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ARTICLE

Imposing a Lifestyle: A New Argument for Antinatalism

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Abstract

Antinatalism is an emerging philosophy and practice that challenges pronatalism, the prevailing philosophy and practice in reproductive matters. We explore justifications of antinatalism—the arguments from the quality of life, the risk of an intolerable life, the lack of consent, and the asymmetry of good and bad—and argue that none of them supports a concrete, understandable, and convincing moral case for not having children. We identify concentration on possible future individuals who may or may not come to be as the main culprit for the failure and suggest that the focus should be shifted to people who already exist. Pronatalism's hegemonic status in contemporary societies imposes upon us a lifestyle that we have not chosen yet find almost impossible to abandon. We explicate the nature of this imposition and consider the implications of its exposure to different stakeholders with varying stands on the practice of antinatalism. Imposition as a term has figured in reproductive debates before, but the argument from postnatal, mental, and cultural imposition we launch is new. It is the hitherto overlooked and underdeveloped justification of antinatalism that should be solid and comprehensible enough to be used even by activists in support of their work.

Keywords: antinatalism; imposition; lack of consent; quality of life; risk

The Need for an Argument from Imposition

The main philanthropic arguments for antinatalism (essentially, against having children) are that we should not produce any more lives that are bad (quality of life) or can be bad (risk) without the permission of those produced (lack of consent).

They all lean on the further idea of asymmetry: It is bad to produce bad, or possibly bad, lives without the permission of those produced; but it is not, in a comparable sense, good to produce new lives that are good, or possibly good, even if consented to after the fact.

The extra justification is needed because people think that their lives are good and that, with certain precautions, this will also be true of the lives of the new people, who will then retroactively consent. Genetic selection, unconditional parental love, and moral education will guarantee the required value.

Asymmetry cuts across this by stating that bringing about bad lives is bad but bringing about good lives cannot be assigned any value. The possible future individuals do not exist at the time of the choice and they do not have any urge to exist. We do not harm them by *not* producing them. If their lives turn out to be bad, on the other hand, we *do* harm them by bringing them into existence.

Pronatalists object. The idea of asymmetry is obscure and overly theoretical, they say, the requirement of consent is inapplicable, and the quality-of-life view does not match their lived experience. We live, we die, our lives as such may not be enjoyable (many religions make this their starting point) but we can make the existence of future individuals tolerable and meaningful through the medical, social, and educational precautions that we mentioned (selection, love, and education).

We argue that this pronatalist argument and its implications may be flawed both intellectually and morally. It can be an intellectual mistake to assign human life meaning beyond the experiences of individuals, anti- and pronatalists alike. And it can be a moral wrong to impose the idea of the—onesidedly—assigned meaning to vulnerable young individuals who do not have the mental competence to assess it properly.

If our judgment is sound, an argument from *postnatal mental imposition* is needed to justify the antinatalist stance in the face of its pronatalist criticism. The standard arguments require the assistance of the idea of asymmetry, but although that can be made comprehensible to proponents of antinatalism, this is not necessarily the case for its opponents. Imposition, or imposition proper, understood in a way that we shall specify, could provide a better overarching background rejection of the pronatalist view.

Our concern here is both theoretical and practical. The normative connection between philosophy and activism in the emerging antinatalist movement is not well studied. Some philosophers present their views as advocacy for the cause, and some activists back up their practices by theoretical justifications, but the benefits of these alliances remain uninvestigated. Does knowledge change people's minds? Do ethical concepts and doctrines make people on a mission more palatable? And, perhaps most importantly from the viewpoint of philosophy, what argument or arguments for antinatalism would support the mission best? The last question can be answered conceptually and without taking sides in the actual contest between pronatalism and antinatalism.

The driving idea in the following is that, although all the standard arguments for antinatalism are useful in the activist's toolkit, the hitherto less developed concept of postnatal mental imposition is needed to give them the background support that they need.

All these summary points will be explicated, interpreted, and evaluated as we proceed. But first, the plan and order of the exposition.

The Plan

Our plan is to proceed from quality of life to consent and then to forms of imposition. The quality-of-life considerations that we analyze comprise the arguments that life is always bad; that it is sometimes bad; that it can be bad; that people deceive themselves in assessing the value of their own lives; and that life's goodness does not make reproductive choices right in the same way as life's badness makes them wrong. Since some of the assumptions of these arguments are not widely shared and since views on risk-taking and life's meaning vary, as we demonstrate, no combination of these provides antinatalist activists with a clearly winning line against their pronatalist opponents.

Considerations of consent require partial rational reconstruction. The main literature that we present concentrates on the roles of benefits and harms in assuming implicit consent when explicit consent cannot be procured. This approach is not ideal for the antinatalist endeavor, as the key legal principle that it leans on, the rule of rescue, may be inapplicable to reproductive choices. Our reconstruction, presented partly in dialogue form, suggests that another legal maxim, the but-for rule, could better suit the case. It could, through the idea of strict product liability, support the antinatalist view. It would, at least, be a possibility.

Our search then leads to the argument from imposition. We first review the ways in which the word and the principle have been used and applied in antinatalist literature and media channels. We then go on to present and defend our own idea of postnatal imposition, the imposition of a lifestyle. This will shift the argument's focus from nonexistent to existing entities and bypass many of the problems experienced by extant defenses of antinatalism. We conclude by considering the practical implications of our view, if accepted, for all the parties involved, and by reflecting why it has had to wait until now to be aired in full.

The Arguments from Quality of Life and Risk and Their Limitations

The main philanthropic—human-friendly—arguments for antinatalism are, according to our best understanding, those from the overall poor quality of human life, the risk of creating a new suffering

existence, and the lack of consent by the possible future individuals. Some sources list the arguments from deluded happiness and axiological asymmetry among these, but we believe that they have a more natural role as supportive, auxiliary principles. Other contenders include the arguments from victimization and exploitation, and their underlying ethos will inform our analysis of imposition.

Quality of Life

The most traditional justification of antinatalism is that human life is bad and that creating more of it is, from a rational viewpoint, dubious. Arthur Schopenhauer expressed this view succinctly in his 1851 *Studies in Pessimism*:

If children were brought into the world by an act of pure reason alone, would the human race continue to exist? Would not a man rather have so much sympathy with the coming generation as to spare it the burden of existence, or at any rate not take it upon himself to impose that burden upon it in cold blood?¹

The arguments from quality of life (“the burden of existence”) and imposition (“impose that burden ... in cold blood”) are present in this passage and although Schopenhauer himself did not actively advocate antinatalism as such it is easy to build a case on his general idea.

The first contemporary formulation of the argument is by David Benatar,^{2,3} who maintains that the poor quality of human life is a sufficient basis not only for a rational but also for a moral condemnation of having children. The cornerstone of his position is that all human existence has negative value. In his own words, “even the best lives are very bad.”⁴ If this were universally accepted, the case could be closed and no further specifications or explanations would be needed. It is not, however, universally accepted, and this is where the ideas of deluded happiness and asymmetry gradually enter the scene.

