

Splijtstof
Jaargang 50, nummer 1
Special Issue 2021
Ethics of Population Policy

Colofon

Splijtstof

Een uitgave van Stichting Splijtstof, ISSN 0928-8139.

Op 15 september 1972 werd *Splijtstof* opgericht als maandblad van de Filosofenbond.

Op 7 november 2013 werd de *Stichting Splijtstof* opgericht.

Redactie

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Splijtstof heeft tevens een postvakje bij de receptie van de Faculteit der Filosofie, Theologie en Religiewetenschappen (E15.30) en een eigen kantoor (E14.16).

Splijtstof is verkrijgbaar in de koffiehoek van de Faculteit der Filosofie, Theologie en Religiewetenschappen (E15).

Prijs

Splijtstof kost 3 euro per stuk. Studenten van de Faculteit der Filosofie, Theologie en Religiewetenschappen betalen 2 euro. Abonnement (thuisgestuurd): 15 euro per jaargang (3 edities). Abonnement (postvak): studenten betalen 5 euro per jaargang, medewerkers van de Faculteit der Filosofie, Theologie en Religiewetenschappen betalen 8 euro.

Niets uit deze of eerdere uitgaven mag zonder toestemming van de redactie worden overgenomen.

Het logo van Splijtstof is ontworpen door Dennis Gaens.

About the illustrations

The cover and illustrations in this edition of Splijtstof are an homage to the style of the earliest editions of Splijtstof to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. The cover is inspired by the covers used by Splijtstof since the second edition of the first year. Almost all illustrations are also reproductions from these early editions. On page 31 you will find a picture of the cover of the very first edition of Splijtstof, which originally was stenciled on yellow paper. On page 32 you will find the illustration that was used on the cover of Splijtstof from the 13th edition onward.

Contents



<i>Editorial</i>	7
<i>A Brief Introduction to Population Ethics</i>	9
Responsibilities on a Finite Planet	13
<i>Marlon Litjes</i>	
Hardin's Case Against Humanitarian Aid	23
<i>Roos van Zeijl</i>	
The Population Dilemma	33
<i>Vincent Ophoff</i>	
Reproductive Health Education as Population Policy	45
<i>Robin Groenewoud</i>	
Do We Have the Duty to Have Just One Child, Concerning Future Generations	53
<i>Hannah Televi Ayawa Holtz</i>	
Anti-natalism, Non-identity, and Smyth's Challenge	61
<i>Jonas Müller</i>	
A Challenge to The Western Immortal's Refusal to Die	69
<i>Joris van der Meere</i>	



Editorial

Dear Reader,

The edited volume in front of you is a very special edition of *Splijtstof*, the journal of the faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies at the Radboud University of Nijmegen. There are two reasons for this.

The first being that this is the first issue of our 50th (!) anniversary that we will be celebrating this year. *Splijtstof* was born as a journal, for and by students, on September 15, 1972. In the very first editorial our first editor-in-chief wrote: “It should serve as a meeting place and discussion platform for any opinion, attack, defence, exposition, or communication by anyone involved in the education and research of philosophy in any way.” I believe that, almost 50 years later, *Splijtstof* has grown to be a journal that does just that: we encourage students to engage, we publish on a wide variety of topics, and we offer opinions and reflection on the subjects that are thought at our faculty.

The second reason is that this volume consists of a collection of essays that are the final product of the second-year bachelor course “Project”. The purpose of this course is to train students in research, presenting, writing, and cooperation skills on the basis of an overarching topic. Every student formulates their own specific research question related to this topic and writes an essay about it. Peer feedback is a pivotal part of this process. Besides the individual effort and contribution of every student resulting in a collection of essays, together the students work towards composing an edited volume, which now lies before you.

The volume you are holding in your hands is a collection of essays concerning the overarching theme “Ethics of Population Policy”. This collection was written and produced under the guidance of Prof. dr. Marc Davidson. This particular volume was selected (out of a total of seven edited volumes) by a jury to be published by *Splijtstof*. This special issue is the seventh of its kind, and hopefully there will be many more to come.

On behalf of the editorial team,

Janneke Toonders
Editor-in-chief of Splijtstof

A Brief Introduction to Population Ethics

“Unlike plagues of the dark ages or contemporary diseases we do not yet understand, the modern plague of overpopulation is soluble by means we have discovered and with resources we possess. What is lacking is not sufficient knowledge of the solution but universal consciousness of the gravity of the problem and education of the billions who are its victims.”

- Martin Luther King

There is no denying that the dominance of the human has shaped the earth in a very short time. At the time of the papacy of pope Benedict IV, in 900, the global population consisted of about 240,000,000 humans. A millennium later, in the year 1900, the Earth’s population consisted of approximately 1.6 billion humans. A century later, due to rapid industrialisation, technological improvements and multiple population booms, that number exploded to 6.1 billion inhabitants. The human became the dominant species on earth, in a population increase which has been unrivalled in recorded history. We can expect this population increase to last longer. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations predicts that by 2100, the population of the Earth consists of about 10.9 billion people.¹

This population growth does not come without issues. The earth we inhabit has finite space for a growing population. A multitude of philosophers has written about the difficult questions that we encounter due to population growth. How can we ensure that everyone can expect a decent life? More so, how can we ensure that those who come after us can have a decent life? These are central questions that we must ask ourselves in population ethics. This philosophical field is a relatively recent addition to the history of philosophy, with Garrett Hardin and Derek Parfit being the first thinkers who established well-known theories about issues regarding population ethics. In this edited volume we will present you with theories which are built on their, and others’, ideas, but also ideas that came after.

When thinking about population ethics, one must acknowledge that there are a few fundamental issues making the field extremely difficult. The main problem being: when discussing population ethics, one is also talking about people that have yet to exist; future human generations. We do not know what the values of these future generations are, nor how many people they consist of. This makes it immensely difficult to write adequate theories about future populations, and how we — current populations — should think about them.

1 DESA. “How certain are the United Nations global population projections?” *Population facts* (December 2019). https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2019-6.pdf

In this edited volume, it was not our goal to cover the entire field of population ethics. We have not written an introductory volume that explains the general theory of population ethics, and its most important philosophers. Rather, the goal of this work is to broaden your view of population ethics and show in which ways problems with the population affect our day-to-day lives. As you will see in the coming chapters, population ethics does not merely fall under the field of philosophy, but the authors in this book will also refer to political theory, history, law, environmental studies, and so on. We have aimed to present you with a broad array of topics, which cover all of these fields, but find their roots in ethical problems concerning population.

This bundle consists of seven essays, which have been written during a group project, but every essay has its own author. This is nevertheless a joint effort, which aims to broaden your knowledge and to introduce you to thinking about the issues population growth brings.

One of the common ideas amongst philosophers is that the current discourse on climate change within the population is not environmentally sustainable. Therefore, in the first essay in this bundle, written by **Marlon Litjes**, we present you with a question whether the individual has a responsibility in environmental issues, or if their impact is neglectable compared to larger institutions. By using argumentation by Garret Hardin, and his famous *The Tragedy of the Commons*, we will examine if there is a morally binding ethic for individuals to act on population growth and climate change.

The second essay in this bundle is written by **Roos van Zeijl** and will also refer to Garret Hardin and his *The Tragedy of the Commons*. However, contrary to the first essay, we do not depart from the perspective of the individual, but take a more global approach. In the second chapter we will ask the question whether overpopulation diminishes a duty to help other people when they are in need. This chapter will focus on Hardin's ideas about Lifeboat Ethics, named after a metaphor which he uses in one of his papers. During the current Covid-19 pandemic, the question whether natural disaster may be a blessing in disguise has resurged. Some people might think: "Why would we bother helping the elderly whilst there are already more than enough people on this earth?" It is important that we find adequate answers for lifeboat ethical questions like these. To find these answers, Roos will also use arguments from Ryberg and Naess, who both have views critical of Hardin's philosophy.

When looking at population growth, and the problems it creates, there is a consensus forming that it could — partially — be controlled by decreasing birth rates. Therefore, the third essay in this bundle will be about a birth rate contradiction which is getting more apparent. In this essay, **Vincent Ophoff** has written about the dichotomy between Western birth rates and birth rates in developing countries. This is the case especially in less modernised regions and countries, for example regions in Africa and Asia. Contrary to these regions, on the continent of Europe birth rates are actually falling. In this third essay, Vincent will investigate what European gover-

nments can undertake in order to overcome the dichotomy between the domestic birth rates and the birth rates in developing countries. Moreover, Vincent will not merely be looking at philosophical argumentation, but also political theory. A central thesis in theories concerning reducing birth rates is that birth rates go down when a country modernises. Can, and must, European governments help with the modernisation of other countries, in order to reduce the birth rates there? One could argue that reducing birth rates in developing countries would not only diminish the human environmental impact on the globe, but also resolve some of Europe's immigration issues.

If we examine European intervention on other continents, we must ask another question parallel to the one mentioned above. This question is raised in the fourth chapter in our bundle, written by **Robin Groenewoud**. Is it morally right to help others with population policy, when they have other cultural ideas about population growth? We will examine this moral issue by particularly focussing on Western aid

The notion of identity seems to be intrinsically linked to the idea of who one believes to be and how one wants to be viewed.

to developing countries in reproductive health education. Given that most of the global population growth at the moment is taking place in Asia and Africa,² do European and American countries have a right to intervene? Are there

ways in which Western ideas about reproductive health can be applied, without harming the cultural sovereignty of developing countries? In order to examine this, two ethical points of view will be compared: Cultural Relativism and Universalism. We will take a look at how these theories can be applied, regarding Western development aid in reproductive health, both in theory, and in practicality. Additionally, the shortcomings of the two theories will be examined in regard to the issue of reproductive rights.

In the essay that follows, we continue to discuss the issue of birth rates. In this chapter, **Hannah Televi Ayawa Holtz** further explores the connection between population numbers and environmental issues. In this essay, the fundamental rights of having children will be investigated, and if there are any moral limits to that right. One could argue that it might be unethical to have more than X amount of children, since having a lot of children accumulates on the total impact of humans on Earth. Therefore, we ask whether the right to have children and environmental sustainability are mutually exclusive, or if they can co-exist. This is done by examining why

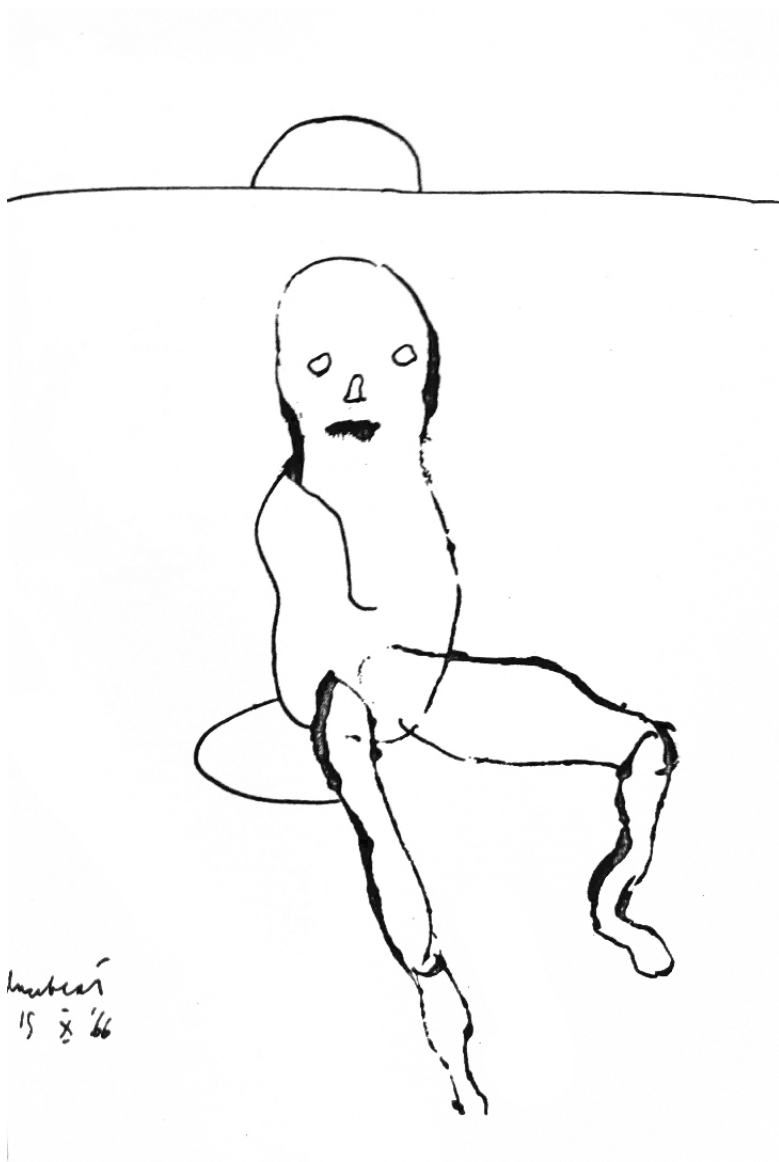
2 M. Szmigiera, "Forecast of the world population in 2019 and 2100, by continent." *Statista*, (December 2020), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272789/world-population-by-continent/>

having children is regarded as a fundamental right. Afterwards, Hannah explores whether one-child policies can be permitted or whether there is a fundamental right of having children.

It is the job of the philosopher to always look beyond conventions. Therefore, the sixth essay in our bundle will move beyond the conventional ideas about the limitation of procreation and go a step further. In this chapter, **Jonas Müller** will explain the philosophical position of anti-natalism — the idea that humans should abstain from procreation. The position will be discussed using the argumentation of the most prominent contemporary anti-natalist: David Benatar. He defends this view by arguing that there is an asymmetry between pleasure and pain in being brought into existence. Jonas will examine to what extent this view holds up, and will consider potential challenges to the ideas of Benatar. One of the challengers is Smyth, who has several problems with Benatar's anti-natalism. We will consider both authors' argumentations, asking the question: "is it better never to have been?"

In the final essay, we will flip the conventional argumentation. Namely, that the population problem is a problem which is rooted in birth rates. In the last chapter, **Joris van der Meere** argues that in the Western world a culture has been created that is focussed on continued life. In order to defend this claim, we use a phrase by Ezekiel Emanuel, "Western Immortality", which refers to a Western immortal being, a person who manically focusses on the prolongation of life. In this essay we challenge the Western immortal and explore why we should not aim at prolonging a life. Joris shows that getting older does not constitute an increase in quality of life, but merely increases chronic illness. In this essay we ask whether there exists a duty to die when a person has become a burden to society, their environment, and the world in general. Lastly, Joris proposes an age cap on life extension in order to make room for future generations to flourish.

Finally, we want thank Prof. dr. Marc Davidson for his immense help in the creation of the edited volume. His support throughout the project was essential, and also much appreciated by all. We hope you enjoy the reading.



Responsibilities on a Finite Planet

Marlon Litjes

The extent to which individuals are morally responsible for environmental and overpopulation impact is still being discussed, as there are many questions to ask regarding responsibility and duties. The questions go from “do individuals have duties towards the environment and population to reduce their impact?” all the way up to questions such as “do individuals have forward- or backward-looking responsibilities towards the environmental and population issues?” Because these topics are still heavily discussed, the question “to what extent do we have individual moral responsibilities to reduce our environmental and population impact in the case of collective action problems?” is addressed in this essay. This question is not only of importance because of the unclarity of individual duties, but also because having individual moral responsibilities could be an extremely important solution, among others, regarding the urgent environmental and population issues.

This essay is divided into two sections. Firstly, in section one, the topic of causal inefficacy will be discussed, followed by the “Tragedy of the Commons”, because they result in a similar conclusion, namely that institutions have all responsibility. Then the issues regarding politics will be discussed in the sub-heading “The Tragedy of Politics”. The individual responsibilities and duties will be discussed in section two. It will start with an introduction to the ethics of individual duties and responsibilities. After the introduction, the topics of individual duties, ethical argumentation, and shortcomings will be discussed. Finally, there will be a short discussion on this research, ending with a conclusion.

