends, nation, etc.) are morally condemnable. Furthermore, I believe that before carrying a pregnancy to term, all efforts should be pursued to determine the best life chances for the unborn child (reproductive beneficence and procreative beneficence).

However, where a right to reproductive freedom has been acknowledged and entrenched, reproductive freedom has been accorded too much value and given excessive protection [...] Thus, it is unheard of (in places where a right to reproductive freedom is acknowledged) to interfere with reproductive freedom, even where this freedom results in suffering offspring” (Benatar 2010: 78).

Reproductive freedom should be morally constrained by several restrictions. The responsibility to demonstrate that their decision to procreate is morally justified should fall on the parents-to-be rather than those who choose not to have children. I propose that procreation can be considered morally acceptable only if effective measures to mitigate global warming, which I use here as a prime example of a phenomenon that could degrade the quality of life for most people, are undertaken<sup>3</sup>.

Maybe, we are morally justified in bringing new individuals into the world if we strive to ensure that the quality of life for future generations does not deteriorate. Additionally, these new individuals must be raised with a planetary ethic that casts them as key players in a cosmic mission—to perpetuate our species. At the same time, we continue to explore our significance from a cosmic perspective. Let’s break down the argument into two distinct parts to formalize it:

#### **Part I**

- 1) If we fail to change our lifestyles, we will degrade the living conditions for future generations and, by extension, worsen the lives of those we bring into the world;
- 2) Consequently, choosing to procreate without planning to change our lifestyles means deciding to bring new individuals into a world where their quality of life will be negative and possibly even terrible;
- 3) Therefore, we have a moral obligation to refrain from procreation unless we intend to change our lifestyles or if changing them is impossible, for instance, due to a weakness of will.

#### **Part II**

- 1) If we choose to procreate, our parental efforts must aim to raise individuals who will positively impact the quality of life for others despite uncertainties about the effectiveness of our educational method;
- 2) If there’s a reasonable doubt that our parental contributions can establish an educational framework capable of producing individuals with a net positive impact on the planet, we should abstain from procreation;
- 3) We should not teach new individuals that existence is inherently good; instead, we should impart that existence is valuable if it reduces negative impacts on the most relevant actors and enhances positive impacts and if it encourages self-improvement that aligns personal flourishing with respect for other living beings in a way that sustains and strengthens the conditions necessary for life;
- 4) We should educate new individuals on the importance of each person contributing to a species-wide ethic to discover a cosmic purpose that positions every species member as a steward of our collective cosmic journey.

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<sup>3</sup> In any case, as long as the burdens of pregnancy persist, we cannot regard the decision to procreate as intrinsically moral. Thus, even if averting our extinction was considered morally commendable, we could not argue that procreation is a moral obligation, even if a significant proportion of the population embraced antinatalism. Therefore, we must intensify our efforts to develop technologies that relieve women of the burden of pregnancy (such as ectogenesis). Only under these conditions could we argue that if it becomes necessary to bring new individuals into the world to ensure the survival of our species, then we would indeed have a duty to do so.

This highlights the paradox of cosmic significance. We may seem insignificant from an earthly perspective. Yet, we may have significance from a cosmic perspective as the only entities in the universe endowed with consciousness and capable of questioning the cosmos and the universe's future. Education around this idea is essential to make procreation morally defensible, positioning it as a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for preserving cosmic meaning. This is despite the fact that new individuals cannot consent to their existence, are subject to the inherent suffering of life, and even though many antinatalist arguments have merit.

This view could be described as antinatalist procreationism. It allows for the possibility of procreation only in rare and specific circumstances, suggesting that procreation is morally unjustifiable in many more situations than it is permissible<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> I recognize that this argument might unsettle both natalists and antinatalists. Natalists may reject the notion that procreation is generally morally wrong and that we should largely abstain from it. Antinatalists, conversely, might take issue with my suggestion that in a few select scenarios, procreation could be morally acceptable and not worthy of blame. Nonetheless, I believe that procreation can be morally justified under certain conditions—specifically, if it is undertaken by responsible individuals who are committed to enhancing the future child's quality of life and are equally dedicated to preserving the planet. This commitment must also extend to their children's upbringing, fostering an awareness of our potential cosmic significance. This careful consideration of our species' potential extinction underscores the importance of being prudent with procreation, presenting an argument of at least theoretical interest.