Those who do not agree with Benatar’s assessment can choose from several lines of dissent. Some say that all human lives, even ones with considerable drawbacks, have sufficient quality and value to be worth living. We should all be grateful for our existence. To think otherwise would be counterintuitive, foolish, or a sign of clinical depression.^{5,6,7,8,9}

This kind of thinking has been contested on factual grounds in debates concerning voluntary euthanasia and the so-called wrongful life cases. Even conservative philosophers have admitted that some circumstances can make life unbearable.¹⁰ And the lawsuits brought against parents and the medical establishment by severely disabled individuals seem to prove that they do not particularly value their own existence.¹¹

Others could object to Benatar’s view by noting that some lives are currently of relatively low quality, whereas others are quite good and future lives could be even better across the board. The Principle of Procreative Beneficence presented by Julian Savulescu states that:

Couples (or single reproducers) should select the child, of the possible children they could have, who is expected to have the best life, or at least as good a life as the others, based on the relevant, available information.¹²

This would, so the argument goes, considerably reduce low-quality lives in the future and dent Benatar’s assertion that all human lives are, of necessity, very bad.

The effect could be intensified by adding social improvements to the mix. Even if individuals continue to have detrimental physiological or mental conditions, their impact can be neutralized or alleviated by sensible adjustments.¹³ A proper attitude in procreation and unconditional parental love could also make future lives better (more on these later), as would educating people to think more positively about their lives.¹⁴

From Quality to Meaning

To Benatar, all these claims signal deluded happiness.¹⁵ People may think, especially if they are taught to think so, that their lives are good but this does not remove the reality that they are very bad. They might, in ideal conditions, be biologically and medically acceptable; and social reform, changes in parental attitudes, and education could make the situation slightly better—although even this is probably wishful thinking. The problem, however, lies deeper. Human lives have no redeeming meaning and consist of dullness, disappointments, and—in most cases grueling—death. They can have meaning to ourselves, to our loved ones, to society, and to humanity, but this does not make up for their utter cosmic futility.¹⁶ To put the matter differently is self-deceptive Pollyannaism.

Benatar is obviously right in saying that much of human happiness is optimistic make-believe. Shifting the focus from the quality of life to its meaning, even for the argument's sake, does not, however, serve the antinatalist case optimally. Dreams of a purpose are deeply entrenched in the human mentality and give leverage to pronatalists. Either our existence does have an external goal or—if this is too metaphysical—it can only be arranged around the unquestioned belief that it does. These ideas are expressed, respectively, in Aristotelian and Kantian ethics.

The Natural Law version of Aristotle's ethics, as encapsulated in the late nineteenth-century Roman Catholic philosophy of Neo-Thomism, states that the goal of human life is, or should be, to survive, seek nutrition and shelter, have children and nurture them to adulthood, and to pursue knowledge of God and nature. This is the order of things, defining what people naturally do—and what they ought to do. Philosophers and theologians have formulated Neo-Thomism and its basic goods in much more sophisticated terms;¹⁷ but the value of human life and procreation is never in doubt. People have children, and so they should, because it is an essential part of our existence.

Philosophers of other schools of thought have seen the equation of what-naturally-is to what-morally-ought-to-be problematic. To put it bluntly, some people are murderers but they should not be.¹⁸ The Aristotelian idea of goals and essences dictating ethics (which could help in responding to the is-ought criticism) has also been challenged. Our motivation and intentions, or the consequences of our actions and inactions, can be more important to morality than what, as products of natural and cultural evolutions, we biologically, psychologically, and socially are.¹⁹

Kantian thinking moves the discussion forward from the ontological (what we are) realm to the epistemological and moral (what we can know and how we should react to external events). Immanuel Kant argued that the way we understand the world is dictated by certain dispositions of the human mind—causality and time. When we observe a billiard ball moving, we take it for granted that something (the cue stick or another ball) has set it in motion and that this is a temporal phenomenon (it started in the past, occurs now, and will eventually end). There is no other human way of comprehending what goes on around us. To know is to know through causality and time.²⁰

Kant's idea was that, although we cannot prove that causality and time exist in any cosmic or metaphysical sense, we must assume their presence just to cope in the world. A similar "transcendental deduction" can also be applied to the meaning of human existence. We conduct our lives as if they had some meaning beyond our own experiences and mutual interactions, because this is the only way in which we *can* conduct our lives. Although we cannot prove the existence of life's meaning, as we cannot prove the existence of time and causality, we must assume it to live our lives.

Axiological Asymmetry and Risk

The transcendental-deduction argument is, seen from the outside, circular, as according to it our lives can have redeeming external meaning only if we assign it redeeming external meaning. This is not, however, fatal for the pronatalist case. The commitment is required—and this will be a part of our argument from imposition—but once it has been made, life can be good and Benatar's quality-of-life argument has been successfully countered.²¹

This is where axiological asymmetry enters the picture. Its simplest formulation is that producing good is not a duty, whereas not producing bad is. This kind of thinking does not bode well in most

people's minds. Surely we should promote, or at least be amenable to promoting, happiness and well-being? There are two answers to this question.

The first is to resort to a strict formulation of negative utilitarianism. Our only moral duty is to reduce pain, anguish, suffering, and other things that we define as bad. The theory has a corollary that makes it unpalatable to most, though. If followed to its conclusion, it implies that all sentient life should ideally be eliminated. Not everyone's cup of tea and not for the faint of heart.^{22,23,24,25,26,27,28}

The second is to stipulate that procreation is exceptional: The recipient of the good and the bad does not exist at the time of the choice. The notion is obtruse, and much ink has been spilled in analyses of Derek Parfit's take on it.²⁹ Put simply, however, the idea is as follows. When a reproductive choice is made, no possible future individual exists yet. Nor does the possible future individual exist later if not made to exist. There is no one who could lose anything—now or in the future—by a decision to abstain. In contrast, the decision to procreate will produce a new individual who can suffer. This tips the balance in favor of the choice to abstain.³⁰

The asymmetry between future existence and nonexistence does not convince pronatalists who see life predominantly as a good thing. In their view, assessments should lean on future value regardless of its bearers' ontological status. It makes perfect sense to compare, like Parfit did, future worlds with happy or unhappy populations, although these populations do not exist yet. Surely, a world with happy people should be preferred to the unhappy alternative. And, *mutatis mutandis*, surely a world into which happy people are born should be preferred to one into which they are not?

This is not the time or the place to dive into the depths of aggregative utilitarianism and its possible shortcomings.^{31,32} Suffice it to say that the argument from asymmetry does not enjoy such wide popularity that the antinatal activists could use it to gain universal acceptance to their creed.

There is a way forward, however, and it was made explicit by Matti Häyry who in his short note *A Rational Cure for Prereproductive Stress Syndrome* moved from the language of "will suffer" to the more moderate "can suffer," outlining the foundations of the argument from risk.^{33,34,35,36,37,38,39} The argument has two formulations, one of which falls prey to the objection from meaning, whereas the other survives this only to see its scope reduced from morality to rationality.

When potential parents make their decision to have a child, there is a high probability, approaching certainty, that the life produced will contain some suffering.⁴⁰ No right-minded person can deny this. But if life always has meaning, as most pronatalists would have it, episodes of suffering pale in comparison with life's overall goodness. The risk is worth taking—and a failure to do so would be a sign of fruitless timidity.^{41,42,43,44}

When the reproductive choice is made, there is also a tangible chance that the life produced will contain considerable, perhaps unbearable, suffering. In risk-averse decision-making strategies, this kind of flirting with danger can be seen as irrational. But if the chance of genuine misery can be mitigated by the precautions of choosing the best children, loving them unconditionally, and learning to live with some discomfort, the irrationality does not necessarily convert into immorality. Other important things in life can override the small probability of disaster.⁴⁵

It seems, then, that the philanthropic arguments from quality of life and risk, even with their auxiliaries, deluded happiness and axiological asymmetry, do not support a strong, unequivocal prohibition of having children. They dent the rationality of procreation but do not give the antinatalist activist enough theoretical ammunition to convince pronatalists in a frank and fair exchange of ideas.