The Tragedy of Politics

Causal Inefficacy

First of all, the problem of causal inefficacy — the theory that reducing individual greenhouse gas emissions would not make a difference because there is always someone else who does not act green — should be discussed. The issue here is that there may be no definitive answer whether or not reducing your individual greenhouse gas emissions actually makes a difference. Given the enormous and complex system of the planet, individual green choices do not seem to matter.¹ Especially compared to whole nations, ideologies, and all other individuals. Therefore, there may be no definitive answer whether or not an individual can make a difference regarding the ecosystem or the population. A common example of the idea that individuals can make a difference would be Peter Singer arguing that there is an obvious and strong connection between

1 James Garvey, “Climate Change and Causal Inefficacy: Why Go Green When It Makes No Difference?” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 69 (October 2011): 158.

becoming a vegetarian and utilitarianism.² This is for the simple reason that if one would become a vegetarian, they would eat no meat, resulting in reducing the demand for meat and thus reducing the profitability of the animal industry. This, therefore, reduces the overall number of animals suffering and greenhouse gas emissions, which is then a morally good action from a utilitarian perspective.

But the problem of causal inefficacy still plays a major role here: the loss of one meat eater is hardly noticeable, perhaps even unnoticeable, in the market of millions of consumers. The resulting problem of causal inefficacy is that nobody seems to be responsible for climate change as nobody's emissions seem to be sufficient enough to cause climate change, therefore it seems not to be an individual responsibility but a collective action problem.³

Even though the problem of causal inefficacy is focused on climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, it is also to a large extent applicable to population

Given the enormous and complex system of the planet, individual green choices do not seem to matter.

issues. The issues of an ever-growing population with its negative consequences, over-farming, deforestation, pollution, and global warming, seems to be nobody's individual responsibility as every individual choice on this matter only seems to be a drop in the large ocean. Therefore, the resulting

issue seems, again, to be one of collective action problems and not of individual responsibility. Thus, the problem of causal inefficacy remains a problem not only for greenhouse gas emissions, but also for population policies.

The Tragedy of the Commons

There are terrible consequences to fear when using a limited resource, especially if the resource is used by a whole population, as Garrett Hardin already carefully illustrated in the 'Tragedy of the Commons': Resources will consequently and inevitably deplete without any implementations on individual limits.⁴ This, according to Hardin, means that the only solution to this tragedy is to implement certain population policies (a collective action problem).⁵ An example of such a policy would be to restrict the freedom to breed to prevent resource scarcity. According to Hardin, restricting the freedom to breed is necessary because people with a social conscience

2 Peter Singer, "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9, no. 4 (1980): 335, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2265002?seq=1>.

3 Augustine Fragnière, "Climate change and individual duties," *WIR Climate Change* 7 (2016): 798, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ru.idm.oclc.org/doi/pdfdirect/10.1002/wcc.422>.

4 Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *American Association of the Advanced Science* 126, no. 3859 (December 1968): 1244, <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/162/3859/1243>.

5 Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," 1244-1246.

will eliminate themselves as they will not reproduce (as much). All the while people without such a social conscience will reproduce, which may lead to the disappearance of altruism over multiple generations.⁶ However, science is nowadays still in conflict whether or not altruism comes from nature or nurture.⁷ Nevertheless, Hardin's main point remains: implementing population policies is the solution to problems such as overpopulation, depleting resources, and climate change.

The problem of causal inefficacy and the Tragedy of the Commons are, to a certain extent, comparable, especially and most importantly regarding their resulting conclusion. As explained before, causal inefficacy deems individual choices not to matter because they seem to have no real effects, and therefore concludes that the problem lies not in the hands of individuals, but is a collective action problem. The Tragedy of the Commons deems individual choices to matter because eventually these choices do add up and result in dire consequences. However, solving these issues is not in the hands of individuals, but in policies or collective actions. Thus, both the problem of causal inefficacy and the Tragedy of the Commons conclude that issues regarding the population and climate change are a problem of collective action. There is, however, a major issue with these particular topics regarding collective actions and policies, which will be discussed in the next paragraph.

The Tragedy of Politics

To implement certain population policies, as for example reproduction restrictions, is extremely hard for a lot of political systems or nations. This is especially difficult considering that that family planning is a basic human right according to the United Nations Declaration of Population (1966). This does not mean it is entirely impossible, as you have China's one-child and two-child policies, for example. However, these policies were easier to implement because China is, to a certain level, a one-party state and therefore very resilient to challenges.⁸ As for (liberal) democracies, it is harder to implement a certain population policy, as there needs to be a majority voting in favour of these, or there needs to be a majority vote on a representative agent or party in favour of populations policies. However, the topic of population policies is not yet being discussed extensively in liberal democracies, and especially not to such an extent as by the Chinese.

6 Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," 1246.

7 Rodolfo Cortes Barragan, and Carol S Dweck, "Rethinking Natural Altruism: Simple Reciprocal Interactions Trigger Children's Benevolence," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 111, no. 48 (2014): 17071–74; Rodolfo Cortes Barragan, Rechele Brooks, and Andrew N Meltzoff, "Altruistic Food Sharing Behavior by Human Infants After a Hunger Manipulation," *Scientific Reports* 10, no. 1 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-58645-9>.

8 Micheal F. Martin, 2010. "Understanding China's Political System," *ResearchGate*, April, 2010, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235098539_Understanding_China%27s_Political_System.

A solution to the problem that liberal democracies face is to change the political system to deliberative democracies, or more, perhaps, to what Eckersley calls an “ecological democracy.”⁹ This kind of democracy would be more fitting for implementing population policies (or ecological policies) as this model obligates people to listen to every voice or, at the very least, every voice should be represented in the nation. This would then result in more attention focussed on population and ecological policies. But, as Eckersley already stated, changing liberal democracies to deliberative democracies is extremely difficult, as the shift would oppose the ideas of liberal nationalism and civic republicanism.¹⁰

However, the aforementioned problem of implementation only presents itself on a national scale. The larger issue perhaps remains on a transnational scale, since there is a lack of global institutional systems. When taking the Tragedy of the Commons and the problem of causal inefficacy into account, in order for population policies to truly work and achieve certain goals, they need to be implemented globally. If not

However, the aforementioned problem of implementation only presents itself on a national scale.

done on a global scale, some nations will still reap the benefits of not implementing them, resulting in the same effects mentioned before in the Tragedy of the Commons and of causal inefficacy. Thus, a difference in certain goals, policies, or implementations of them throughout nations would lead to

not fully achieving the desired effects, which overall may lead to very few or no results in times when results are urgent and necessary. To prevent these lesser to no results, the establishment of authorised global institutions is essential. Without establishing political organs that act on a global level, population policies remain extremely difficult. Even though there already are existing global authorities like the United Nations, it is still hard to implement global environmental and population policies. Perhaps a good example of such a difficulty would be the United States withdrawing from the 2015 Paris agreement because of self-interest (the United States acted according to their “America First” policy). Another example could perhaps be the increasing tendencies of (right-wing) political parties criticising the European Union and wanting to leave the European Union because of multiple disagreements and losing sovereignty, with “Brexit” at the forefront of it all. There is, therefore, much proof that implementing transnational policies is extremely difficult, especially without a globally authorised organisation.

My point, however, is not to argue that establishing a global authority for implementation of population policies is impossible. A global policy with effective

9 Robyn Eckersley, *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 111.

10 Eckersley, *The Green State*, 111, 114.

implementations could solve a lot of issues, if not all issues regarding climate change and overpopulation. The point made here is to acknowledge the fact that a globally authorised political organ is extremely hard to establish, because it could be too demanding for nations, causing them to leave. It could also cause a global Tragedy of the Commons where some nations reap certain benefits while others do not because not every country is as invested in making changes.

All the aforementioned issues are what I refer to as “the Tragedy of Politics”. Because of this tragedy I am going to argue in the next section that the issues regarding overpopulation are not only a case of collective actions, as Hardin (1964) and proponents of the problem of causal inefficacy argue, but also require individual actions. Moreover, these individual actions are not only caused by the Tragedy of Politics, but also grounded by ethical theory.

All in all, implementing population policies seems to be of extreme difficulty because of national and transnational complications. On a national level, and especially regarding liberal democracies, implementing population policies is hard to get through all democratic steps as the policies oppose the ideas of liberal nationalism and civic republicanism. On a transnational level, the main issues remain in the fact that there is a lack of institutional authorisation that can implement population policies with the desired effective results. Therefore, responsibilities should not only be sought-after in population policies, but instead in the individuals of the population self.

Individual Responsibility and Duty

In ethics and ethical theories, duties refer to actions upon which you have the moral obligation to act. Responsibilities, however, differ. Ethical theory distinguishes two concepts of responsibility: backward- and forward-looking responsibility. Looking backwards on responsibility means to look for accountability in a given state of affairs, while forward-looking responsibility refers more or less to the concept of duty, looking at what an individual ought to do.¹¹ Even though the arguments are rather similar, this section is focussed on the notion of forward-looking responsibility, thus looking at what an individual ought to do regarding population and climate issues. The reason for this is that the focus of this essay is on what individual responsibility is and what individuals ought to do regarding the before mentioned issues.

Individual Duties

Firstly, the problem of causal inefficacy should again be discussed, but this time more focussed on the arguments instead of the resulting conclusion. A concise summary of the problem of causal inefficacy is that individual choices do not seem to matter because compared to the large picture, individuals are insignificant, there is no direct

11 Fragnière, “Climate change and individual duties,” 799.

marginal harm, and if I choose not to do Y, someone else may choose to still do Y (for example reproduce). And, as also mentioned in the section before, there may indeed be no definitive answer to whether or not individual choices seem to matter. The arguments are, however, still being discussed. The rather extreme “side” indicates that the impact of individuals is rather significant, like John Nolt, who concludes that the average American is responsible for the suffering and/or death of two future

Now, if everyone ought not to do an act if the consequences of an act are undesirable, then there is the collective responsibility to not act upon that act.

people through their greenhouse gas emissions.¹² And a bit less significant, the philosopher Derek Parfit, who concludes that the problem of causal inefficacy is a “mistake in moral mathematics”.¹³ This is contrary to the other side of the debate, stating that individual choices do not seem to matter because of their insignifi-

cance. But one answer is definitive, which is that this debate is far from settled and it, moreover, shows that we should not draw any conclusions too quickly. Also, because there could be a very significant impact made by individuals, it could also indicate a very clear duty or moral responsibility for individuals. However, since the significance of the individual impact is still being discussed, I shall focus on two other aspects regarding individual duties within the environment and overpopulation.

The first aspect is that individuals have the responsibility (duty) to reduce their environmental impact, regardless of the significance. According to the “Argument of Generalisation” (GA), no one ought to do an act if the consequences of everyone doing that act is undesirable. Even though there is a considerable amount of literature discussing the shortcomings of this theory, a closer look and proper understanding of GA will suggest the duties one has towards undesirable acts.¹⁴ The first shortcoming of the argument is that this theory forces you to make very complex trade-offs, which clearly is not always a possibility.¹⁵ A second shortcoming lies within the formulation of the argument, which is now stated in a subjunctive mood, which therefore might only turn to hypothetical scenarios. The final shortcoming is the term “everyone”, as clearly not everyone is able to do a certain act, as for example babies.¹⁶ But these

12 John Nolt, “How harmful are the average American’s greenhouse gas emissions?” *Ethics Policy Environment* 14 (2011): 10.

13 Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984): 560.

14 Carl F Cranor, “Collective and Individual Duties to Protect the Environment,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (1985): 244, <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1468-5930.1985.tb00037.x>.

15 Cranor, “Collective and Individual Duties to Protect the Environment,” 244.

16 Cranor, “Collective and Individual Duties to Protect the Environment,” 245.

shortcomings are rather easy to overcome. Firstly, the trade-offs should be made very explicit. In the case of environmental and overpopulation concerns, one should only make the explicit trade-off between harming the environment/planet and between the good consequences of the harm.¹⁷ Secondly, the formulation should simply be changed to an indicative mood, meaning only acts that are being done should be analysed. This way you do not tackle hypothetical problems, but only actual problems in this case of urgency. Finally, the term “everyone” should not literally include everyone, but only the people who are able to do the certain act. For example, in the case of overpopulation, the term “everyone” includes all the people who are able to reproduce.

Now, if everyone ought not to do an act if the consequences of an act are undesirable, then there is the collective responsibility to not act upon that act. Thus, if everyone would reproduce at a too high rate, dire consequences such as over-farming, deforestation, water pollution and climate changes will become real. Therefore, there is the collective responsibility to not reproduce at a too high rate. This responsibility is then automatically extended to the individual. It could be argued though, that self-interest will prevail above responsibility, for example through generalised cases of “the prisoners dilemma”. This then means that the individual cannot be trusted with individual responsibility.¹⁸ Therefore, there not only needs to be the argument of generalisation, but also the extension of morality in this case. Still acting upon a certain act because of self-interest even though according to the argument of generalisation you should not, should not be seen as an act of self-interest but as vice or wickedness.

The second aspect that individuals have, is the responsibility (duty) to support and promote collective action. Having and implementing collective actions may still be the most important and significant solution to all climate and population issues, but, as stated in the section before, there is “the Tragedy of Politics”. Even though fighting climate change is argued to be an institutional or governmental job by some philosophers, such as Walter Sinnott-Armstrong,¹⁹ most authors still argue in favour of promoting collective action. Because of the absence of such collective action on topics such as climate change and overpopulation, authors such as Stephen Gardiner therefore propose the model of delegated responsibility.²⁰ This model holds that individuals delegate a portion of their responsibility to institutions or political organs, but when

17 Cranor, “Collective and Individual Duties to Protect the Environment,” 245.

18 Cranor, “Collective and Individual Duties to Protect the Environment,” 248.

19 Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “IT’S NOT MY FAULT: GLOBAL WARMING AND INDIVIDUAL MORAL OBLIGATIONS,” *Advances in the Economics of Environmental Research* 5 (2005): 293-315, <https://sites.duke.edu/wsa/papers/files/2011/05/wsa-itsnotmyfault2005.pdf>.

20 Stephen Gardiner, “Is no one responsible for global environmental tragedy? Climate change as a challenge to our ethical concepts,” *The Ethics of Global Climate Change* (2011): 38-59.

the political organ fails to discharge the responsibility it inevitably falls back onto the individuals.²¹ Moreover, Elizabeth Cribbs gives a similar model stating that groups that have a weak collective responsibility (for example in the case of climate change) translate their group responsibility into an individual duty to promote the group's collective action.²² There is, therefore, a clear justification in stating the individual duty to promote collective action in case of environmental and population issues.

Regardless of the issues individuals may bear, namely the problems of causal inefficacy, self-interest, and shortcomings of the generalisation argument, individuals still have moral duties towards the environment and population issues. They are, for one, responsible to not act upon acts with undesirable consequences if everyone would act upon that act. And individuals are responsible to stimulate and promote collective actions in case of environmental and population issues as they have given a portion of their responsibility to them, but when they fail to succeed, the responsibility falls back onto the individual.

Discussion

Because the responsibilities and duties in environmental and population issues are still unclear in many aspects, it is difficult to conclude where the responsibilities and duties are. One side of the debate argues for no individual duties while the other side argues strongly for individual duties. One thing, however, is very clear and that is that everyone agrees on having collective action responsibilities. But, as I have argued, this is also a difficult topic because collective actions are hardly taken and perhaps even harder to effectively implement.