The Arguments from Lack of Consent, Benefit, and Greater Harm

Considerations of consent offer a different approach to reproductive choices. These considerations started from jurisprudential analyses of lives that were seen to have low quality,^{46,47} but later on the requirement of consent has also been used independently, with no reference to the value of the particular life produced.^{48,49}

The Conceptual Background Rationally Reconstructed

The argument from consent is deeply rooted in late-twentieth-century philosophical discussions on causing harm.⁵⁰ A rational reconstruction of the debate elucidates the matter. In what follows, we begin

by using the concept of suffering instead of harm as the latter is more complex and potentially controversial.^{51,52,53,54} It will enter the argument in due course, though, and receive our full attention.

The most natural way to describe the debate is to present it in dialogue form, with clarifying commentaries. The first voice in the dialogue below is that of a Radical (Rad), the second that of a Moderate (Mod). Both were implicitly present in the 1980s and 1990s academic exchanges. We are with the Radical, who starts.

Rad: We should not bring about or allow, by acts or by omissions, avoidable suffering.

Mod: Probably not. But what is suffering?

Rad: At least being in pain or anguish and being intolerably frustrated, as in having an unshakeable feeling of irremediable helplessness.

Mod: Sounds feasible. When is suffering avoidable, then?

Rad: When it can be prevented from coming into existence or removed from being in existence.

Mod: All right. No objections.

So far, this is clear sailing. (We bypass the more disputed theoretical questions of acts and omissions here but assume that *not* opposing evil can be a wrong of its own.) Since the discussion occurred in a liberal setting, one of its key topics was, inevitably, choice. The Moderate begins this time.

Mod: But what if the actual or potential sufferers want the suffering?

Rad: Then they can have it, provided that they want it freely, autonomously, and informedly,⁵⁵ and can and do explicitly express this. Why would they want it, though?

Mod: For one thing, to avoid greater suffering.

Rad: Fair enough. We could add “unless greater suffering is thus avoided” to the end of the original norm.

Mod: And since we can assume that rational persons would, other things being equal, choose this, implicit or assumed consent would suffice here.

Rad: If the persons cannot express their preference at the time, and have not expressed a contrary preference before, yes, agreed.

Mod: Or they can want it to add to their lives further value, beyond the avoidance of suffering.

Rad: So, we are talking about people like athletes, masochists, and deeply religious persons. If they so choose. But the free, autonomous, and informed expression that this is their own choice would be non-negotiable here.

So far, so good, and the Radical and the Moderate can agree on these background suppositions and stipulations. Their application to the emerging wrongful life cases showed, however, differences of opinion and made, we believe, room for darker, not-so-rational undercurrents. The exposition of the not-so-rational mentalities will pave the way for our argument from imposition.

Feinberg and His Pronatalist Doppelgänger on Wrongful and Rightful Lives

Joel Feinberg presented an influential Moderate view in his essay *Wrongful Life and the Counterfactual Element in Harming*.⁵⁶ The view has its background in his work on the roles of harm and coercion in law, but his argument translates easily into the language of avoidable suffering.^{57,58,59,60,61,62,63}

Feinberg conceded that if the plaintiffs' lives are so miserable (painful, anguished, or intolerably frustrated beyond redemption) as not to be worth living, the plaintiffs' valid (free, autonomous, and informed) consent for their own existence cannot be assumed. They have been wronged, and their claims are legitimate.⁶⁴ He continued, however, that if, despite the miserableness, the plaintiffs' lives *are* worth living, their valid consent for being brought into existence *can* be assumed. They have not been wronged, and their claims are *not* legitimate.⁶⁵

Feinberg's argument relies on an analogy with emergency rescue. One whose life has been saved cannot reasonably complain about an arm broken in the rescue process. This is a case of being harmed but not wronged—or coming to harm without being harmed.⁶⁶⁻⁶⁷⁻⁶⁸⁻⁶⁹ Terminologies differ, yet the point remains the same: Causing bad is allowed even without the recipient's permission if it is done in the context of preventing or removing greater bad. More on this later.

Now for the not-so-rational undercurrents of these verdicts. Feinberg never said any of the following out loud, but an antinatalist faces these questions regularly enough for them not to be ignored in our context.⁷⁰⁻⁷¹⁻⁷²

On Feinberg's legitimate cases, there is disbelief, of approximately this ilk:

Mod: What are these plaintiffs doing in a court of law, if their lives are truly not worth living? Why have they not ended their existence? Is it because their lives are worth living, after all? If so, cannot their consent for the reproductive choice be assumed and their complaint rejected?

Similar considerations apply to Feinberg's illegitimate cases:

Mod: If the lives are worth living, is it not the plaintiffs' own responsibility that they are alive? Do they not, by staying in existence, prove that they have no real objection to living their lives as they are? If so, what objection could they have against the reproductive choice?

Both create a pronatalist catch-22. We can only sue our parents successfully for being alive if we kill ourselves. But if we kill ourselves, we are not around to sue them anymore.

The Discussion that Was Never Conducted and the One that Was

A sensible discussion would have taken these catch-22 undertones into consideration and the Radical's next response could have been:

Rad: Let us stop calling them wrongful-life cases, then, and call them bad-stuff-in-my-life-that-you-are-responsible-for cases.

The analogy would be strict product liability and the legal instrument applied would be the but-for test. This bad stuff would not have befallen me but for your acts or omissions. They are your responsibility, your fault.⁷³

Based on this, those of us who do not see particular value in our lives could argue: This bad stuff would not have befallen me but for your reproductive choice. You were wrong to make it.

And the Moderate could have made an easy initial come-back:

Mod: My reproductive choice gave you your life. Unless you choose to give it up, it seems reasonable to assume that it has worth to you and that the bad is a price you are willing to pay for your existence. That gives me grounds to believe that, at the time of my choice, you would have consented to it.

Feinberg comes close to expressing this view when he brings up the rule of rescue the way he does.⁷⁴ Potential parents make a heroic choice to save their potential children from nonexistence and the fact that the children are hurt a little in the process is irrelevant.

Faced with this, and even not diving too deep into the murky waters of axiological asymmetry, antinatalists could have pointed out that in actual cases of rescue the rescued already exist and prefer to exist. The planned individuals do not exist and have no preferences, so the analogy breaks.

The idea of strict product liability, on the other hand, seems perfectly applicable. But is it? The Moderate could have objected, starting a new strand in the debate:

Mod: Strict product liability doesn't work like that. We would have no axes or knives, as they can be misused to hurt people.⁷⁵

Rad: Axes and knives are produced by mutual consent between existing people for their usefulness despite the misuses. New individuals would be exposed to the bad solely by the choices of others.

Mod: But no one would have children if they could be held liable for every bad in their children's lives.

Rad: Well, if that's the case, then good and fine. That is not a *reductio ad absurdum*. It is a rational conclusion.