The key weakness regarding this research is within the lack of explanation of "extending morality". The point of the argument of generalisation seems rather clear, but how to extend morality and what the consequences are, is rather unclear. But that does not take away that individuals do have duties. It only emphasises the fact that individuals may not act upon those duties because of self-interest and a solution might be to extend morality.

Conclusion

Proponents of both the problem of causal inefficacy and the Tragedy of the Commons similarly conclude that the responsibility lays not within individuals, but within institutions or governmental policies. There are, however, major issues regarding institutions as population and environmental policies are extremely hard to implement, especially in liberal democracies. Moreover, another issue is the ineffectiveness of policies when they are not implemented on a global scale. Then, similarly to the

21 Fragnière, "Climate change and individual duties," 807.

22 Elizabeth Cribbs, *Climate Change and the Moral Agent: Individual Duties in an Interdependent World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 258.

Tragedy of the Commons, some nations may still reap the benefits of not implementing policies. Therefore, the responsibility of individuals is argued for. Even though there are certain implications or shortcomings to individual duties, there still is a certain extent to which individuals are responsible for environmental and population issues. The extent of the duties, firstly, include that individuals are morally responsible not to act upon certain acts which have undesirable consequences if everyone would act upon them. And secondly, that individuals have the duty to promote collective action, especially when their institutions or political systems fail to act in this regard.

Even though there are certain implications or shortcomings to individual duties, there still is a certain extent to which individuals are responsible for environmental and population issues.

HET METAVIES FILOSOFIE

Guy



Ik kan mij op dit moment niet herinneren,
wat ik nu eigenlijk wil zeggen

Hardin's Case Against Humanitarian Aid

Roos van Zeijl

Introduction

Most people would probably say that we have to give aid to developing countries. However, is this really the case? Currently, we are dealing with a climate crisis and one of the causes of this is overpopulation: too many people are using too many of our earth's resources. This is a serious problem and it could lead to the conclusion that maybe we should not help developing countries when they encounter some kind of emergency, because we need less people on the earth. This sounds very morbid and controversial, but in this essay I want to examine this issue in a philosophical and theoretical way. The question I will investigate in this essay is: "Does overpopulation diminish our duty to help people during emergencies?" In this essay I will first examine Garrett Hardin's lifeboat ethics and the case he makes against giving humanitarian aid. I will then examine two authors and their critiques of Hardin: Ryberg, who criticizes Hardin's everything or nothing mentality, and Næss, who criticizes the inequality in Hardin's theory. Finally, I will give my own analysis of all of these three authors and explain why I disagree with Hardin.

Hardin's lifeboat ethics

Hardin proposes the lifeboat metaphor in order to explore the environmental crisis that our world is currently dealing with.¹ In this metaphor he compares countries to lifeboats, in which the rich, Western countries have big and sturdy lifeboats, while the poorer countries have too little and too small lifeboats for their population. Because of this, people are falling out of the lifeboats and the population of these countries is in the water, on the verge of drowning. Meanwhile, the population of the rich countries are safe inside their lifeboats. To finish the metaphor, Hardin proposes an example of a lifeboat that has fifty people in it with space for ten more. This gives the lifeboat a maximum capacity of sixty with a safety factor of ten. This safety factor is important in case of an emergency, for example a storm or a lack of resources in the lifeboat. The last addition to the metaphor is that there are a hundred people in the sea that want to be let in to the lifeboat. These people represent the population of the developing countries.

According to Hardin, there are three possible options in this scenario. Firstly, the lifeboat can take all one hundred people in. This will completely swamp the lifeboat, since there are now 150 people in a lifeboat that can only hold sixty. Because of this, the lifeboat will not be able to stay afloat and everyone will drown. The second option is to take in ten people, so that there will be sixty people in the lifeboat. Yet, this gets

1 Garrett Hardin, "Commentary: Living on a Lifeboat," *BioScience* 24 no. 10 (1974): 561-568. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1296629>.

rid of the safety factor, which is also problematic. It will now be disastrous when the lifeboat encounters some kind of emergency, and the people in the lifeboat will pay for getting rid of the safety factor. Another issue with this option is that it is very difficult to determine which ten people from the one hundred drowning are allowed in the lifeboat. Should they allow the most injured people in? Should it be the people with the most useful skills? Should they allow the first ten people to reach the boat in?

The third option is to admit no people to the lifeboat. This is Hardin's preferred option since this gives the biggest chance that at least some people will survive (namely the fifty in the lifeboat). To him, this is the preferred option, even though the people in the sea have nearly no chance of survival. To those who feel guilty about their privilege of being in the lifeboat from the start, Hardin proposes that these people can swap with one of the drowning people. The person they swap with will not feel guilty (if they did, they would not accept the place) and thus the lifeboat will rid itself of guilt.

The population escalator

Hardin uses the lifeboat metaphor to examine certain situations. The specific case that he examines in his article is the proposal for world food banks. This is a form of humanitarian aid, which could help developing countries that are dealing with famine by providing them with food. This food would come from a surplus of the rich, developed countries. Hardin does not think that the world food banks will be a good thing. On the contrary, he believes that world food banks would ultimately do more harm than good, because of the ratchet effect, or the population escalator. To understand this effect, it is first needed to understand a normal population cycle.

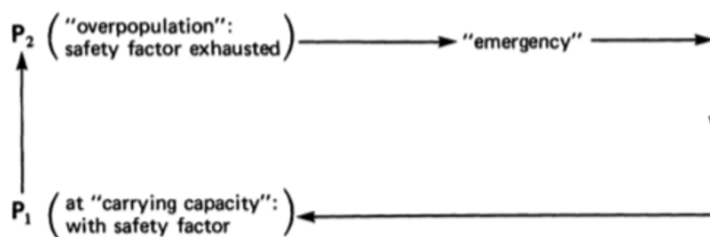


Fig. 1: Hardin 1974, 564.

In a normal population, there is the population at "carrying capacity" (P_1). This can be compared to the lifeboat with fifty people and thus includes a safety factor. In normal times, there is more food than is actually needed to sustain this population so the population will grow (P_2). At this point, the safety factor is exhausted, which can be compared to the lifeboat with sixty people. When the country now encounters an

emergency – for example famine – it will be disastrous for the population (since there is no safety factor anymore) and a lot of people will die. This causes the population to drop back to P_1 .

If world food banks would be in the picture, the population escalator comes into play. In this scenario the first part of the population cycle would be the same. However, once it gets to the emergency, it changes. With a world food bank, a country suffering from famine would just get all the food they need from the bank. This means that the population does not decrease. On the contrary, it would be sustained and will grow over time. Now the country will become even more overpopulated, and the safety factor will be more exhausted. To sustain this increased population, a constant aid is needed from the world food bank, since the population is too big for the country. In addition to this, whenever there is a new emergency, the world food bank will have to provide more food, which will again allow the population to stay stable and grow. According to Hardin, this population escalator will continue until a certain point where disaster will strike for all involved.

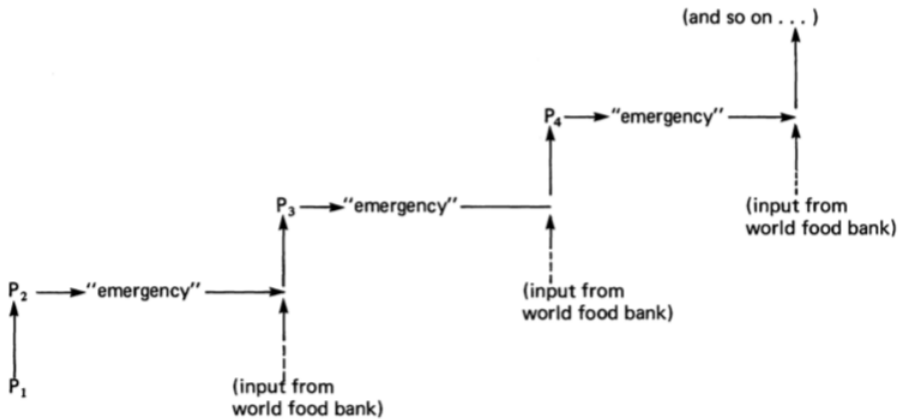


Fig. 2: Hardin 1974, 564.

Ryberg's "higher" population cycle

Ryberg criticises Hardin's theory on the population escalator for several reasons.² First of all, he does not agree that the population escalator will ultimately end in a disaster. According to him, the escalation would end when the world food bank could no longer provide more food when there is a new emergency. At this point, however, it would not necessarily have to end in a disaster. The food bank could, for example, just

2 Jesper Ryberg, "Population and Third World Assistance – A Comment on Hardin's Lifeboat Ethics," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 14 no. 3 (1997): 207-219, <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/1468-5930.00058>.

decide to keep the amount of aid steady at a certain level. This would cause a “higher” population cycle. In this scenario, the world food bank would provide as much aid as possible. After this point, the population would stabilise in a cycle similar to the normal population cycle.

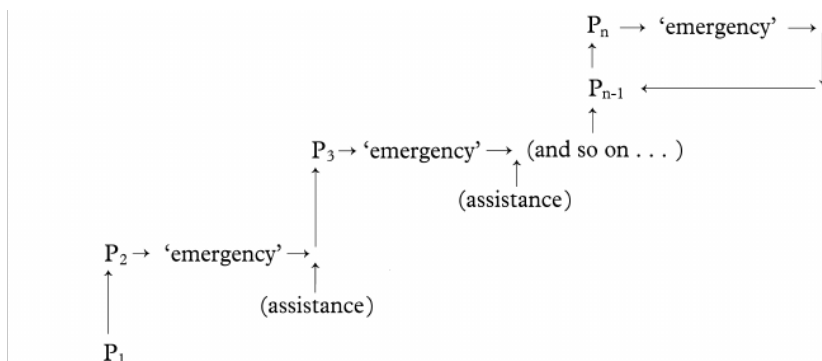


Fig. 3: Ryberg 1997, 214.

According to Ryberg, the “higher” population cycle would be better than the normal population cycle because of the following reasons. First of all, Ryberg makes a point that a small population transgressing a smaller carrying capacity is not worse than a bigger population transgressing a higher carrying capacity. This is because, relatively speaking, it would be the same. For the bigger population, there might be more people suffering but it is the same percentage of people that would be suffering.

Secondly, Ryberg assumes that in a normal population cycle, there is more pleasure than suffering. He assumes that a normal population cycle is better than no population at all. Since no population has a net neutral result, the normal population cycle has to have an overall positive net result. Of course, the assumption that the normal population cycle is better than no population at all can be contested. This is, however, a completely different argument that I cannot go into in this essay. These arguments combined mean that the “higher” population cycle is not worse than the normal population cycle. In fact, Ryberg argues that they are better than the normal cycle, since the absolute amount of positive wellbeing is more than in the normal cycle.

I, however, do not agree with Ryberg, specifically with the point that the percentage of people suffering would be the same. What Ryberg fails to do here is to envision this scenario on a global scale, and consider the climate crisis. My assumption here is that the aim of giving aid to developing countries is to actually help them develop, not just purely allow them to increase their population. When these countries develop, they will start using more resources and contribute much more to global warming. Therefore, if a country has a higher population cycle, it will have a significant contribution to global warming, whereas with a lower population cycle the contribution is less.

Another important thing to note here is that more global warming will cause more frequent and more severe emergencies.³ From this it follows that there will be a bigger percentage of suffering in the higher population cycle than in the normal cycle, since the disasters are more frequent and severe. Relatively speaking, there will be more suffering.

Næss' critique regarding inequality

Næss has a very different type of critique.⁴ He focuses on the inequality in Hardin's theory between the Western developed countries and the developing countries. There are a couple of points in Hardin's theory that he does not agree with, which all come back to this implied inequality. Two of these points are relevant to this essay.

The first point Næss makes is an inaccuracy in the lifeboat metaphor. To go back to the lifeboat example, let us take a look again at the lifeboat with 50 people in it and a carrying capacity of 60. In this example, Hardin does not tell us anything about the amount of resources that every person is using and the amount of baggage people have brought onto the lifeboat. Both of these are big factors in the carrying capacity of the lifeboat. After all, if the people currently in the lifeboat all throw out the majority of their baggage, and only keep the pure essentials, there is a lot more space for other people. If all the "rich" lifeboats do this, it might even be possible that there is enough space for everyone.

Additionally, Næss criticises Hardin's definition overpopulation. Hardin does not explicitly state this, but reading in between the lines, it is clear that he views the developing countries as overpopulated. He does not seem to have the same concerns for Western countries. Næss proposes to compare the population size to the amount of resources naturally given by that country. This entails looking at a country's resources before any import or export happens. From this perspective, certain developing countries might not be seen as overpopulated at all, whereas certain Western countries are, in fact, overpopulated.

Selfishness and inequality in Hardin's theory

Hardin gives the world food bank as an example for the lifeboat metaphor. Instead, I want to consider the idea of a global commons of resources in general. This could, for example, include non-renewable energy sources such as oil and coal. It is important

3 Noah S. Diffenbaugh, Deepti Singh, Justin S. Mankin, Daniel E. Horton, Daniel L. Swain, Danielle Touma, Allison Charland, Yunjie Liu, Matz Haugen, Michael Tsiang, and Bala Rajaratnam, "Influence of global warming on extreme events," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114 no. 19 (2017): 4881-4886, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1618082114>.

4 Petter Næss, "Live and let die: the tragedy of Hardin's social Darwinism," *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 6 no. 1 (2004): 19-34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908042000259668>.

that for something to be regarded as a commons, it has to be a resource that may get used up. This means that there will be too little of it, if it is overused or if there is a lack of contribution to it.

In this kind of global commons, the lifeboat metaphor also applies. The lifeboat metaphor also overlaps with Hardin's theory about the tragedy of the commons.⁵ The most important point of the tragedy of the commons, is that in a commons it does not make sense to restrain yourself. The only solution, according to Hardin, is mutually agreed upon coercion. To elaborate, it does not make sense to restrain yourself, since others would then take more from the commons. This would result in the same amount of commons used, while you yourself get less. The only way to solve this is to all agree to restrain yourself, and to make sure that others do so too.

The tragedy of the commons has a fairly selfish idea of humans. It believes that if the opportunity arises to take more resources, there will always be at least one person that will take that opportunity. The lifeboat ethics Hardin proposes has a similar assumption of selfishness: each lifeboat is better off if it does not allow other people to enter it. Field studies suggest, however, that the tragedy of the commons is not always the case. People are able to solve the tragedy of the commons on a local level or through elaborate governance systems. However, when talking about this on a global level, it gets much more complicated, because of issues like cultural diversity, inter-linked commons with opposing goals, and simply the fact that there are much more people involved.

In addition to the tragedy of the commons being selfish, it also justifies inequality. This is the same inequality that Næss is talking about. In the tragedy of the commons, the most preferred option is to take as much as possible from the commons. Yet, the amount of resources that one can take from the commons is dependent on the amount of power and ability one has. In lifeboat ethics this inequality is present too: rich countries can build a better lifeboat and can carry more equipment and luggage than poorer countries. Their safety margin is therefore much bigger: they are less vulnerable. When putting the inequality inherent to the tragedy of the commons in the context of a global commons, it means that the Western countries take much more than the developing countries, simply because they are more powerful. In that sense, the lifeboat clearly builds on the tragedy of the commons.

Evaluating Hardin

As much as I do not like the selfishness and inequality that is an inherent part of the tragedy of the commons as well as of lifeboat ethics, I still think that lifeboat ethics is a convincing theory that certainly makes some important points. I agree with Hardin that giving a country resources as soon as it reaches a bump in the road will not help

5 Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 no. 3859 (1968): 1243-1248, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.162.3859.1243>.

such a country. This gift will allow the country to continue on without any consequences and there will be no incentive for the country to learn and change the way they do things. There are, however, also some points that I disagree with.

First of all, I think it is important to state that Hardin does not think that the more developed a country gets, the less population growth there is. This is however a widely accepted theory.⁶ As stated

before, the purpose of giving aid (e.g. food as in Hardin's example) to developing countries, is to give them the opportunity to get more developed.