As things unfolded, this conversation never occurred.⁷⁶ Instead, Seana Shiffrin took Feinberg's bait and kept the rule-of-rescue approach afloat. In her *Wrongful Life, Procreative Responsibility, and the Significance of Harm*, she accepted the rescue analogy but argued that Feinberg's conclusions were based on an incorrect interpretation of the rule's driving force.⁷⁷

Shiffrin noted that Feinberg appealed to the overall benefit produced by the rescue operation. Even if we cannot ask the ones in distress their permission to intervene, we can legitimately assume that they would consent if the operation would benefit them beyond the probable harm caused. According to Shiffrin's own interpretation, however, the factor doing the justification work in these cases is harm. Rescue is permissible, and consent can be assumed, *only* if greater harm can be prevented or removed by the action that is known to cause lesser harm.⁷⁸

From this premise, Shiffrin proceeded to confirm the legitimacy of all reasonable wrongful-life cases whether the claimant's life is deemed to be worth living or not. We cannot assume the consent of individuals for rescue operations that do not prevent or remove a greater harm—and bringing individuals into existence never does. Existence may be construed as a benefit but nonexistence cannot be sensibly represented as a harm.⁷⁹

At this point, pronatalists objecting, the argument circles back to axiological asymmetry—or something resembling it. The line could be, for instance, that if nonexistent individuals could be seriously harmed by not bringing them into existence, we should do everything in our power to have all the children that we can. Even ardent advocates of human reproduction have not suggested that we would have such a duty.

Shiffrin's argumentation brought her acclaim as the inventor of the argument from lack of consent. Ensuing commentaries have reiterated and reenforced her case that greater harm must be avoided if we are to justifiably overlook actual consent in reproductive decisions.⁸⁰⁻⁸¹ In these commentaries, the focus has stayed on harm.

Inspired by the argument, there have been those who believe that the lack of actual consent alone suffices to condemn reproduction.⁸²⁻⁸³ They may be right, but the issue remains unsettled since assumed, hypothetical, and rational consent is possible in other areas of decision-making, including but not limited to emergency-rescue cases.

In our own postnatal reconstruction of the argument from imposition, we shall bypass these conundrums by concentrating on existing individuals and their plight.

Our Findings So Far and the Plan Forward

We have now shown that the arguments from quality of life, risk, asymmetry, and consent do not seem to produce a reliable tool for the antinatalist activist's kit. Consent developed in the direction of product

liability could provide a new line but the legislation is too unsettled to lend support to this; the idea is too risk-averse for most; and the complaint is still about a choice that is made on behalf of something that does not exist, in other words, on behalf of nothing.

As we move on to imposition, some of the problems persist, whereas others seem to subside. Problems persist insofar as academics, and activists concentrate on preconceptional impositions—but subside in that the disputed idea of quality of life is not the only issue on the agenda anymore.

The Arguments from Preconceptional and Postnatal Imposition

All kinds of burdens can be imposed on people: legal duties, moral obligations, social manners, religious practices, laborious tasks, hazardous undertakings, dangerous situations, and so on. Sometimes the impositions in question can be justified, sometimes not, but they inevitably involve a load to be carried, possibly but not necessarily by one's own choice. In hindsight, it was always a matter of time when the concept would find its way to antinatal thinking. Unfortunately, however, it entered the debate in a tumultuous time in the movement's history and ended up being a relatively blunt instrument pointed at random directions. We shall explain how this happened next.

Imposition Amidst the Coming of Age of Antinatalism

Antinatalism as a philosophy was named in 2006 and it took a few years for the emerging and divided antinatal communities to find and become accustomed to the new nomenclature.^{84,85} The hitherto separate groups criticizing pronatalism and exploitation and championing less-or-no-children policies and personal autonomy in matters of life and death found themselves, some in considerable discomfort, under the same umbrella term and did not always agree on its meaning.⁸⁶ During these same years, the word "imposition" began to gain popularity and to attract controversy among the social movement—vloggers on YouTube and other video-sharing platforms and other forms of social media.^{87,88} Antinatalist artists, too, became interested in the idea.⁸⁹

In the social media, opinions on whether or not reproduction can reasonably be called a wrongful imposition differed. The pseudonymous antinatalist figurehead Inmendham was among the first to characterize all human life as an imposition:

I've said it before. If I had the power to make it, right here in my hand, I could invent planet earth and put all those little creatures on it, and have them for two billion years evolve into little funny monkeys in their little funny dresses, would I do it? And the obvious answer is of course not, what motivation would I have to do that? That would be a sick, disgusting experiment to impose.⁹⁰

Media scholar and personality Corey Anton for one disagreed and defended reproducers, as encapsulated later in his *How Non-being Haunts Being*:

Despite all the risk, chance, and uncertainty as well as the assurance of death in the end, people regularly choose to bestow this fate. As there is no other way to enter life than to have others bring you into it, this outrageous imposition is also, arguably, a most forgivable act.⁹¹

Indignation loomed large on both sides of the debate, and the concept remained undefined. But the word was out, for better and for worse.⁹²

Philosophers within and outside the community also found the term and put it to use in their argumentation. Antinatalist philosopher Karim Akerma described graphically the many inexcusable impositions involved in human reproduction, starting with illness, aging, and mortality and proceeding to our biological limitations as regards life-and-death choices:

People who talk of the gift of life, should not ignore all the different (childhood) illnesses, infirmities that come with age and the mortality that all parents impose on their children. That's not to mention the abuse, harassment and betrayal that every new person will have to face.

Our bio-physical constitution (fear of death!) makes it impossible for most or all, to end their life when they wish. Once alive, most people will want to continue to exist—until the pain becomes unbearable. But this desire itself is not our own, but is imposed upon us: first by our parents' actions, and second by the demands of our own body that desperately strives to keep us alive.⁹³

Akerma's emphasis, as seen in the quotes, was on the horrors of life in the shadow of a death that we are biologically programmed to fear and to avert.

Moderately pronatalist philosopher Rivka Weinberg had also found the word and utilized it in her captivatingly titled *The Risk of a Lifetime*.^{94,95} She conceded that all reproduction involves massive impositions of risk on the new individual but argued that they can be justified. The requirement of prior consent cannot, according to her, be extended to the nonexistent unborn, and what she calls the hazmat approach to parental responsibility will give the reproducers the right attitude for having children. We shall return to the hazmat theory when we consider the possibility of redemption for people who only after having children see the error of their ways.

Imposition and Elective Appendectomy

The notion of imposition, then, had clearly entered the scene and apparently met a conceptual need in the pro- and antinatalist discussion. Alternatively, the word and the indignation that it expressed simply fitted the heated atmosphere of the social media that was gaining in influence and popularity. Be that as it may, the meaning of the term remained to be robustly defined. Let us illustrate the situation by the structurally similar case of elective appendectomy.

Elective appendectomy is a surgical procedure in which the vermiform appendix of the human body is removed without an acute medical indication (for instance, appendicitis). The benefits and harms of the procedure are debated but it is widely practiced in some affluent countries. Three main types of imposition can occur in conjunction with it.

An elective appendectomy can be *forced upon* an individual. This can be done by compulsion or by coercion.⁹⁶ Compulsion would mean seizing individuals and removing their appendices without their permission. Coercion would imply threatening them with harm unless they give their permission to the operation.

An individual can also be *exposed to* elective appendectomy. The procedure can be made, or allowed to be, available, and citizens can be made aware of its availability. They can choose to undergo the operation or not, as they wish, but the possibility exists.

The main differences between compulsion and coercion on the one hand and exposure on the other have to do with consent and responsibility. If the procedure is forced upon us, we have not consented to it and bear no responsibility for its potential ill effects. If we are merely exposed to it, our consent is required and, should anything untoward befall us as a consequence, we are, at least partly, responsible.