Normally, the population growth rate

will decrease and thus the population escalator will stop at a certain point, provided the population gets the means to develop. This means that it is important that aid should aim at development, not just at survival.

I also disagree with Hardin's assumption that people are selfish. As seen by Ostrom's research, there are multiple examples of (local) commons being regulated in a good way. However, some rules need to be fulfilled for governing the commons such as having participatory decision making and graduated sanctions for those who abuse the commons.⁷

The last point that I do not agree with is the inequality incorporated in the tragedy of the commons and the lifeboat metaphor. This inequality entails that not everyone on earth will survive and that it is better if some people survive rather than no people surviving at all (see Næss). The scenario he is actually talking about here is that it is better if people in Western countries survive, while the people in the developing countries do not. It will not be possible to save everyone and if we try to do this, everyone will be doomed. Hence, according to Hardin, it would be better if the people that have the best chances to survive focus on themselves (these people being the ones in the Western countries). Næss criticises this idea. He says that there is no justification for choosing the West to be the surviving civilisation. If anything, it would be better to have Western countries not survive, since their way of living is much more destructive than in other countries.

Conclusion

This essay has thoroughly analysed Hardin's theory and the criticisms against it. However, there is still no answer to the question it set out to answer: Does overpopu-

If all the "rich" lifeboats do this, it might even be possible that there is enough space for everyone.

6 Ansley J. Coale, "Demographic Transition," in *Social Economics*, ed. John Eatwell, Murray Milgate and Peter Newman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 16-23, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-19806-1_4.

7 "Elinor Ostrom's 8 rules for managing the commons," *The Earthbound Report*, January 15, 2018, <https://earthbound.report/2018/01/15/elinor-ostroms-8-rules-for-managing-the-commons/>.

lation diminish our duty to help people during emergencies? Hardin would obviously say yes. Yet, Hardin does not acknowledge a lot of important factors in his theory. In my opinion, our situation is not yet desperate enough that Hardin's lifeboat metaphor applies. There are a lot of options apart from just not giving people any aid, the most important option being to get rid of the baggage that is already in the rich lifeboats. More concretely, the rich, Western countries should collectively restrain themselves and give the developing countries the ability to develop.

An issue that I want to address, but that I am not able to investigate in this essay, is what to do when Western countries face an emergency. We are currently dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, and it is interesting to see that the emergency is suddenly very close and personal to us. Now things are also going wrong in our well-equipped lifeboats. The question is what we do now, how much can we rely on other countries for help and how much help do we offer in return? On a final note, regarding the lifeboat, we might not have a lot of time left to do something about the climate crisis, but I for one am not so desperate yet that I want to solve this with a theory that justifies selfishness and inequality.

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The Population Dilemma and the Case for Accelerating the Modernisation of Developing Countries

Vincent Ophoff

Overpopulation has become a serious threat to the environment, biodiversity and the supply of natural resources. A 2019 IPCC Assessment Report concludes that:

[G]lobal population growth and changes in per capita consumption of food, feed, fibre, timber and energy have caused unprecedented rates of land and freshwater use [...]. With large regional variation, these changes have contributed to increasing net greenhouse gas emissions, loss of natural ecosystem and declining biodiversity.¹

Despite the fact that further population growth in the near future will only occur in developing regions of the world, like Africa and the Middle East, the results of overpopulation will impact the entire planet, since climate change and resource depletion are not regional but global phenomena. Therefore, a reduction in global birth-rates should at least be a variable in the formula of limiting climate and environmental damage.

However, Western countries are facing a second problem, namely seriously falling birth rates. In 2018, the total fertility rate in the EU-28 was 1.55 births per woman,² while 2.1 children are needed for a population-level to be sustained. A problematic consequence of this low birth rate is an aging population, which results in high welfare spending, increased collective tax-burden and pressure on medical and elderly-care facilities. As a region, Europe had the highest percentage of people age 65 or older in 2000, which is 15%.³ European governments are therefore facing a difficult dilemma: should we increase our birth rates to prevent an ever-aging population? Or should we decrease our birth rates in order to curb the damage that humankind is doing to planet earth? Out of these two questions the “Population Dilemma” emerges, which is formulated as the following research question: “How can European governments solve the contradiction between (1) the need for increasing birth rates in order to sustain the domestic population level and (2) the need for decreasing birth rates in order to limit climate change and environmental damage?”

1 IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers,” in *Climate Change and Land*, 2019, 7, https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/4/2020/02/SPM_Updated-Jan20.pdf.

2 “Fertility Statistics,” *Eurostat*, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility_statistics#live_births_per_woman_in_the_EU_in_2018.

3 Grant, Jonathan, Stijn Hoorens, Suja Sivadasan, Mirjam van het Loo, Julie DaVanzo, Lauren Hale, Shawna Gibson, and William Butz, *Population Implosion? Low Fertility and Policy Responses in the European Union*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RB9126>.

In this research essay I will argue that there is no contradiction between these two lemmas anymore, once we differentiate between relevant regions. In fact, both challenges can partially be resolved by implementing one strategy, which is: accelerating the modernisation of developing countries. This solves both problems of

In accordance with a growing amount of scientific evidence, humanity will face serious geobiological challenges in the coming decades.

the dilemma: (1) migration becomes less of a threat to the European continent due to decreased cultural tensions, making migration a justifiable solution to the decreasing birth rates in European

countries, and (2) developing countries will experience a decreasing birth rate once they modernise according to scholars, resulting in less global overpopulation.

Theoretical Background

First problem - A Growing Global Population

In accordance with a growing amount of scientific evidence, humanity will face serious geobiological challenges in the coming decades. One of these is climate change, which is most likely induced by human emissions of greenhouse gasses like carbon dioxide and methane.⁴ This will result in the following phenomena: a rising global temperature,⁵ a rising sea level,⁶ increasing weather extremes,⁷ desertification of dry regions⁸ and diminishing coral reefs.⁹ Another problem that reflects humanity's unsustainable way of life is environmental degradation. According to a 2019 IPCC report, a quarter of the Earth's ice-free land area is subject to human-induced degradation.¹⁰

The extensive analyses of climate change and environmental degradation that the IPCC, NASA and the WMO have performed and published in recent years have identified many causes. However, the elephant in the room that remains largely unmentioned is overpopulation. Some authors have coined the initiative to think

4 World Meteorological Organization, *WMO Statement on the State of the Global Climate in 2019, 2020*, https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=10211.

5 IPCC, "Summary for Policymakers," in *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, 2018, <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>.

6 World Meteorological Organization, *WMO Statement on the State of the Global Climate in 2019*.

7 IPCC, "Summary for Policymakers," in *Climate Change and Land*, 2019, <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/>.

8 Michel Verstraete, Robert J. Scholes, and Mark Stafford Smith, "Climate and Desertification: looking at an old problem through new lenses," *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 7, no. 8 (2009): 421-428.

9 IPCC, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*.

10 IPCC, *Climate Change and Land*.

about population growth as one of the main obstacles to an effective climate and environmental policy. For instance, Götmark et al. suggest that an aging population is more of a blessing than a challenge:

As the nations of the world grapple with the task of creating sustainable societies, ending and in some cases reversing population growth will be necessary to succeed. Yet stable or declining populations are typically reported in the media as a problem, or even a crisis, due to demographic aging. This is misguided, as economic analyses show that the costs connected with aging societies are manageable, while the economic, social and environmental benefits of smaller populations are substantial.¹¹

So why has there not been more attention for overpopulation, if it seems to be such an obvious cause of many of the environmental challenges we are facing on this planet? According to Hines, the link between environmental issues and population growth has mostly been ignored due to its status as a taboo:

It was, after all, environmentalists who first drew global attention to the need for population control in the 1960s and 1970s. However, since that time, after criticism by developing countries' activists and leaders that talk of population control is a form of colonialism, racism and imperialism, most green groups have studiously ignored this topic.¹²

If overpopulation is already a problem today, it will become more problematic in the near future. Certain developing regions in the world, like sub-Saharan Africa, will experience a population explosion. The largest demographic increases will be seen in 48 countries, among which 27 are on the African continent, where the population is expected to double in size from 1.9 billion in 2015 to 3.2 billion in 2100.¹³ In contrast, population growth in developed countries, like Europe, is non-existent. Therefore, when using a reduction in overpopulation as a method of curbing environmental degradation and climate change, the main focus of this method should be on developing countries.

11 Frank Götmark, Philip Cafaro, and Jane O'Sullivan, "Aging Human Populations: Good for Us, Good for the Earth," *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 33, no. 11 (2018): 851, <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2018.08.015>.

12 Colin Hines, "Immigration and Population: 'The Interlinked Ecological Crisis that Dares not Speak its Name'," *The Ecological Citizen* 2, no. 1 (2018): 54.

13 Maristella Bergaglio, "The contemporary illusion: population growth and sustainability," *Environmental Development and Sustainability* 19, no. 5 (2017): 2023-2038, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-016-9842-3>.

Second Problem – A Shrinking European Population

Unlike sub-Saharan Africa, some regions of the world are demographically shrinking. Dutch women are on average giving birth to 1,59 children.¹⁴ This number is 1,57 in Germany, 1,50 in Hungary, 1,36 in Poland and 1,3 in Ukraine.¹⁵ A birth rate this low is problematic, since 2.1 children per woman are needed to sustain the population level.¹⁶ The fertility rate in Europe has decreased in recent decades from 2.6 births per woman in the 1950s to 1.57 births per woman in 1995.

On the short term, this low birth rate in Europe will result in an aging population. The shares of elderly in the total population are the highest in Europe, when

On the short term, this low birth rate in Europe will result in an aging population.

compared to other continents.¹⁷ Mostly Western countries are facing an aging population, which according to the United Nations, is secondarily caused by increased longevity, but primarily by a shrinking birth rate.¹⁸ An aging

society is confronted by many challenges, like the fiscal burden on future generations and the sustainability of current social programs due to increased public expenditures for health care and pensions, as well as a proportional decrease in workers contributing to the system.¹⁹

Around the year 2000, the shrinking birth rates in modernised countries became a political issue. A possible solution that was coined by the United Nations was “replacement migration”, which suggests that immigration could augment the labour forces of states with low birth-rates.²⁰ In 2004 the European Commission acknowl-

14 “GDP in current US dollars of the Netherlands,” The World Bank, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/netherlands>.

15 The World Bank, “GDP in current US dollars of the Netherlands.”

16 Thomas J. Espenshade, Juan Carlos Guzman, and Charles F. Westoff, “The surprising global variation in replacement fertility,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 22, no. 5 (2003): 575-583, <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:POPU.0000020882.29684.8e>.

17 Arun Balachandran, Joop de Beer, and K. S. James, “Comparison of Population Aging in Europe and Asia Using a Time-Consistent and Comparative Aging Measure,” *Journal of Aging and Health* 32, no. 5-6 (2019): 340-351, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0898264318824180>.

18 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, *World Population Aging Report*, 2015, https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2015_Report.pdf.

19 Guillaume Marois, Alain Bélanger, and Wolfgang Lutz, “Population aging, migration and productivity in Europe,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 4 (2020): 7690-7695, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1918988117>.

20 United Nations Population Division, *Replacement migration: is it a solution to declining and ageing populations?*, 2001, <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/replacement-cover.pdf>.

edged the validity of this theory, by claiming that migration had the positive effect of mitigating population decline and would continue to do so in the future.²¹ Some scholars have argued in favour of this strategy as well.²²

However, I would argue that “replacement migration” is an inadequate contemporary solution. On the short term, compensating a shrinking population with higher migration numbers in order to solve the problem of aging will most likely be effective. However, on the long term, this method will cause significant ethnic transformations in European societies, with socio-cultural problems as a result. To make replacement migration a viable solution in the future, European governments must think about methods of making mass immigration less problematic for native European societies than it currently is (as will be explained in the following section).

Another possible solution to shrinking birth rates has been offered by some Eastern European governments, who are implementing policies to make procreation more attractive financially. Countries like Poland and Hungary are accepting almost no immigrants from Africa and the Middle East.²³ This forces their governments to formulate so-called pro-natalist policies for increasing their birth rates, like maternal capital in Russia,²⁴ a lifetime exemption from income tax for mothers with three children in Hungary,²⁵ and a payment of 12% of the country’s average wage per child in Poland.²⁶ This strategy prevents the socio-cultural harm that immigration brings, but has other negative effects. For example, making it financially more attractive to procreate only creates an incentive for civilians from a lower socio-economic class. The less educated will in that case procreate more than the higher educated, which will lead to socio-demographic disruptions itself.

To conclude this section, my conviction is that both problems of the Population Dilemma can be solved without creating contradictory policies. The objective

21 European Commission, *First Annual Report on Migration and Integration*, 2004, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0360:FIN:EN:PDF>.

22 Marois, Bélanger, and Lutz, “Population aging, migration and productivity in Europe.”; Hines, “Immigration and Population: “The Interlinked Ecological Crisis that Dares not Speak its Name”.”

23 Jonas Eklom “Poland, Hungary broke EU laws by refusing to host migrants: Court Adviser,” *Reuters World News*, October 31, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migration-court-idUSKBN1XA1S5>.

24 Elizarov, Valeriy, and Victoria Levin, *Russian Federation Aging Project: Family Policies in Russia, could efforts to raise fertility rates slow population aging?* (World Bank Group, 2015).

25 Shaun Walker, “Baby machines: Eastern Europe’s Answer to depopulation,” *The Guardian*, March 4, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/04/baby-bonuses-fit-the-nationalist-agenda-but-do-they-work>.

26 Leonid Bershidsky, “Making Babies to Grow Economies Won’t Work,” *Bloomberg*, January 20, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-01-20/making-babies-to-grow-economies-won-t-work>.

of limiting population growth should be aimed at the regions where the growth rate will be highest in the near future, which are developing countries. The objective of achieving a sustainable population-level in Europe should be identified in the “migration replacement” theory, but without the socio-cultural disruption that mass immigration is currently causing in Europe. Both of these tasks can be united, namely in the ambition to accelerate the modernisation of developing countries.

Accelerating the Modernisation of Developing Regions

What Is Modernisation?

Modernisation is a theory that explains the developmental progression from traditional societies towards modern societies.

to pre-modern philosophers, but gained popularity since the age of Enlightenment. Generally, German sociologist Max Weber is seen as the founder of modernisation theory, due to his works in which he glorifies bureaucratisation, ration-

alisation, and a system of legal authority instead of charismatic or traditional authority.²⁷ Modernisation was reached first by Western-Europe and North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Modernisation is almost always associated with the following phenomena: industrialisation, technological advancement, division of labour, capitalism, scientific progress, urbanisation, individualism, increased production and consumption, rational state-building, economic growth, free market liberalism, mechanisation of the production processes, improved education and literacy, secularisation of religion and increased life-expectancy.²⁸ According to political science studies, in most cases – but not always – modernisation correlates with democratisation and political participation.²⁹

27 Max Weber, “The Three Types of Legitimate Rule.” *Berkeley Publications in Society and Institutions* 4, no. 1 (1958): 1–1.

28 Krishan Kumar, “Modernization,” *Social Movements & Trends*, *Britannica*, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/modernization/Work-and-the-family>.

29 Ronald Inglehart, and Christian Welzel, “Changing Mass Priorities: The Link between Modernization and Democracy,” *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (2010): 551–567, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592710001258>.

Decreasing the Population Growth Globally

One of the strongest scientific laws in the social sciences is the fact that all societies that experience economic industrialisation and socio-cultural modernisation will experience a shrinking birth rate.³⁰ In demographics, this is called the “Demographic Transition”.³¹ The primary causes of the demographic transition are the following:

- Scientific improvement leads to technological and medical innovations, which results in less mortality, particularly child mortality. When more children survive, the need for procreation reduces.
- Improvements in contraceptive technology made family planning possible.
- Increased economic prosperity and state-funded social welfare policies have made the elderly less dependent on their children for financing and care.
- Education became possible for an increasing number of civilians. This increased literacy, knowledge about hygiene and contraception, and the preference for career instead of family.

There is plenty of discussion among social scientists about which factors are stronger predictors of a demographic transition than other factors. Some authors value economic factors more, while others argue that socio-cultural factors are more important. The real causal mechanism behind the modernisation of a society is highly diffuse and complex, since all the variables interact with each other. However, the important theorem we can deduce is that all of the mentioned causes are elements of modernisation, and most importantly: the process of modernisation always correlates with a lowering birth-rate.

There is however one obvious, but credible, criticism to this argument: modernisation of developing countries, and its correlating increase in production and wealth, will lead to higher productivity and consumption, which will increase greenhouse gas-emissions and resource depletion. This is indeed a legitimate concern, however not fatal for the argument for two reasons. Firstly, the technological advancement that goes along with modernisation can decrease climate and environmental harm significantly. For example, while the Dutch population grew by 5% and the Dutch GDP grew by 32% in the past fifteen years,³² the greenhouse gas emissions of the Netherlands

30 Mikko Myrskylä, Hans-Peter Kohler, and Francesco C. Billari, “Advances in development reverse fertility declines,” *Nature* 460 (2009): 741-743.

31 Şefika Şule Erçetin, and Sevdâ Kubilay, “Relationship between Demographic Transition and Economic Growth,” in *Economic Growth and Demographic Transition in Third World Nations* (Palm Bay Florida: Apple Academic Press, 2019), 2-17.

32 “GDP in current US dollars of the Netherlands,” The World Bank, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/netherlands>.

have actually decreased by 15%,³³ as a result of technological advancement.³⁴ Secondly, it seems a little cynical and morally questionable to argue that the rich modern world should keep sub-Saharan Africa poor and uneducated in order to prevent them from achieving the same level of consumption as we have.

Decreasing Cultural Tensions

Mass immigration is already leading to significant cultural tensions, due to increased social welfare spending, Islamic terrorism,³⁵ the introduction of barbaric practices like female genital mutilation on the European continent,³⁶ and increased crime. According to recent research on Swedish crime demographics, “based on 33% of the

It seems a little cynical and morally questionable to argue that the rich modern world should keep sub-Saharan Africa poor and uneducated in order to prevent them from achieving the same level of consumption as we have.

population, 58% of those suspects for total crime on reasonable grounds are migrants. Regarding murder, manslaughter and attempted murder, the figures are 73%.”³⁷ Criminal behaviour of immigrants has been an increasing concern in most European

countries. Nearly 59% of Western Europeans agree with the statement “Immigrants increase crime rates”, while the corresponding statistic for Germany is 66%.³⁸ In the Netherlands 0,65% of native residents and 0,95% of residents with a western migration-background is suspect of criminal behaviour, while 2,38% of residents with a

33 “Uitstoot Boeikasgassen 3 procent lager in 2019,” CBS, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/70946ned?dl=2628E>.

34 “Uitstoot Broeikasgassen licht gedaald,” CBS, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2019/19/uitstoot-broeikasgassen-licht-gedaald>.

35 Clara Egger, and Raúl Magni-Berton Raúl, “The Role of Islamist Ideology in Shaping Muslims Believers’ Attitudes toward Terrorism: Evidence from Europe,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 1, no. 24 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1571696>.

36 Pieter J.J. Sauer, and David Neubauer, “Female Genital Mutilation: A Hidden Epidemic. A statement from the European Academy of Pediatrics,” *European Journal of Pediatrics* 173, no. 2 (2014): 237-238, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00431-013-2126-0>.

37 Göran Adamson, “Migrants and Crime in Sweden in the Twenty-First Century,” *Society* 57 (2020): 9-21. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-019-00436-8>.

38 Jennifer Fitzgerald, Amber Curtis, and Catherine L. Corliss, “Anxious Publics: Worries about Crime and Immigration,” *Comparative Political Studies* 45, no. 4 (2012): 477-506, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414011421768>.

non-western migration-background is suspect of criminal behaviour.³⁹ Studies show that irregular migrants represent more than half of the total number of prisoners in Greece.⁴⁰

A policy of mass migration without a policy of proper integration puts a heavy burden on the support for migration among the native European population. Since 2016, migration has become the primary concern among European citizens in general.⁴¹ For many Europeans, faith in multiculturalism has changed into fear for co-existing parallel societies with incompatible cultural values. The emergence of the new populist right can for a substantial part be explained by the conviction that the culture and lifestyle of Muslims are incompatible with the Western way of life.⁴² These cultural tensions go both ways: many Arab migrants are living a double life, one public life that conforms to social expectations of country they migrated towards, and one private life that preserves their original culture.⁴³ Several Islamic organisations have established their own Islamic schools, and a few of these schools have been exposed as breeding ground for violent anti-Western thoughts, deeds, and actors.⁴⁴

Whether one argues that migrant crime can be attributed to differing cultural values, or that it is the result of poverty among migrant communities in Europe does not make a difference to the hypotheses. When the future immigrants of Europe come from a modernised society, their cultural values will overlap more with European values: individual responsibility, secularism, liberalism, gender equality, universal human rights and support for a liberal democracy. Also, they will come from a wealthier, economically thriving country, which means there is less chance that their socio-economic position in Europe forces them into criminal behaviour. Native Europeans will be more tolerant towards mass immigration and be less likely to vote an anti-immigrant political party in office. This should pave the way for a sustainable influx of migrants into European countries, in order to sustain their population levels and prevent their societies from aging.

39 “Verdachten; geslacht, leeftijd, migratieachtergrond en generatie,” CBS, accessed December 23, 2020, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/81959NED>.

40 Ecaterina Balica, and Valentina Marinescu, *Migration and Crime: realities and media representations* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).

41 European Commission, *Eurobarometer 86: Public opinion in the European Union: First Results*, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/finland/sites/default/files/eb86_first_en.pdf

42 Gordon Sammut, Luke Joseph Buhagiar, Sandra Jovchelovitch, Giuseppe A. Veltri, Rozlyn Redd, and Sergio Salvatore, “Arabs in Europe: Arguments for and against Integration,” *Peace and Conflict* 24, no. 4 (2018): 398–406, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000271>.

43 Sammut, Buhagiar, Jovchelovitch, Veltri, Redd, and Salvatore, “Arabs in Europe: Arguments for and against Integration.”

44 Peter O’Brian, *The Muslim Question in Europe: Political Controversies and Public Philosophies* (Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2016).

Advice on Implementing Policies for Accelerating Modernisation

Some argue that creating policies for other continents and cultures is paternalizing or even colonialist. I would make the case, however, that these people are just hunting ghosts from the past. It is definitely the case that Western countries have suppressed local cultures and forced their own worldview upon others during the age of colonisation, but very few people are eager to use the same strategies again. The new method should consist of offering the tools to make a rapid modernisation possible, but not forcing them upon anyone by coercion. In practice this means: making scientific data freely available, make it easier for certain countries to cheaply produce patented medicine, offer educational methodologies that seem to be successful in the West, motivate local industries instead of forcing them to an impossible competition with global competitors, give the local population the chance to habituate to Western values instead of pushing them towards religious fundamentalism by unwanted military interventions (like in Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and Syria).

The beauty of accelerating modernisation as a population policy is exactly this: a population that voluntarily chooses a new way of life and a new way of organising their community is much more stable, more sustainable, and more peaceful than a population that is forced to change by external forces. Decreasing a birth rate in developing countries by convincing the population of the modern alternative, after which they freely choose themselves to have fewer children trumps one-child policies, fertility restrictions and other tyrannical population policies. In the words of Bergaglio:

[F]or birth control to become an active and effective factor demographically, it must be the conscious choice of the couple, while at the same time, it must receive social legitimacy, and finally, contraceptives must be actually available. In addition, the beginning of a change in reproductive practices does not require the presence of one or either of the three preconditions, but the presence of all of them at once.⁴⁵

Conclusion

The human race has achieved an amazing skill in the past few decades, namely thinking about and anticipating on global problems. Intergovernmental institutions as the United Nations, the World Bank and the IPCC, as well as technological innovations as the World Wide Web and the microchip, have made it possible for human beings to reflect upon their own individual position as being part of the greater whole of humankind, living on a beautiful as well as a finite planet earth. We have known for a while now that our level of consumption in combination with a growing population is an alarming recipe for environmental degradation and climate change.

⁴⁵ Bergaglio, "The contemporary illusion: population growth and sustainability."

At the same time, more knowledge is available to us than ever before. For example, we know that in the near future only the continent of Africa will experience a significant population growth. That knowledge, in combination with the insights of modernisation theory, shows us that the best way to prevent more population growth in the coming decades, is to promote and accelerate the modernisation process of the developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa. For European governments it is crucial to formulate and implement proper policies based on that ambition, to improve the quality of life in developing regions, as well as to prevent climate- and environmental disasters.

However, our remarkable ability to think globally should not blind us to regional problems.

However, our remarkable ability to think globally should not blind us to regional problems. European countries are confronted by seriously shrinking birth rates, which has the problematic side-effect of aging populations. Current European governments are attempting to solve this problem by so-called “migration replacement”, a theory that describes the method of reducing aging with migration from developing countries. This theory however ignores all the problems that migration brings, like increased crime, increased governmental spending, cultural tensions and Islamist terrorism. The best way of making replacement migration a viable solution to Europe’s shrinking birth rates should for that reason be sought in modernisation of developing regions, namely in sub-Saharan Africa. That way, immigrants will integrate more smoothly, native European will be more welcoming and cultural tensions become less of a problem.

In conclusion of this essay, I argue that the Population Dilemma, namely the choice of increasing our birth rates in order to prevent aging and decreasing our birth-rates in order curb climate and environmental harm, is not really a dilemma after all. The reason for that is this: a reduction in birth rates is necessary in another region of the earth (namely developing countries in Africa) rather than an increase in birth rates (namely in European countries). Therefore, European governments can formulate policies for both those goals. Creating (1) a strategy to make “migration replacement” work and (2) a strategy to limit the prognosed population explosion on the African continent is, in fact, more cohesive than contradictory: both can be the result of the same ambition of helping underdeveloped regions to modernise and improve.



Reproductive Health Education as Population Policy

Robin Groenewoud

The population problem has many sides to it that have been addressed by different approaches in this edited volume. This essay will focus on reproductive health education as a solution to the overpopulation problem. Specifically, we will look at the questions: Do Western countries have the right to interfere in developing countries to reduce population growth? And to what extent are universalist and cultural relativist theory applicable as legitimisation of this intervention? This moral quandary refers to these different positions of “universalism” and “cultural relativism”. We will look at these positions, and examine to what extent they can be applied to reproductive health education as population policy, from both a theoretical standpoint and practical standpoint.

What is reproductive health and what does it entail? Sexual and reproductive health as it is defined by the World Health Organization, refers to a wide range of education including family planning, education about sexually transmittable diseases, and infertility prevention and management. This education is to prevent poor sexual and reproductive health, which could include complications of pregnancy and childbirth, unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, complications caused by sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual violence.¹

One might question how the overpopulation problem relates to reproductive health education. For many women around the world, it is difficult to regulate how many children they have. This can be a financial, emotional, and physical burden on those women, and can limit their capabilities to manage their future. In many cases, they do not know about the health risks and complications that come with sexual activity and pregnancy.² Additionally, the fact that they do not have the resources to regulate their sexual activity leads to bigger families, therefore influencing the population problem. By educating women and men about possible contraceptives and other reproductive health topics, will help people be autonomous in their decision to have or not have a certain number of children. This could influence the population problem, by reducing birth rates. Especially in developing countries, where these reproductive

1 World Health Organization, “Fact sheets on sustainable development goals: health targets: Sexual and Reproductive Health.” *who.int*, September 4, 2017, <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Life-stages/sexual-and-reproductive-health/publications/2017/fact-sheet-on-the-sdgs-sexual-and-reproductive-health-2017>.

2 United Nations, “International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action.” *UN Population Fund (UNFPA)*, 2014, <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/international-conference-population-and-development-programme-action>, 60.

and sexual health resources are limited, the overall wealth in these countries is lower.³ For this reason, if people have the autonomy to decide whether or not to have children and the number of children they can have, they can decide to what extent they can manage taking care, physically and mentally, of these children. This factor of being able to plan to what extent to have children gives people an autonomy – over their future and over their own bodies – that we might take for granted in the West.

When looking at reproductive health education in comparison to some of the other policy solutions suggested in this edited volume, it is a relatively easy solution. However, reproductive health education in developing countries is not as easy of a solution as it might sound. This is because of a debate surrounding the topic. The question that arises is that of the aforementioned moral quandary of whether or not the West has a right to intervene in developing countries to reduce population growth. The opposing positions are that of “universalism”, which states that there are fundamental rights that universally apply to all human beings, and “cultural relativism”, which claims that there is no such thing as universal fundamental rights.

Where does the debate stem from? The debate about morally questioning intervention in other countries, especially developing countries, stems from a history of Imperialism. Historically speaking, when the West has taken over governance in non-Western countries – which could not defend themselves – this resulted in exploited local resources, oppressed local culture, and forced westernisation on those communities. These forms of oppression were institutionalised and spanned from the 15th century until the 20th century. The West legitimised their oppressive behaviour with the idea of western superiority and their duty to westernise the rest of the world. Additionally, the atrocities of the Second World War raised the question if people’s

The West legitimised their oppressive behaviour with the idea of western superiority and their duty to westernise the rest of the world.

safety can be totally put in countries sovereign hands, with the assumption that they will not abuse their power.⁴ The International Human Rights Treaty that was formulated after the Second World War is based upon univer-

salist ideals, that believe that there are some fundamental rights that should universally apply and is there to protect humans from abuse of power. On the contrary, cultural relativists are sceptical about broad generalisations regarding human beings.

3 United Nations, “International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action,” 21.

4 Elizabeth M. Zechenter, “In the name of culture: Cultural relativism and the abuse of the individual,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 53, No. 3 (Autumn 1997): 319.

Both of these positions further the debate and question which manner is the best way to act. Can we intervene in developing countries? And to what extent can we legitimise it without assuming one culture is better than another?

Universalism

The philosophical theory of universalism assumes that there is a universal moral or ethical framework, and that every human being has a right to this framework being upheld. The realisation of this universal ethical framework can be found in the International Human Rights Treaty (1966). Universalism bases its support of human rights on three different main theories: the theory of natural law, the theory of rationalism, and the theory of positivism.

The theory of natural law was developed by the stoics, and advanced further by Thomas Aquinas.⁵ It assumes that humans have inalienable rights that are provided by Providence or God.⁶ These inalienable rights go beyond the local laws of the *polis*, or in the case of modern societies, the local law of the country.⁷ This is, of course, hard to justify in today's world, because of cultural and religious diversity, which in itself has a long history of conflict and disagreement. Different religions, in particular, often disagree to what extent there is a higher power, and what form this higher power assumes. Correspondingly, if they cannot agree on the existence of a higher power, then the existence of a higher order of law is also put in jeopardy. Consequently, the existence of universal morals and ethical norms based on natural law is questioned.

The theory of rationalism is a similar theory to that of natural law. This theory believes in the human capacity to reason and to think rationally. It replaces the divine origin of the theory of natural law with humanity's capability to rationalise.⁸ It assumes that ideals like human rights stem from our capability to rationalise, and should therefore be based on this.⁹ Cultural relativists critique this theory, because this rationality is, according to them, only a reflection of western ideals and standards. Consequently, it does not do justice to the diversity of the human experience.