There is a third alternative, however, and it could be called imposition proper, or just *imposition* for short. It does not involve compulsion or coercion as defined, but it does add an element of pressure to pure exposure. There may be familial, communal, or social indoctrination or manipulation in play, favoring elective appendectomy. If there is, many of us would like to say that the consent given to the operation is not as safe as it should be and that the question of responsibility should now be seen in a different light.

All good and well in the case of elective appendectomy, then. This is how forms of imposition work in relation to it. But what has this to do with human reproduction? Almost everything—at least if we have read the situation correctly. Let us see how.

From Non-existing to Existing Beings, from Lifetime to Lifestyle

The main rationale of introducing the notion of imposition to the discussion on human reproduction is to shift the focus away from our own choices. Our parents have, by bringing us into existence, burdened us with life, death, and the hardships of life—and we cannot escape from these burdens. Our existence is a wrongful interference, intervention, intrusion, and imposition. But how? Although the description is, in some sense, persuasive, our elective-appendectomy analysis, with auxiliary considerations, shows that it does not tell the whole story. In its current form, it is not the good tool that we are searching for the antinatalist activist.

It is true that our life has been forced upon us by compulsion and that we have not been consulted in that decision. But this burden is not, strictly speaking, inescapable. We can, biology notwithstanding, end our existence. Life is, in this sense, still our own choice and responsibility, albeit that we share that responsibility with our parents. A better narrative is needed to demonstrate what is so special in the alleged imposition that entitles us to put the blame on our procreators.

It is also true that our eventual death has been forced upon us by compulsion. This burden, unlike life, is genuinely inescapable. But here we encounter the by-now-familiar paradox. If life is such a bad thing, why would the event that cancels it be undesirable? Benatar has consistently argued that death—as well as life—is normally bad but his protestations may be lost on those who already disagree with him on the value of existence.^{97,98,99} Again, we must be careful with the wording of the message.

And it is true that we are exposed to the hardships of life. But here the problem is that we are exposed to them, but it is not altogether clear that someone has exposed us to them. This may look like a trivial matter, a play with words, but it is far from it. Akerma seems to have realized this when, a few years after depicting the evils of imposition in manifesto style, he more analytically declares that preconceptional imposition is a conceptual impossibility. We cannot, literally speaking, place burdens—or anything else—on nonexistent entities.¹⁰⁰ Yet another reason to rewrite the antinatalist story of imposition.

Fortunately, nothing could be simpler, as long as we keep some guidelines, or requirements, in mind. An imposition proper, like in our elective-appendectomy case, must be

- Directed at actual, existing beings (to avoid the metaphysical abyss of involving imaginary possible future individuals)^{101,102}
- Avoidable but only with considerable effort (to give hope of emancipation amidst a concrete intrusion)¹⁰³
- Unobjectionable (to steer clear of the never-ending disputes over the value of life and death to different individuals and groups)¹⁰⁴

In an attempt to meet all these criteria, our suggestion is the postnatal mental imposition of a pronatalist mindset and lifestyle.

Presenting and Defending an Argument from Postnatal Imposition

The narrative so far has pretty much revealed what we are arguing for. In the words of the activist half of the authorship, the message is straightforward. Instead of speaking about an imposition on a new being who does not exist, the imposition is on the one already created. It is the decades, years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, and seconds of our lives, and all that is experience within that time until death. It is only for the philosopher half's insistence that we give that concise expression a more detailed explication and steer it toward a specific kind of postnatal experience.

Practical Solutions to the Issue of Risk

Potential reproducers are not necessarily ignorant, or unaware of the risk of creating an unacceptably bad life. Even when they recognize the danger, they often think that they can avoid it with proper precautions and countermeasures. Undesired hereditary conditions can be screened, potential reproducers can be

required to assume an appropriate attitude, unconditional parental love heals many ills, and a proper upbringing can make life's hardships easier to tolerate.

The first solution, the idea of selecting only the genetically most desired offspring,¹⁰⁵ is arguably incompatible with the rest. At least prenatally, parents who resort to screening seem to set conditions to the kind of children they could cherish.¹⁰⁶⁻¹⁰⁷ The challenges of the genetic resolution need not concern us, however, because the decision to impose or not to impose a risk of an unwanted condition is made before any future individual exists, and we have already excluded this aspect from our inquiry.

The remaining reproducer-related suggestions concern parental attitudes. Either we know that motherly and fatherly love almost always prevails;¹⁰⁸ or we can require parents to see the world through their child's eyes,^{109,110} trusting that they can make their offspring's life good. Weinberg, who claims to take seriously the risk of a genuinely bad life, argues in her hazmat theory that gametes are hazardous material that possible reproducers should use with utmost caution. She finds the solution in stressing that children should only be had if the motive is to create a loving parental bond.¹¹¹ We are including Weinberg's account here although she addresses preconceptional choices because the bond would presumably continue postnatally and assure the quality of the new person's existence.

All these proposals focus on the role of reproducers and lean on the assumption that it is in their power to make their offspring's being palatable. Insofar as they are normative, however, they also acknowledge the fact that not all parents live up to the standard unless prompted to do so. A natural source of such prompts is education.

Education has a double role in the pronatalists' fight against life's experienced badness. Parents have to be taught to prioritize the good of their children—in and of itself, a formidable task. But, what is more, education can also be used to guide children to see their lives in a more favorable light. This way forward has been hinted at in more general quality-of-life literature.^{112,113} Even if you cannot avert a bad thing—disease, disability, frustration, pain, anguish, loss of control—you can adapt your preferences to come to terms with it. Followed to its conclusion, this line of thinking could preempt the need for further parental education. And this is where the solution becomes the problem.

How the Solutions Become the Problem

The pattern emerging here has not gone unobserved. Benatar detected it already in his early classic *Why It Is Better Never to Come into Existence* only to dismiss it to make room for his preferred argument from deluded happiness. He begins by noting that the endorsement that children retrospectively give to their parents' reproductive choice is not necessarily trustworthy. It represents a form of you-will-thank-me-for-it-later paternalism that has in other contexts been criticized for

its inability to rule out those harmful interferences in people's lives (such as indoctrination) that effect a subsequent endorsement of the interferences.¹¹⁴

This is a genuine concern. Since Benatar focuses on preconceptional decisions, he himself goes on to reject the idea in reproduction. It is, however, perfectly applicable to postnatal impositions. Although people may endorse their parents' proactive decision later, this does not straightforwardly justify the choice.

In the more general context of paternalism, Heta Häyry had a few years before Benatar had drawn attention to the phenomenon. This is how she summarizes the earlier discussion on the topic^{115,116,117,118}:

But there is one difficulty with the doctrine of future consent which is serious enough to refute it altogether. This is the possibility of manipulating the recipient of the paternalistic intervention in a manner that automatically leads to consent and gratitude later. Given a simple interpretation of the doctrine, it would be permissible for the public authorities to imprison people and turn them into religious or political fanatics, provided only that the manipulative programme in question includes

a section which teaches the brainwashed people themselves to appreciate the treatment when it is over.¹¹⁹

This is a consideration that went missing from the budding antinatalist debate, the main attention being on harm even when consent should have been focal.