Both theories believe that universal human rights exist outside of culture, ideology, or other value systems. The natural law theory assumes that it is based on divine origin, whereas rationalism claims it to be based on the human capacity to rationalise. Therefore, human rights are perceived as a class of rights each individual possesses by virtue of being a human.¹⁰ However, human rights are rights of the last resort, because it is assumed that local states will take care of their citizens, rather

5 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 320.

6 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 320.

7 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 320.

8 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 321.

9 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 321.

10 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 321.

than exploiting them. Thus, human rights are the last resort if the need arises to protect individuals.¹¹ Both theories additionally assume that the extra-cultural is meant to challenge and change existing norms, practices, institutions and to subvert oppressive customs, as expresses it.¹²

The theory of positivism indicates that the justification of human rights is based on acceptance and ratification of said human rights.¹³ This concept of acceptance and ratification is physically embodied by international treaties and agreements. Both Western and non-Western countries have signed these treaties and agreements,

Both theories believe that universal human rights exist outside of culture, ideology, or other value systems.

thereby underlining their acceptance, according to positivists. They additionally presuppose that the source of human rights is that of international laws rather than individual cultures.¹⁴ Thereby also justifying it on an international level, and taking away the domestic laws' power to

withdraw human rights.¹⁵ However cultural relativists believe the legal justification is primarily for the people living in modern nation-states, it fails to justify universal rights for indigenous peoples who were forced into modern nation-states,¹⁶ and therefore never actively accepted any treaties, agreements, et cetera.

All three of the different universalist theories on which human rights are based have multiple points that are challenged. These points that have been critiqued are the basis of the three differing universalist theories and are therefore vital for their legitimisation of human rights. Therefore, the fact that universalists cannot refute these counter-arguments, does not bode well for their position in the debate.

Cultural Relativism

In contrast to universalists, cultural relativists are sceptical of broad generalisations about human beings, and rather emphasise human diversity.¹⁷ They do not believe in extra-cultural standards by which specific cultures can be judged. Consequently, we should accept and tolerate all practices. The full realisation of cultural relativism is therefore quite problematic. Some scholars call it "intellectually irresponsible" to fully realise cultural relativism.¹⁸ If we can never judge others, we can also not hold them

11 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 321.

12 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 321.

13 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 321.

14 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 321.

15 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 321.

16 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 321.

17 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 324.

18 Zechenter, "In the name of culture," 324.

accountable for their actions. Being held accountable is, historically speaking, one of the most important devices to ensure that mistakes from the past are not repeated. Examples like the National Socialist Party's rise to power in Germany and the corresponding genocide, are often enough to make people question the full realisation of cultural relativism.

The biggest point of critique of cultural relativism is that its full realisation is not realistic and may even be ethically questionable. So, if a theory cannot be applied in its totality is there not a thing fundamentally wrong with the theory itself? Well, this question – even though you might not have asked it to this extent – makes one question the validity of the cultural relativist theory.

Applied to Reproductive Health Education

What would these theories look like applied to the actual problem we are discussing in this essay? The practical application of universalism assumes universal human rights, which therefore legitimises an intervention in developing countries, to ensure that these fundamental human rights are being upheld. However, if we look at this scenario realistically, local people from the developing countries will most likely be severely sceptical of Westerners intervening in their country. Not only will it be unlikely that they accept the intervention of the West, may it be for the fear of losing sovereignty or the overall fear of a repeating an imperialistic era, but additionally they might be hostile towards the intervention. This hostility is based upon the historical background of institutionalised oppression, which is still in the process of being dismantled in contemporary societies. With this history of institutionalised oppression in mind, the undermining of local culture by way of Western intervention, will most likely not be accepted. Consequently, educating people about reproductive health in a community that is not accepting of you being there, will be extremely hard. This naturally makes the women and men that are supposed to be educated more sceptical, and maybe even opposed to education. For, why would you accept help from someone who has come to invade your community? Even if the West legitimises their presence with the intent of educating people to help themselves, with their historic background they are unlikely to be welcomed with open arms.

The application of cultural relativism to reproductive health education would mean that there is no way to legitimise the western intervention in developing countries. This is because of the fact that cultural relativists believe that there are no such things as fundamental human rights. Consequently, there is no universal ethical framework that defines what is good or bad. Accordingly, if there is no ethical framework, one cannot legitimise judging other cultures and rituals. This means one cannot legitimise intervening in another culture, even based upon the premise of education, because one assumes that what one is educating is superior to local knowledge. Therefore, cultural relativism would automatically make it impossible to use reproductive health education, as a population policy. In reality, the application of

cultural relativism on population policy, in general, is not possible. For the full realisation of cultural relativism means that one cannot judge others in any form. Therefore, our overpopulation problem cannot be weighed at all, either as good or bad. In particular, the distinction that developing countries have a higher birth rate, and should therefore reduce it, is problematic, because it would not be our place to judge them or criticise their way of living.

Conclusion

Both theories in the debate regarding reproductive health education in developing countries by the West have immense problems in the practical application. Even though both theories have a solid background in their theoretical argumentation, the practical application of those theories does not seem to be a viable option. In reality, if we apply cultural relativism to its full extent, it will make the debate redundant,

Consequently, there is no universal ethical framework that defines what is good or bad.

because it assumes an impossibility of judgment. It therefore takes away the legitimisation of the intervention. When we realistically look at the application of universalism, it would also be immensely problematic, because of the corresponding connotation of superiority of Western culture. Therefore, I propose a combination of the two theories, in order for us

to be able to apply it practically. The cultural relativist assumption of leaving one's judgment behind is a good approach in combination with the universalist idea of helping developing countries. This of course is contractionary in a theoretical sense. However, in practical applications, we do not have to apply a theory to its fullest extent. Therefore, I suggest taking the "best parts" of both theories and combining them for a practical application so that we can still use reproductive health education as a population policy. For by themselves the theories do not seem to be strong enough to justify educating people in developing countries about reproductive health.

The approach I suggest is that Western education is taught to local experts in their fields, after which they can decide in what way this knowledge is appropriate to be taught to the local community. This teaching can be done in collaboration with Western experts, but it takes away the hostility of a Western invasion, because of the collaboration. Consequently, there is also an automatic appreciation of local culture, which then cannot be undermined, because the community itself is deciding in what way to use the resources provided to them by the West. In that respect, it gives those communities the power and autonomy in their respective countries, contrary to the historic events that have taken place.

In conclusion, the central question referring to what extent universalism and cultural relativism are applicable to legitimise a sexual health education intervention of the West in developing countries to reduce population growth has been investigated. In summary, both theories are not applicable in their fullest state and if they

were to be applied that would bring some issues. Therefore, my solution is to create a combination of the two theories, with the purpose of circumventing their respective problems. In this way, we compromise them, thereby applying the benefits of both theories in practice, to ensure that we do not repeat history.



Do We Have the Duty to Have Just One Child, Concerning Future Generations?

Hannah Televi Ayawa Holtz

According to the “ $I = P \times A \times T$ ” formula, human impact on the environment is the product of complex linkage between three basic factors: population, affluence and technology.¹ Current debates surrounding climate justice have largely focused on just the latter two factors. They are often stressing that our lifestyle puts pressure on the environment, because we use the world in the wrong way: too much consumption, too much carbon and too much waste (A). Additionally, we encourage investment in environmental technologies (T). Yet, the increasing population (P) puts pressure on the environment too. As a matter of fact, the world population increased from 1 billion in the 19th century to 7.7 billion today.² A growing population and a finite world are incompatible, considering humans already appropriate 10-55 percent of terrestrial photosynthesis products.³ We are simply with too many people.

Indeed, the omission of factor P is to be expected when recalling the history of the 20th century, for instance during the Third Reich. Attempts to control population growth, be it for environmental or non-environmental reasons, were often seen as an attack on human rights. Discussing the connection between environmental problems and factor P is challenged by the belief that procreation is viewed as a private act and is politically and morally off-limits. However, some philosophers, including Sarah Conly and Anca Gheaus, see the solution in having fewer children as one answer to environmental degradation. Procreation is a fundamental right and receives protection in national and international legislations.⁴ This raises questions about the value of human individuals and the future of the planet. Therefore, one may ask whether we have a duty to have fewer children, concerning future generations.

First, I want to examine why having children is considered as a fundamental right and whether it is possible to recognise this right, while at the same time sustain the environment by reducing the population. In order to answer the question, I will investigate the fundamental right of having children, and how we should address this right nowadays concerning environmental issues. Next, I will introduce the article

1 Erik Magnusson, “One child: Do we have a right to more?,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 15 (June 2016): 477-480.

2 Max Roser, Hannah Ritchie, and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, “World Population Growth,” *OurWorldInData.org*, 2013, <https://ourworldindata.org/world-population-growth>.

3 Stuart Rojstaczer, Shanon Sterling, and Nathan Moore, “Human appropriation of photosynthesis products,” *American Association for the Advancement of Science* 294, no. 5551 (December 2001): 2549-52.

4 Anca Gheaus, “The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 24, no. 4 (2016): 487-508; Sarah Conly, “The Right to Procreation: Merits and Limits,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2005): 105-115.

“The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations” by Anca Gheaus. Subsequently, I will outline the arguments of Sarah Conly who claims that government restrictions like one-child policy do not violate the right to have children. Lastly, I will conclude to what extent we have a duty to have fewer children.

Fundamental Interest in Parenting and the Right to Have Children

In this section, I will explain why individuals have a fundamental interest in parenting and what this implies for a right to procreate.

People have children because having families is a natural and fundamental unit of society. Having children is a value of life, while for others remaining childless is equally essential. There are three key purposes of having children: genetic reproduction, fulfilling interest in creating a familial relationship, and offering offspring equal treatment in matters of procreation.⁵ However, there is an obligation for parents to support their children to become morally good people and live a decent life.⁶ In general, according to biologist Lonie Aarssen, one can agree with the fact that there is a desire to have children in the future and a desire to have pleasure, which derives directly from “real time parenthood per se”.⁷ Furthermore, the relationship one builds their child is unique and not comparable with the relationship to a friend or partner.⁸ Besides that, the complexity of the decision parents face, plays an important role in the motivation to have or not to have children. Before people become parents, they need to decide whether they want to bring up children, to adopt, or may choose to be childless. There are a lot of “preparental” choices to consider. Those “preparental” choices have become more complicated nowadays.⁹ There are a lot of things one cannot know until one actually has children, just as one cannot know what a childless life is until one commits to being childless. The unknowability of the outcomes of a decision to have a child, or not, makes it difficult to predict how the outcome of the decision will feel. Next to the decisions that couples make to have a child or not, the population policy that a government implements is also a factor. Parents and policymakers have always faced choices about raising children. Consequently, there is a matter of dispute about who makes choices about how many children should be born into the next generation.

Reproductive Rights Are Human Rights

5 Conly, “The Right to Procreation: Merits and Limits,” 39.

6 Anca Gheaus, “The Ethics of Parenthood by Norvin Richards,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 28, no. 4 (2011): 419.

7 Christiane Overall, *Why Have Children? The ethical debate* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2012), 3-4.

8 Gheaus, “The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations,” 495.

9 Onara O’Neill, and Willian Ruddick, *Having children. Philosophical and Legal Reflections of Parenthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 8-13.

Now I will look at having children from a moral rights-based approach, because rights are valued as important by most of us.

The right to have children was formulated in the International Conference on Human Rights in Tehran (1968) by the United Nations, which reflects the regarded importance. It states that “[t]he opportunity to decide the number and spacing of their children is a basic human right of all individuals.”¹⁰ In other words, the human

right to procreate is the right to decide whether, when and how many children one wants. Human rights are valid rights for everybody, and include duties for governments to perform actions and to provides goods.¹¹ However, a human right is a liberty a government cannot touch.¹²

Procreation is a fundamental right and receives protection in national and international legislations.

It also involves the obligation not to limit the freedom of others to want children and the freedom of their children to procreate. This right to procreate and to form a family is taken for granted in every society. Yet the public interest of controlling population growth still matters. For instance, the author Anca Gheaus, whose arguments I will present in the next section, demonstrates that the right to have children results in the duty of having fewer children in order to protect this right.

The Right to Parent

In this section, I will discuss the arguments of the philosopher Anca Gheaus presented in her article “The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations”, followed by some brief objections.

In the article “The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations”, Anca Gheaus defines fundamental rights concerning people and children who are living at the moment. Her arguments lead to the conclusion that we have to restrict the fertility rate so that distant future generations can have adequate lives. She states that “some people doubt that there can be a theory of justice towards distant future generations because the vast majority of the future generations’ members do not yet exist and may never exist.”¹³ Therefore, her theory only concerns children who are living right now. It is her way to overcome the non-identity problem, because it is difficult to apply a theory to children who may never exist. She therefore expresses her theory as fundamental rights, because in her theory the obligation that the contemporary generation has, is addressed to their existing children. Thus, she claims that each

10 “Reproductive Rights,” United Nations, accessed December 23, 2020, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/theme/rights/>.

11 O’Neill and Ruddick, *Having children. Philosophical and Legal Reflections of Parenthood*, 14.

12 Conly, “The Right to Procreation: Merits and Limits,” 107-108.

13 Gheaus, “The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations,” 4.

adult has an obligation for their children to have the same adequate life prospects and those children have the same obligation toward their children.¹⁴ The author argues as follows:

P1: Each child has a right, against all, to adequate life prospects.

P2: For each child who has the potential, as an adult, to be an adequate parent, adequate life prospects require enough resources to justly raise children.¹⁵

These premises express that every child has the right to adequate life prospects. Since she does not specify what she means exactly by “adequate”, one may assume that everyone deserves some necessities in order to have a fulfilled life. So, having children is a basic right, because without having this right a lot of people would not have a fulfilling life, according to Gheaus.

The second premise claims that the right to procreate is qualified by the requirement that the prospective child will be likely to have a life worth living. In this way, the first premise is included in the second premise. In other words, each child has a right to “justly raise” children and these children have the same right to justly raise children and so on. “Justly” raising children means raising them with their necessities for adequate life prospects satisfied, including environmental resources like clean air, clean water, and a source of energy. In general, one can say that people have an adequate life if their rights are not being violated.¹⁶ Therefore, the current existing parents have a duty to currently existing children to support human life at the “level of adequacy”.¹⁷ From this follows that existing parents have a duty to create a sustainable world in order to address the needs of the next generations and all offspring. This implies an obligation to have fewer children, because an increasing population is one factor of human impact on the environment.

After this, the author presents some empirical facts in support of her theory. Firstly, she claims that people already procreate at a rate so high that it is taking away their right to have children. Then, she argues that some societies have arrived at the point that they force some members of the subsequent generation to choose between “(a) to thwart their fundamental interest in parenting” or “(b) engage in illegitimate parenting.”¹⁸ In short, Gheaus demonstrates that the right to have children is consequently an obligation of having fewer children, to preserve this right for distant future generations.

14 Gheaus, “The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations,” 2-4.

15 Gheaus, “The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations,” 2.

16 Gheaus, “The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations,” 8.

17 Gheaus, “The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations,” 6.

18 Gheaus, “The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations,” 15.

Implications

It seems like her theory is unfair, because parents in Europe can offer their children enough resources and can therefore give their child the opportunity to have children. Meanwhile, a parent in sub-Saharan Africa, where the poverty rate is about 41 percent, is unable to provide their children with enough resources.¹⁹

Governmental Limits on Reproduction May Be Morally Acceptable

I have shown in the previous section, with the arguments by Gheaus, that there is a moral duty to procreate less to maintain the right to have children. In what follows, I want to demonstrate that governmental limitations on reproduction may be morally acceptable by outlining Sarah Conly's thesis that our right to procreate does not legitimate us to create as many children as we want. To do so, I describe Conly's arguments, before giving some brief reflections.