Had the possibility of indoctrination and manipulation been included, consent could have been predominantly presented by analogy to torts—instead of contracts like in Feinberg and Shiffrin’s work—and the path would have been clear to the view that we are suggesting. Alan Wertheimer defines the approaches:

In *contracts*, B undertakes an obligation that he otherwise would not have. If B’s contract is made under duress, B is released from his obligation. In *torts*, A begins with an obligation not to harm B (or impose a risk of harm on B), an obligation which B can waive. If B waives A’s obligation not to harm him under duress, A is still under an obligation and B can recover should he be injured.¹²⁰

Duress is the key word here and it marks a division between two interpretations of reproductive choices and permissions given to them.

According to the contract model, B undertakes, after the fact, an obligation to live. The contract has not been made under duress, because at the time of the preconceptional, imaginary contract B did not exist. This is what the debate is still about.

According to the tort model, A may have B’s retrospective endorsement to existence, but, due to familial, communal, and social pressure, the endorsement is given under duress and therefore invalid. The pronatalist does not have a leg to stand on.

Duress is, of course, a clearly defined legal concept, and normal education is not included in its sources.¹²¹ The kind of manipulation needed for the pronatalist defense and highlighted by Häyry’s example is not, however, a form of normal education. Legalities aside, it is a potentially immoral imposition that cannot be reasonably justified.

The lack of justification stems from both the nature of the imposition (the indoctrination and manipulation of immature minds) and its content. Julio Cabrera and Thiago Lenharo di Santis point out (parenthetically at the end of the following passage) a crucial side effect that education has in the spirit of learning to appreciate life:

Certainly there is a risk involved in procreation. But the real problem is not that there is risk, but that it extends to the child, not just being limited to the father and mother.... The implication of the action will also be up to, and mainly, the new being, who had nothing to do with the decision, since they did not participate in this process, being loaded with impositions afterwards (including, potentially, that of suicide).¹²²

Being brought into existence burdens children, once in existence, with the possibility of having to end it, against the moral education they have received. Bluntly put, all living human beings have received a note saying:

Dear Child,

Accept your life as it is, uncomplainingly, or end it.

Your loving parents

P.S. Killing yourself is forbidden.

There is much more to the imposition we envisage, of course, and we shall proceed to explicate it immediately, but this simplification might help to explain why so many antinatalists, especially young ones, feel helpless and frustrated.

In the Beginning, Reproducers Created God in Their Own Image

To summarize the course of our narrative so far. Pronatalists, faced with accusations of exposing children to unacceptable risks, countered by maintaining that parental love and moral education will reduce the risks sufficiently. For the argument's sake, we conceded this (although it is far from obvious) and turned our attention to the delivery of the education. It can be criticized from two angles. Conveying the pronatalist message by indoctrinating and manipulating immature minds is morally unjustifiable. And the content of the education raises further questions.

Let us present some highlights of this content in the framework of one faith system, the Judeo-Christian tradition. We do not have the expertise to extend our investigation to other religions or faiths, and the results might be different, but we leave it to better minds to complete, or to question, our analysis from these important viewpoints.

One commandment in our chosen tradition stands out. It is:

Honor thy parents!

Even the most superficial of explorations into the meaning of this rule lends support to our view. As a preliminary observation, the full formulation of the rule in Judaism and Christianity includes the addition that obeying it guarantees that things go well with you and you live long.^{123,124} Apparently, the latter part originally meant that you are not put to death. Children disobeying their parents could be stoned.^{125,126,127,128} The practice is officially discontinued in most regions of the world but this may, perhaps surprisingly, make matters worse.

Moderate and liberal (as opposed to conservative or fundamentalist) minds can interpret the additions prudentially. It is good to honor your parents because it makes your own life better and longer. We shall sketch a possible mechanism for that momentarily, but first an explanation. How can this turn make matters worse? Surely it is a sign of good progress that disobedience is not currently punishable by death?

Not necessarily—and this is due to the Panopticon effect. Panopticon is an institutional building designed by philosopher and inventor Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century to effect a humane prison reform.¹²⁹ The idea was that a single guard at the center of a round building could in principle observe all the prisoners in their work cells without being seen by the inmates. One person cannot, of course, constantly keep an eye on everyone in their cells, and the main trick is, in fact, in the “without being seen” part. As inmates do not know whether they are being observed or not, they assume that they are, thereby internalizing the rules of the prison.

Similar logic applies to honoring your parents in more liberal times. Disobedience does not get you stoned anymore, but under the old law you at least knew who your commander and oppressor was. The new arrangement makes you your own guardian in the name of your own well-being. Now you are responsible for the code that you follow. You cannot complain to anyone else.

The details of the code vary culturally and geographically, but some of the principles emanating from “Honor thy parents” are widely accepted. You should obey your parent's lawful commands. You should live like they wish you to live. You should take care of them, especially in their old age. You should not speak evil of them, even after they are gone. And, by implication, a metarule emerges:

This is the way of your kin. Thou shalt have no other ways!

It is this last one that lays the foundation of our argument from postnatal mental imposition.

In our buildup, we specified that the burden worthy of our consideration should be

- Directed at existing beings
- Avoidable but only just
- Unobjectionably a burden

Earlier justifications of antinatalism have failed—at least as practical tools for the activist—because not everyone sees life as a burden. This can be extended to the substantial rules of honoring one’s parents, as well. They can be seen as good guidelines for a flourishing communal and social life. Hence, adhering to them is good for you. Conservatives, moderates, and liberals can join forces against the antinatalist radicals. Not so with the metarule.

At the time he pondered the permissible and impermissible harms on future children, Feinberg also presented a principle that he called the *child’s right to an open future*.¹³⁰ According to it, educational and related decisions should be made keeping in mind that, ideally, the recipient will sooner or later become autonomous, self-ruling. Nothing in what children are taught should permanently close any doors to different world views, ideas, or ideologies.

The child’s right to an open future can be understood radically, liberally, or moderately, but the essence remains the same. It would be wrong to educate children so that they do not, as adolescents or adults, have any choice in what they believe in or commit to. It would, in fact, not be education. It would be illegitimate indoctrination, manipulation, and brain washing.

Only the strictest conservatives and reactionaries object, but their views need not concern the antinatalist activist. The discussion on the child’s right to an open future was going on between philosophers, but Ronald Reagan expressed the conservative and reactionary line of thinking in a speech at Orlando, Florida, on 8 March 1983:

A number of years ago, I heard a young father, a very prominent young man in the entertainment world, addressing a tremendous gathering in California. It was during the cold war, and communism and our own way of life were much on people’s minds. And he was speaking to that subject. And, suddenly, though, I heard him saying, “I love my little girls more than anything . . .” And I said to myself, “Oh, no. Don’t . . . say that.” But I had underestimated him. He went on: “I would rather see my little girls die now, still believing in God, than have them grow up under communism and one day die no longer believing in God.”

There were thousands of young people in the audience. They came to their feet with shouts of joy. They had instantly recognized the profound truth in what he had said, with regard to the physical and the soul and what was really important.¹³¹

The antinatalist activists would, we believe, be wasting their breath trying to convince this crowd of the blessings of not having children and the undesirability of the pronatalist Panopticon.

Breaking (Out of) the Pronatalist Panopticon

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. The argument avoids the challenges encountered by earlier defenses of antinatalism involving nonexistent decisionmakers, avoidable threats, and questioned burdens. The arguments from quality of life, risk, and consent are still useful tools in the activist’s kit, and for their part they explain the nature of the burden imposed on almost all of us by the reproducers’ code. But the new tack is needed to provide an overarching view of the totalitarian threat posed by the code and its endorsement. Let us conclude by considering why this particular argument from imposition has not been clearly explicated before and what its recognition would mean to antinatalist philosophy and the antinatalist movement.

Why Not Before, Why Now?

Imposition as a word has been prominently displayed for decades in the debate on having or not having children. The ideas of intervention, interference, and intrusion have also had their fair share of visibility

in the discussion. But no one—if we have done our homework properly—has said what we say: that the perennial culprit is our imposed trust on parents and parenting as the only acceptable lifestyle.

In practical terms, the likeliest explanations for this are the slowness and the speed of cultural change. The pronatalist code is deeply ingrained in our mindset, and questioning it brings us mental discomfort. This accounts for the slowness. The speed of change, in its turn, is visible in the migration of populations from the streets to the internet and in the divided but growing interest in both radical and reactionary ideologies. In the new reality, people have little time for reasoned dialogue even on existing, let alone new, ideas.

In philosophical conversations, our inquiry has revealed two major mind blockers, one unintentional, the other intentional. The unintentional block stems from an understandable reluctance to offend one's own parents. One may sincerely believe that reproduction is wrong, even recognize the harm done by pronatalist indoctrination, yet stop short of openly accusing one's own, maybe loving and supportive, parents of one's predicament. The intentional block can be a part of ideological tactics. If an alarming antinatalist notion like imposition seems to be on the rise, it is a clever move for the opposition to hijack it, give it an innocuous reading, and build counterarguments on this milder interpretation.

Despite these possible hindrances, antinatalism and the argument from imposition proper have been emerging for quite some time and may break through in the not-too-distant future. Several factors could contribute to this. Reproductive choice is still a relatively new phenomenon, and the more widely it becomes available, the more people are empowered to question having children. The decline of religious traditions works in the same direction, giving individuals escape routes from the pronatalist Panopticon. And capitalism—when it does not urge more workers and soldiers to be born—chips in with its tendency to break families and to commercialize care services.¹³²

The Way to Emancipation and Redemption

But if and when the code is broken, what would the real-life implications to various stakeholders be? The main groups to be considered are antinatalists in doubt, antinatalists with children, philosophers, and antinatal activists. The following words of advice and consolation could help them along on the way to emancipation and redemption.

For antinatalists who have already arrived but are still in some doubt, the message is this. If you have not had children, keep it that way and you are already an antinatal soldier. You have not added people prone to suffering into this world. If everyone did the same, suffering would eventually end. But more importantly, you have broken the walls of your personal Panopticon and dealt a blow to the worldwide one in the process. You may encounter extra hardship because of your choice, but you have defeated the imposers. You are an antinatal hero, and there are others in the community who can support you. Unite with them and embrace them if you are so inclined.

For those who have found antinatalism later, after having children, feel free to join the party without any prejudice whatsoever. Try not to have more offspring and let your children have their own views. Give them the open future that you did not have and the imposers try to rob of them. Most importantly, revert the code. Your children are not responsible for your existence, you are for theirs. Rightfully, they are not your servants and keepers, you are theirs. You will be redeemed.

For pronatalist, anti-antinatalist, antinatalist, and anti-pronatalist philosophers, keep doing what you have been doing. The main thing in your work is to keep the imposition in the spotlight, whether you support it or criticize it. Open, respectful dialogue will ease the way toward a better future, either with lesser or no reproduction or with more considered and reasoned reproduction. No one should expect or fear that the world will come to an end tomorrow because of this conversation. It is a value in itself, wherever it leads.

For antinatalist activists, be kind. Speak softly. When you are shouted at, speak even more softly. They will, at some point, want to hear what you are saying and they will then lower their voices, too. Or at least that is to be hoped. Do not let yourself to be provoked. You are talking in a tongue that is foreign to them. Give it time to sink in. Having said that, be relentless and be strong. Do not let them discourage you. Seek

support from your antinatal comrades and lend them the same even if you have some slight doctrinal disagreements. Put the fire out first. There is plenty of time to discuss the color of the hose later.

For all who are antinatally inclined, have patience and know your answers. They will ask you why you take care of your elderly parents—in case that this is what you do—if you are so emancipated. Tell them your reasons. They may not understand that antinatalism does not preclude common kindness, genuine gratitude for a good childhood, self-interest, or keeping up appearances. Leaving the Panopticon does not mean departing from humaneness. And when they ask you why you have not killed yourself yet, the best answer is: “Because then there would be one less person opposing you.”

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39. We use the wording “made explicit by Matti Häyry” advisedly. Any number of people had mentioned risks in their argumentation before. Notably, Shiffrin (see note 11, Shiffrin 1999, at 134) presents the view concisely: “The imposition of significant burdens and risks is not a feature of exceptional or aberrant procreation, but of all procreation.” Put in her context of avoiding harm, this is the argument from risk for antinatalism, although Shiffrin went on to bury it under her chosen language of missing consent, leaving the explication to Häyry.

40. Cf., however, Pearce D. *The Hedonistic Imperative*; 2015; available at <https://www.hedweb.com/> (last accessed 9 February 2023).
41. See note 34, Benatar, Wasserman 2015.
42. Sanger L. Against anti-natalism; 2019; available at <https://larrysanger.org/2019/11/against-anti-natalism/> (last accessed 9 February 2023).
43. See note 35, Hedberg 2020, at 119–21.
44. See note 36, Magnusson 2022.
45. Bennett R. Human reproduction: Irrational but in most cases morally defensible. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 2004;**30**:379–80. doi:10.1136/jme.2003.004747 (last accessed 9 February 2023).
46. Feinberg J. *Freedom and Fulfillment: Philosophical Essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; 1992.
47. See note 11, Shiffrin 1999.
48. Licon JA. The immorality of procreation. *Think* 2012;**11**:85–91. doi:10.1017/S1477175612000206 (last accessed 9 February 2023).
49. Harrison G. Antinatalism and moral particularism. *Essays in Philosophy* 2019;**20**:66–8. doi:10.7710/1526-0569.1629 (last accessed 9 February 2023).
50. See note 11, Shiffrin 1999; see note 5, Carrier 2022.
51. Feinberg J. *Harm to Others*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1984.
52. Harris J. *Wonderwoman and Superman: The Ethics of Human Biotechnology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1992.
53. Häyry M. *Playing God: Essays on Bioethics*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press; 2001, at 64–79.
54. See note 31, Häyry 2020.
55. Häyry M, Takala T. Coercion. In: ten Have H, ed. *Encyclopedia of Global Bioethics*. Cham: Springer; 2016, at 595–605. The conditions specified mean that the consent is procured without coercion.
56. See note 46, Feinberg 1992, at 3–36.
57. Nozick R. Coercion. In: Laslett P, Runciman WG, Skinner Q, eds. *Philosophy Politics and Society, Fourth Series*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; 1972:101–35, at 112 ff.
58. Feinberg J. *Social Philosophy*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; 1973.
59. Day JP. Threats, offers, law, opinion and liberty. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1977;**14**:257–72.
60. Miller D. Constraints on freedom. *Ethics* 1983;**94**:66–86.
61. See note 51, Feinberg 1984.
62. Häyry M, Airaksinen T. Elements of constraint. *Analyse & Kritik* 1988;**10**:32–47.
63. Häyry M, Airaksinen T. Hard and soft offers as constraints. *Philosophia* 1988;**18**:385–98.
64. See note 46, Feinberg 1992, at 24–5.
65. See note 46, Feinberg 1992, at 26–7.
66. See note 51, Feinberg 1984.
67. See note 52, Harris 1992.
68. See note 53, Häyry 2001.
69. See note 31, Häyry 2020.
70. Akerma K. *Antinatalist Manifesto: On the Ethics of Antinatalism Challenging Human and Animal Procreation*. Mikkola A, tran; 2014, at 4; available at http://akerma.de/Antinatalist%20Manifesto_Karim%20Akerma.pdf (last accessed 9 February 2023).
71. Sukenick A. *The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast #41 – Iddo Landau*; 2021 November 15; available at <https://youtu.be/Vm3kLTH9dLc> (last accessed 9 February 2023).
72. See note 5, Carrier 2022.
73. Proximate cause. *West's Encyclopedia of American Law*. 2nd ed. Farmington Hills, MI: The Gale Group, Inc.; 2008; available at <https://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/But+for+rule> (last accessed 9 February 2023).
74. See note 46, Feinberg 1992, at 26–7.
75. This is the current “normal” legal reality. But it has been tested, which shows that it is not necessarily carved in stone. See *Sindell v. Abbott Laboratories*. 26 Cal.3d 588 (Cal. 1980); available at <https://>