Conly claims that we do not have a moral right to have more than one child per couple. Hence, she argues for a one-child policy as a fertility reducing intervention. Furthermore, she sees the widespread belief that people's procreative rights would be violated by government intervention as a serious challenge, because she is convinced that government interventions do not violate procreative rights. Moreover, she acknowledges that there is a right to procreate and asks, "does it follow from this that there is a right to have as many children as you want?"²⁰ In order to answer the question, she compares it with the right to marry. This is a human right, but it is restricted to marrying only one person at a time. The fundamental right to something does not mean that this right is limitless.

Conly does agree that every individual has a right to a family and that the family unit is protected by the declaration of human rights. Likewise, she argues that one can have a family with only a limited number of children, considering that the urge to procreate can

The fundamental right to something does not mean that this right is limitless.

be satisfied without producing as many children as possible. Furthermore, she states that rights reflect interests which are related to the values I discussed in the section above. She asks the following question: "in what does our greater interest lie, in the ability to procreate as often as we want, or in the goods that such procreation might prevent access to?"²¹ According to her, procreation rights must be based either on

19 Patel Nirav, "Figure of the week: Understanding poverty in Africa," Brookings, 2018.

20 Conly, "The Right to Procreation: Merits and Limits," 106.

21 Conly, "The Right to Procreation: Merits and Limits," 107.

one's basic interests or on bodily integrity. She questions if people have a fundamental interest in having more than one child, seeing as many childless couples have decent lives without children, therefore there is no ground for even one child.²²

Conly therefore concludes that the government is justified in restricting its citizens to one child per couple considering that overpopulation is a serious problem. She is not averse to mandatory restrictions, but her discussion is led by voluntary

However, coercion is only legitimate in the last instance, after attempts to reduce the reproduction rate are exhausted through education, accessibility of contraception, and the use of positive reinforcement.

compliance.²³ Therefore, she finds that voluntary efforts are not sufficient to achieve the goal of limiting reproduction to one child, since overpopulation is only one factor in environmental issues. She also pays attention to mild forms of government enforcement, like education, contraception and financial support

which had proved to be effective.²⁴ Nonetheless, procreative government policies are necessary to reduce the reproduction rate. However, coercion is only legitimate in the last instance, after attempts to reduce the reproduction rate are exhausted through education, accessibility of contraception, and the use of positive reinforcement.²⁵ It seems that Conly respects liberal rights although she takes environmental problems to justify their restrictions. It is as if she is going alongside with Micheal Bayles, who considers reproductive policies as coercive but at the same time, he claims that they might be legitimate at the last instance.²⁶

Implications

All in all, Conly proposed convincing arguments, but at some points she could offer a more delicate conclusion. Considering that procreation ethics are a sensitive subject and, as she acknowledged, people worry that their procreative rights might be violated by government intervention. Furthermore, an implementation of restrictions does limit freedom of human individuals even though those restrictions reflect their interests.

Moreover, Erik Magnusson offers a critique in his review, saying "it is one thing to argue that our environmental obligations require us to limit our procrea-

22 Conly, "The Right to Procreation: Merits and Limits," 107-108.

23 Conly, "The Right to Procreation: Merits and Limits," 105.

24 Travis Rieder, "One Child: Do We Have a Right to More? By Sarah Conly," *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 26, no. 2 (June 2016): E-29-E-34.

25 Rieder "One Child: Do We Have a Right to More? By Sarah Conly."

26 O'Neill and Ruddick, *Having children Philosophical and Legal Reflections of Parenthood*, 34-35.

tive activity and another thing to argue that these obligations weigh in favour of a very specific limit of one child per couple”.²⁷ Indeed, we should limit our population growth due to the impact that each additional human being has on the environment. However, let’s take the example of the impact of a child in sub-Saharan Africa where the average consumption per person is a fraction compared to the consumption in the West.²⁸ Therefore, it is not the same to create a child in a developed society where the environmental impact is much higher. It would be pointless to implement a procreation limit of one child in a country with a consumer-level like in sub-Saharan Africa. This shows that the issue is different in undeveloped regions. Furthermore, the fertility rate in developed regions like Europe is rather declining than decreasing. For this reason, reproduction limits are perhaps not appropriate in those contexts.

Conclusion

To conclude, I have explained that individuals have a fundamental interest in parenting because family is a “fundamental and natural unit of society” which is protected by law. Secondly, having children is regarded as necessary for a fulfilling life, although some people may commit to be childless and value other things in life from which they can flourish. Then, by having a look from the rights-based approach we have gained the insight that the human right to procreate is the opportunity to decide when and how many children one wants. Anca Gheaus acknowledges this right and demonstrates that the right implies an obligation of having fewer children to maintain this right for distant future generations. This is supported by the arguments of Sarah Conly, who claims that our right to procreate does not legitimate us to create as many children as we want. Governmental limitations on reproduction may therefore be morally acceptable.

I think the arguments of both authors are convincing and provide us with sufficient understanding of one solution to lower the pressure on the environment due to overpopulation. As a matter of fact, by procreating less we actually respect the right to procreate, instead of having as many children as we do or do not want. Insofar as I do not think that it is in people’s interest to deprive a future generation the opportunity to procreate. With that being said, I personally think that we do have a duty to have fewer children, concerning future generations. Nevertheless, I do not see a reason to limit procreation to one child per couple. Neither that it justifies implementing procreation limitations. Rather, I would suggest that people acknowledge their responsibility.

27 Magnusson, “One child: Do we have a right to more?”, 245.

28 Antonio Castello, Adam Kendall, Mikhail Nikomarov, and Tarryn Swemmer, “Powering Africa,” *Mc Kinsey and Company*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/electric-power-and-natural-gas/our-insights/powering-africa>.



Anti-natalism, Non-identity and Smyth's Challenge

Jonas Müller

As we have seen, many philosophers in population ethics argue that we have a duty to limit our procreation. There is even a view that we have a duty not to procreate at all. Anti-natalism is the philosophical position that humans should abstain from procreation. A prominent contemporary proponent of this position is the philosopher David Benatar. In his book *Better Never to Have Been*, he argues that having children will always harm them. We should therefore refrain from bringing children into this world. It is a controversial view, but that is exactly why it is necessary to discuss this position. I will therefore investigate the following question: Is it at all morally justifiable to procreate? More specifically, I will investigate whether Benatar's anti-natalism can respond to the problem of non-identity and Smyth's challenge.

I shall begin by explaining Benatar's asymmetry argument. Then I will consider two challenges to Benatar's position. Firstly, I will respond to an objection related to the problem of non-identity. Secondly, I will respond to Smyth's challenge that ethics should solve the practicality problem and the authority problem. I propose two criteria to solve both problems.

Benatar's Anti-natalism

When is bringing someone into existence wrong? Benatar argues that a person is harmed by being brought into existence if never existing is preferable. If existing is preferable to never existing, then coming into existence is not a harm. Now we must ask: "When is coming into existence a harm?" Benatar asserts that coming into existence is always a harm. Procreation is, therefore, always wrong.¹ What is his argument in favour of this conclusion?

Let us first make an important distinction, namely the difference between lives worth starting and lives worth continuing. Benatar argues that a life worth starting, which he calls the "future-life sense", is distinct from a life worth continuing, which he calls the "present-life sense". Whether a life is worth continuing is a judgement about an already existing person. Likewise, whether a life is worth starting at all is a judgement about a potential but non-existent person. A problem arises when one confuses the present-life sense and the future-life sense, because it may then be said that a life is worth starting when it would be worth continuing. Benatar holds that this view is mistaken, because our threshold for deciding if a life is worth continuing is much higher than for deciding if a life is worth starting. If, for instance, an existing

¹ David Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 28.

person loses a limb, we would likely not yet say that their life is no longer worth living. However, if a person came into existence missing a limb, we would be more eager to say that their life is not worth starting.²

Having made that distinction clear, we can now move on to Benatar's main argument, which he calls the asymmetry of pleasure and pain. If we were to consider pain and pleasure as representations of harms and benefits, it would be uncontroversial to assert that the presence of pain is a bad thing, while the presence of pleasure is a good thing. There is, however, an asymmetry in the absence of pain and pleasure. Benatar argues that the absence of pain is good, even if there is no one to experience its absence, while the absence of pleasure is only bad when someone is deprived of that pleasure.³ It should also be mentioned that Benatar argues that this asymmetry holds in other systems which are not based on pain and pleasure. Pain and pleasure are merely possible and plausible quantifications of harms and benefits.

This may seem difficult to accept, but according to Benatar his asymmetry has a lot of explanatory power. Firstly, it explains why there is an apparent duty not to bring suffering people into existence, while there is no duty to bring happy people into existence. There is a widespread intuition that we should avoid bringing people into existence who will suffer greatly. This supports the idea that the absence of pain is good, even if there is no one to experience it. At the same time, we do not think that we have a duty to bring somebody into existence if their life is going to be filled with pleasure. This supports the idea that the absence of pleasure is not bad when there is no one to experience it.⁴

Secondly, it explains what reasons people tend to give for having or not having children. Whereas we often cite a child's potential suffering as a reason not to have that child, we do not often cite a child's potential happiness as a reason to bring that child into existence. These reasons do not hold if the asymmetry is incorrect. If, for instance, it is not the case that the absence of pain is a good thing even if there is no one to experience it, then avoiding suffering could not be a reason not to bring a child into existence. However, we do think that avoiding pain is a sound reason not to have a child. This again implies the asymmetry.⁵

Thirdly, we can regret bringing a person into existence for the sake of that person, but we cannot regret not bringing a person into existence for the sake of that person. It is true that we can regret not having as well as having children. However, when we regret not having children, we do so not for the sake of the child. We may regret missing the experience of being a parent, but not the pleasure the child could have had. This implies that the absence of pleasure is not bad when nobody is deprived of pleasure.⁶

2 Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*, 22-23.

3 Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*, 30.

4 Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*, 32.

5 Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*, 34.

6 Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*, 34-35.

Lastly, the asymmetry explains our attitude towards potential pain and pleasure in uninhabited places in the world. We do not mourn for the pleasures that potential sentient beings on Mars could have had. Yet, if there had been sentient life on Mars, we would have regretted their suffering. Again, this implies that the absence of pleasure is not a bad thing if there is nobody to experience it.⁷

Of course, that these four intuitions are widely held does not yet mean that they are correct. Benatar admits this, but claims that because these intuitions are widely held, the asymmetry of pleasure and pain should in theory also be widely accepted.⁸ If we were to reject the asymmetry, we should also have to reject these intuitions.

We may now compare a scenario in which X exists to a scenario in which X never exists using the asymmetry. The presence of a harm, such as pain, is bad. However, the absence of a harm, such as pain, is good, even if there is no one to experience it. In existence there is a presence of pain, which is bad. In never existing, there is only the absence of pain, which is good. In this comparison, never existing is thus preferable. Furthermore, in existence there is the presence of pleasure. This we can qualify as a good thing. In non-existence, there is only absence of pleasure. If the asymmetry holds, then the absence of pleasure is not bad if there is nobody who is deprived of pleasure. In this comparison, existence is not preferable to never existing.⁹ By bringing a person into existence, we are thus harming them. Therefore, Benatar concludes, it is always wrong to bring children into existence.

In existence there is a presence of pain, which is bad. In never existing, there is only the absence of pain, which is good.

If the asymmetry holds, then the absence of pleasure is not bad if there is nobody who is deprived of pleasure. In this comparison, existence is not preferable to never existing.⁹ By bringing a person into existence, we are thus harming them. Therefore, Benatar concludes, it is always wrong to bring children into existence.

It is controversial to contend that the presence of pleasure is not an advantage over the absence of pleasure. It is certainly intuitively plausible that the presence of pleasure is preferable over the absence of pleasure. Benatar argues that this is not the case, and he offers an analogy to demonstrate this. Person S often gets sick, but luckily can recover from his illness quickly. It is bad that S gets sick so often, but it is good that he has the ability of quick recovery. Meanwhile, H never gets sick, but is not able to recover quickly. It is obviously a good thing that H always stays healthy, but H is not deprived of anything by not being able to heal quickly. Therefore, while it is good that S has the capacity to heal, H is not worse off.¹⁰

The Non-identity Problem

An intuitive objection to this argument and controversial conclusion is related to the problem of non-identity. In this case, the problem lies in comparing existence and

⁷ Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*, 35.

⁸ Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*, 36.

⁹ Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*, 40-41.

¹⁰ Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*, 42.

non-existence. One might argue that non-existence is by its very definition nothing, and non-existence is thus strictly speaking not a state in which one can be. We take to be harmed to mean to be worse off. To determine whether somebody is harmed (that is to say, worse off) in a certain state, we must compare that state to an alternate state. Therefore, to know if one is harmed by coming into existence, we must compare it to the alternate state of non-existence. However, non-existence is nothing, and cannot properly be called a state in which one can be. This means that there is no alternate state to compare coming into existence to. Coming into existence can thus never be a harm.¹¹ Let us call this the “non-identity view” for convenience.

First, allow me to give an example to show that we, at least intuitively, agree that we can compare existence to non-existence. For one, we do it all the time in those cases

There is no alternate state to compare coming into existence to. Coming into existence can thus never be a harm.

where we consider whether a life is worth starting. We may, for instance, judge that a potential child is better off not existing at all, if it would have suffered a great deal by existing. If one holds that non-existence cannot be compared to existence, then one must admit that

these judgements are erroneous. This is not to say that one is wrong by arguing that non-existence cannot be compared to existence in any sensible way. Rather, it points out that accepting that view would lead to some counter-intuitive consequences.

Let us consider another example to demonstrate the problematic implications of accepting the non-identity view. Imagine a person who has the magical ability to conjure a human baby into existence. This can only be done, however, by creating the child in a kettle filled to the brim with boiling water. The child will surely suffer an agonizing death. If one holds that, because non-existence is nothing, bringing a child into existence can never be a harm, one must also admit that the case of the human baby conjured into existence is perfectly permissible. Yes, it is true that you kill a child. Yet the alternative is non-existence, which is no state at all and cannot be preferable to the boiling water. This is of course dubious. To be clear, this does not mean that the non-identity objection is incorrect, but it shows that if one adheres to it strictly, it leads to some extremely undesirable conclusions.

Benatar offers us a solution to this problem by referring to an argument put forth by Joel Feinberg.¹² Feinberg argues that when, for example, someone claims to be better off dead, he is not making a claim that there is a metaphysical realm of non-existence. Instead, that person is simply comparing two states of affairs, one in which they

11 Joel Feinberg, “Wrongful Life and the Counterfactual Element in Harming,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 4, no. 1 (Autumn 1986): 158, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052500000467>.

12 Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*, 21-22.

do exist and another in which they do not exist.¹³ If we judge a life to be not worth starting, we say that the possible state of affairs in which that person does not exist is preferable to the possible state of affairs in which that person does exist.

Existential Grounding

There is a more fundamental objection to be made against Benatar's position. It is less concentrated on the internal logic of Benatar's argument, but more on the way Benatar argues for his position. Let us consider Nicholas Smyth's argument. His main problem with anti-natalism (and more broadly, populational ethics) is how deeply impersonal it is. In ethics, we may distinguish several questions, such as "Which actions promote the most valuable outcomes?" and "Which actions should I take?" Although similar, these questions are simply not identical, and by answering the first, one has not yet answered the second.¹⁴ The anti-natalist, or more specifically the "Benetarian" anti-natalist, might point out that they have found an answer to the first question. This does not mean, however, that the anti-natalist has actually answered the first question.