- casetext.com/case/sindell-v-abbott-laboratories?resultsNav=false&tab=keyword (last accessed 9 February 2023).
76. Häyry (see note 27, Häyry 1994, at 137) came close to expressing the Radical's view here but was distracted by animal welfare issues and lost the thread.
 77. See note 11, Shiffrin 1999.
 78. See note 11, Shiffrin 1999, at 126.
 79. See note 11, Shiffrin 1999, at 121, 131, 137–9.
 80. Singh A. Furthering the case for anti-natalism: Seana Shiffrin and the limits of permissible harm. *South African Journal of Philosophy* 2012;31:104–16. doi:10.1080/02580136.2012.10751771 (last accessed 9 February 2023).
 81. Singh A. The hypothetical consent objection to anti-natalism. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 2018;21:1135–50. doi:10.1007/s10677-018-9952-0 (last accessed 9 February 2023).
 82. See note 48, Licon 2012.
 83. See note 49, Harrison 2019. Harrison does, however, present other arguments, too.
 84. See note 3, Benatar 2006.
 85. de Giraud T. *L'art de guillotiner les procréateurs*. Nancy: Editions Le Mort-Qui-Trompe; 2006.
 86. Anton L *The Recent History of Antinatalism Online* | Amanda Sukenick; 2023 January 23; available at <https://youtu.be/SR7s4vesPTY> (last accessed 9 February 2023).
 87. Inmendham. Gift of imposition? *GloomBoomDoom*, at 2:56; 2010 July 1; available at https://youtu.be/_EK1ZAGJ4tw (last accessed 1 February 2023): “Imposition can’t be a gift because it had ethical responsibility attached to it – we aren’t brought into a world where need can be freely satisfied.”
 88. DerivedEnergy. Is procreation an “imposition” or not? *DerivedEnergy*; 2012 September 12; available at <https://youtu.be/1Yx3FQ-0MWM> (last accessed 9 February 2023).
 89. Sukenick A. *The Sentient Opposer of The Imposition (Antinatalist Man Revisited)*; Orig. 2011; available at <https://vimeo.com/737322161> (last accessed 9 February 2023).
 90. Inmendham. You bet MY Life? *JustSayNoToKids*, at 19:58; 2011 March 30; available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cn8OrzAj2EE> (last accessed 9 February 2023).
 91. Anton C. *How Non-Being Haunts Being: On Possibilities, Morality, and Death Acceptance*. Madison, NJ: The Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; 2021, at 150.
 92. It should be noted that we are here only scratching the surface of the heated debates between pro- and antinatalists and among the antinatal and related communities. Amanda Sukenick is in possession of an extensive antinatalist archive, collected since 2010, and in an ongoing project Organization and Management Around a Philosophy: The Case of Antinatalism 2006–2026, the social movement's history will be more thoroughly explored.
 93. See note 70, Akerma 2014, at 4–5.
 94. Weinberg RM. Procreative justice: A contractualist account. *Public Affairs Quarterly* 2002;16:405–25; available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40019712> (last accessed 9 February 2023).
 95. Weinberg R. *The Risk of a Lifetime: How, When, and Why Procreation May Be Permissible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2016.
 96. See note 55, Häyry, Takala 2016.
 97. See note 2, Benatar 1997, at 349–50.
 98. See note 3, Benatar 2006, at 212 ff.
 99. See note 16, Benatar 2017, at 101 ff.
 100. Akerma K. *Antinatalism: A Handbook*. Berlin: Neopubli GmbH; 2021, at 280.
 101. The kind of talk that we refer to in parentheses only perpetuates the myth that possible future individuals are somehow present when the decision about their existence is made—and responsible for it. They are not. The wrong turn in the discussion on human reproduction—the idea had been present in debates about utilitarianism before—was initiated by R. M. Hare (see note 102, Hare 1976) in his imaginary discussion between a fetus who would be born disabled and another who would be born abled—and perpetuated by Derek Parfit (see note 29, Parfit 1984) and the still-ongoing arid debate about the merits of his views.

102. Hare RM. Survival of the weakest. In: Gorovitz S, ed. *Moral Problems in Medicine*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; 1976, at 364–9.
103. The hope is needed for the sensible antinatal activist who tries to convince fellow antinatalists (who are often struggling in the grips of depression and anger), navigating between the sterile, no-human-being-behind-the-words message of many academics and the I'm-about-to-kill-myself-and-look-at-how-messy-my-bedroom-is world of the target audience.
104. Demonstrating the—even relatively—unobjectionable nature of the burden clearly presents the greatest challenge. We try to accomplish this with a change of tack from physical to mental, without forgetting the risk of a truly miserable physical existence, still a valid independent objection to procreation.
105. See [note 12](#), Savulescu 2001.
106. Herissone-Kelly P. Procreative beneficence and the prospective parent. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 2006;**32**:166–9, at 169.
107. Häyry M. *Rationality and the Genetic Challenge: Making People Better?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2010, at 63–4.
108. Green RM. *Babies by Design: The Ethics of Genetic Choice*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; 2007, at 114–6.
109. See [note 106](#), Herissone-Kelly 2006.
110. Ruokonen F, Vehmas S. Parental responsibility and the duty to love one's children. In: Takala T, Herissone-Kelly P, Holm S, eds. *Cutting Through the Surface: Philosophical Approaches to Bioethics*. Leiden: Brill; 2009, at 163–72.
111. See [note 95](#), Weinberg 2016.
112. Calman KC. Quality of life in cancer patients — An hypothesis. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 1984;**10**:124–7; available at <https://jme.bmj.com/content/medethics/10/3/124.full.pdf> (last accessed 9 February 2023).
113. See [note 14](#), Häyry 1991, at 112.
114. See [note 2](#), Benatar 1997, at 352.
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122. Cabrera J, di Santis T. *Porque te amo, Nao nasceras! Nascituri te salutant*. Brasilia: Editora LGE; 2009, at 99.
123. Exodus 20:12. *Christianity.com*; available at <https://www.christianity.com/bible/niv/exodus/20> (last accessed 9 February 2023).
124. Ephesians 6:1–4. *Christianity.com*; available at <https://www.christianity.com/bible/niv/ephesians/6-1-4> (last accessed 9 February 2023).
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