Smyth discerns two problems for ethics: the practicality problem and the authority problem. The practicality problem can be best understood by looking at the previous paragraph. Simply put, it is the question of how objective moral considerations translate into subjective intentions. The authority problem is the question why certain moral considerations should be preferred over other considerations.¹⁵ We may ask for instance: why should the objective judgement that stealing is wrong trump my personal and practical judgement that I should steal this loaf of bread to feed my family? Smyth argues that a philosopher working on ethics must address these problems.¹⁶

Smyth proposes his concept of "existential grounding" as a way of answering the practicality problem. Imagine a person at the end of their life reflecting on an experience and asking if this experience made life worth living. If the answer is yes, then that experience is existentially grounding. Smyth offers an example of a woman cooking a vinegar-chicken recipe. This experience may be a treasured memory for that woman, and it cannot easily be quantified in Benatar's hedonistic categories. Her experience may seem mundane to us, but that is exactly the point. Although the woman can share it, it is ultimately only important to her. An experience that is existentially grounding is meant to justify one's life to oneself and not to another.¹⁷

13 Feinberg, "Wrongful Life," 158-159.

14 Nicholas Smyth, "What Is the Question to which Anti-Natalism Is the Answer?" *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice: An International Forum* 23, no. 1 (February 2020): 71-72, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-020-10070-7>.

15 Smyth, "What Is the Question to which Anti-Natalism Is the Answer?" 72-75.

16 Smyth, "What Is the Question to which Anti-Natalism Is the Answer?" 73.

17 Smyth, "What Is the Question to which Anti-Natalism Is the Answer?" 81-82.

Procreation is also existentially grounding. Having children is seen by many as giving a sense of meaning and purpose to their life. As Smyth notices, this is often ignored in procreative ethics.¹⁸ Furthermore, the concept of existential grounding is not meant to be an argument in favour of procreation. It is just meant to show that the gap between what ethicists argue is the best possible outcome and what I should do is not easily bridged.¹⁹ So instead of merely answering questions that nobody is asking, like "Is it at all morally justifiable to procreate?", procreative ethics should engage with the practical question "Should I have children?"

One might argue that Smyth's article lacks rigorous arguments and cannot be considered a serious challenge to any positions in procreative ethics. Smyth's article is, however, very relevant to the debate. If we were to ask parents why they chose to have children, none of them would answer that it was to maximise pleasure and to reduce

Nobody can convince a person who truly believes that strangling results in existentially grounding, that they should no longer strangle.

pain. Philosophers who are active in procreative ethics do indeed tend to view having children in such an abstract way. However, people ultimately do not look at the world in this manner. Of course, harms and benefits and pain and

pleasure certainly play important parts in people's lives, but Smyth's concept of existential grounding comes closer to how most of us actually value our lives. Therefore, anti-natalists must engage with the personal and sentimental considerations that people might have for having children. The anti-natalist must attempt to answer Smyth's challenge.

I propose two criteria that must be met for an ethical position to be practically relevant and authoritative. Firstly, the ethical position must rest on arguments. These arguments have the potential to force us to accept that the moral judgement must overrule our personal consideration. If one accepts the arguments, then one is forced to accept that the moral judgement trumps the personal consideration. The ethical position then becomes authoritative.

Denying that arguments are that which forces the moral judgements to outweigh personal considerations implies some undesirable consequences. Consider the following analogy. There is a difference between what really exists and what I believe to exist. If I do not know of the existence of a chair in this room, then under normal conditions I do not believe that there is a chair in this room. Now somebody attempts to demonstrate the existence of the chair with all the arguments imaginable. Imagine that I deny that there is a chair, although I agree with all the arguments. I simply do not see why the arguments for its existence outweigh my believe that there is no chair. In that case, it would be quite justified to ignore my personal consideration that the chair does not exist.

18 Smyth, "What Is the Question to which Anti-Natalism Is the Answer?" 82-83.

19 Smyth, "What Is the Question to which Anti-Natalism Is the Answer?" 84.

Similarly, it would be quite frustrating if I gave every possible argument to support my claim that strangling an innocent person is wrong, but the person I am debating simply denies that this is the case, because it is existentially grounding to strangle people. Although the person agrees with all the arguments, they will not accept that they should stop killing people. We hit ethical bedrock. Nobody can convince a person who truly believes that strangling results in existentially grounding, that they should no longer strangle. Smyth might of course bite the bullet and argue that arguments do not make a theory authoritative.

Secondly, the ethical position must appeal to emotion. This is meant to make the ethical position practically relevant and bridge the gap between what actions promote the most valuable outcomes and what I should do. This appeal to emotion does not necessarily add to the validity of the arguments. Apparently, Smyth accepts this criterium. Smyth points to Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation* as an example of ethics done right. Singer's frank discussion of the suffering of animals spoke to people's practical experience, because it inspired many people to become advocates for animal rights.²⁰

Anti-natalism meets these criteria. It cannot be denied that Benatar has arguments to support his position. They have the potential to force us to accept that the moral judgement that we should not procreate outweighs our personal consideration of wanting to procreate. Whether or not somebody agrees with them is at this point irrelevant. That Benatar's argument also appeals to emotion may be less clear at this point. One would, however, be mistaken to deny this. Anti-natalism is eminently practical. It is uncontroversial to claim that most people are concerned with the suffering of their fellow humans. Anti-natalism is the most effective solution for that problem. Benatar puts it strikingly. We play a sort of "Russian Roulette" by procreating, in which our children pay the price. If the asymmetry is correct, then the gun is fully loaded.²¹

Conclusion

After explaining Benatar's asymmetry argument, I considered two challenges to his position. The first is related to the non-identity problem. Since non-existence is nothing, it cannot be compared in any sensible way to existence. This can be countered by understanding the non-existence and existence of a person as two different possible worlds. The second is the argument put forth by Smyth. He counters that anti-natalists need to solve the problems of practicality and authority first. I therefore proposed two criteria to resolve these problems. It has thus been shown that Benatar's anti-natalism can answer the problem related to non-identity and Smyth's challenge. It is indeed better never to have been.

20 Smyth, "What Is the Question to which Anti-Natalism Is the Answer?" 79.

21 David Benatar, "Still Better Never to Have Been: A Reply to (More of) My Critics," *The Journal of Ethics* 17, no 1-2 (June 2013): 124.

DE ZAAIER



„...dan maar beneden de twintigste breedtegraad...”

A Challenge to the Western Immortal's Refusal to Die

Joris van der Meere

There seems to be an agreement that the current discourse in population growth is unsustainable. This population problem is mostly viewed as a natalistic problem. It is seen as an issue that needs to be handled by educating people on fertility rates and safe intercourse, and economically discouraging large families. This line of thinking is simple: if people have smaller families, the population of a country will decline. However, if we want to have a serious debate around population issues, there is a problem which is rooted much deeper in our culture, and in our thinking.

To broaden the spectrum on this problem, we must also look at reversing the idea of the population problem. Do people live for too long? Have we, as a society exchanged quality of life for quantity of life? The everlasting process of the modern human to postpone death is a serious contribution of the population problem. In this essay, I will consider the morality of this issue. We must therefore identify the factors which contribute to the modern idea that more life equals a better life.

To illustrate these ideas, let us look at a – graphic – scene from the movie *Midsommar*, directed by Ari Aster. In this horror/drama movie, Dani Ardor (played by Florence Pugh) and her peers get invited by a Swedish exchange student to visit his community in Sweden: the Hårga. This community has a non-consumerist outlook on life and a high regard for nature. The Hårga apply a multitude of traditions which honour fertility, death, and the overall “circle of life”. This community knows a ritual, where elders who turn 72 commit a spiritual suicide, to make “space” for a new generation. In the movie, this happens in a gruesome ritual, where two elders throw themselves off a cliff, while the rest of the community is watching them.

Of course, I am not going to argue that every 72-year-old should throw themselves off a cliff. However, the movie is a useful thought experiment, and asks its audience some potent questions. Namely, in order to keep our community spacious and thriving, is it better *not* to strive for everlasting life?

In this essay I will firstly introduce the cultural values around aging and dying. How do they shape the modern view of elderly life? Afterwards, I will argue that that modern Western culture of aging is questionable in multiple ways and should be challenged. To argue for my views, I will use argumentation by John Hardwig (1997) and Ezekiel J. Emanuel (2014). Afterwards, I will make a proposition for an outlook on life which is more realistic and more sustainable, than the current way of aging in the West.

The cultural idea of immortality

The human project of prolonging life is an idea which is as old as our race itself. To be frank, survival is in our DNA. Humans are, in this regard, no different than other animals. It is a very natural idea, to prolong one's life as long as possible. Yet, we

have overclocked this idea of surviving to envisioning immortality in various ways. Historically, humans have looked for various ways to achieve immortality. "The Holy Grail", "the Philosophers Stone", and even "Heaven" are some examples of this. The accumulation of these cultural ideas has created a set of values which are largely accepted in the Western world. We live in a culture in which getting old is regarded as an end in itself. Think of examples like Dumbledore in the *Harry Potter* series, Mr Miyagi in *The Karate Kid*, or Morgan Freeman in various roles. Looking elsewhere than fictional stories, David Attenborough is an excellent example of this idea. Part of the appeal of Attenborough's latest works is the fact that he is an elderly person. However, we must face the facts: these cases are very rare.

Thus, the ideal of prolonging life is both a natural idea and a social and cultural construct. In certain nomadic cultures, it was customary for elders who had become ill or debilitated to end their life. The community would help them prepare and support them in doing so.¹ This might sound irrelevant to our contemporary culture, since times have changed, and medicine has progressed. However, we must look at this from another point of view. If we accept cultural relativism to be – even remotely – true, we also must accept that Western culture is not superior to others. Therefore, this criticism of Western values should not be swept away.

The Western Immortal

Through the years, our culture has made it a value that getting old is an ideal to strive for. In the now infamous article "Why I Hope to Die at 75" (2014), Ezekiel J. Emanuel labels the person who embraces this ideal "the American immortal". His idea of the

A case can be made that humans sometimes have a duty to die.

American immortal is the person who is obsessed with a variety of exercises, diets, vitamins, and supplements, to prolong life for as long as possible.

The idea of this obsession is all-consuming and is thus essential to this American immortal. It is an obsession in the absolute sense of the word. In my view, this person is not per definition a product of American culture, but of Western culture. I will therefore call it the "Western immortal" in the remainder of this essay. The Western immortal looks at cases like I mentioned before (Attenborough, Freeman, ...) and believes that they could be a rare individual just like them. However, this is simply not the case.

In the Netherlands, a fourth of the people 80 or older have Alzheimer's disease. In the Netherlands, one in three women will eventually suffer from Alzheimer's disease.² If dementia does not affect a person, their mental capacity will still decrease with age.

1 John Hardwig, "Is There a Duty to Die?," *The Hastings Center Report* 27, no. 2 (1997): 35.

2 "Factsheet cijfers en feiten over dementie," Alzheimer Nederland, last modified May 27, 2019, <https://www.alzheimer-nederland.nl/factsheet-cijfers-en-feiten-over-dementie>.

Of course, not just our mental capacity diminishes with age. Additionally, our physical abilities will decrease as we get older. As muscles age, they begin to shrink and lose mass. The size of our muscles decreases as well. Finally, bones endure a process of life-long wear and tear. Due to aging, bones endure a longer process of this gradual wear and tear. By 2020, one in two Americans over age 50 was expected to be at risk of developing osteoporosis of the hip³.

In trying to overcome the harsh facts and statistics which are mentioned above, the Western immortal embraces a culture where they will do and buy a variety of goods to help defend their ideal. There are a multitude of vitamins, mind enhancing games, physical exercises which will assist in prolonging one's life. In his article, Emanuel states that this is fuelled from a desperation to believe in the "compression of morbidity".⁴ He states that compression of morbidity:

[...] tells us exactly what we want to believe: that we will live longer lives and then abruptly die with hardly any aches, pains, or physical deterioration—the morbidity traditionally associated with growing old. It promises a kind of fountain of youth until the ever-receding time of death. It is this dream—or fantasy—that drives the American immortal and has fueled interest and investment in regenerative medicine and replacement organs.

Thus, according to Emanuel, the Western⁵ immortal believes in a fairy tale that death will come swiftly, with hardly any trouble. It is this idea, which the Western immortal believes in, which must be challenged. Moreover, by comprising morbidity, the Western immortal will eventually become a burden to society and to their loved ones. This statement might seem harsh and might be interpreted as disrespectful to elderly. However, a case can be made that humans sometimes have a duty to die.

A duty to die and the individualistic fantasy

In his article, "Is There a Duty to Die?" (1997), John Hardwig expresses his feelings that there might be circumstances where a person has a duty to die. He writes this from a conviction that he himself might someday have a duty to die. Hardwig states that there are some cases where a duty to die is very clear. As an example, he uses the story of Captain Oates, who was a member of the first expedition to the South Pole. Oates became very sick and was unable to continue the journey. One night he made

3 Office of the Surgeon General (US), "The Frequency of Bone Disease," in *Bone Health and Osteoporosis: A Report of the Surgeon General*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK45515/>.

4 Ezekiel J Emanuel, "Why I Hope to Die at 75, An argument that society and families—and you—will be better off if nature takes its course swiftly and promptly," *The Atlantic*, October, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/10/why-i-hope-to-die-at-75/379329/>.

5 Or for him, the American Immortal.

the decision to walk into a blizzard, to never be found again. He sensed that he had a duty to die, in order that the rest of the team could continue the expedition. This might be a heroic story, and a very clear example of a duty to die. However, Hardwig thinks that a duty to die is more common than a "lifeboat case" like this.⁶

Like Emanuel, Hardwig believes that the culture of modern aging should not be seen as a triumph with no imperfections. He is of the opinion that most modern medicines to treat sickness have a dark side that should be acknowledged. Although modern medicines deliver us survivability, they can also allow us to live longer than that we can take care of ourselves, or even be ourselves.

Thus, taking away the true personality of the person and leaving a mere shell of what once was. In cases like this, the costs – not merely being monetary – are staggering. If medicine continues to improve and many of today's terminal diseases are treatable, most of the patients will be left debilitated, and eventually suffer from dementia or another physical error. In Hardwig's opinion, these developments could generate a duty to die.⁷

To argue for the idea that there could be a duty to die, Hardwig criticizes another Western/American dream that is held by the Western immortal: the individualistic fantasy. The individualistic fantasy is the view which leads us to imagine that lives are unconnected or could be so if we choose to.⁸ If other people's lives were not connected

Within the context of bioethics and population ethics, the individualistic fantasy would mean that the patient is the only affected by their choices.

to the Western immortal, they would be free to live their lives as they would please. Within the context of bioethics and population ethics, the individualistic fantasy would mean that the patient is the only affected by

their choices. However, this idea is morally questionable. Most people are connected to family and friends, all people are connected to others in a society. The individualistic fantasy leads the Western immortal to make certain choices about their life, with little regard to how dramatically that might affect their family, friends, and society.

However, the lives of the loved ones of a patient can be significantly compromised by caring for that person. At the moment, 31 percent of all family-caregivers in the Netherlands spends more than 40 hours per week caring for a family member with dementia. 76 percent of these family-caregivers admits that an accident or unsafe circumstance has occurred within the house.⁹ A serious illness in the family like dementia is a tragic situation, however, we must make choices in how one should

6 Hardwig, "Is There a Duty to Die?," 34.

7 Hardwig, "Is There a Duty to Die?," 35.

8 Hardwig, "Is There a Duty to Die?," 35.

9 Alzheimer Nederland, "Factsheet cijfers en feiten over dementie."

respond. One must be taking in account the life and dignity of the patient. If the position of giving care becomes too hard for a family member, or loved one, a duty to die might apply according to Hardwig.¹⁰

In his article, Hardwig only focuses his argument of burdens to a family unit or loved ones. I believe that his argument applies to society as a whole. Because not only the life of a loved one can be compromised by caring for a patient. If we look at a bigger scale, society is also heavily impacted by the Western immortal. Due to the aging of the population in Western Europe and North America, there is an increasing burden on these societies. I do not aim to express this burden solely in financial figures, however, there is a big monetary impact which aging will have on the current workforce. In the Netherlands, between 2019 and 2040, the amount of 75-year-olds will rise by 86%. The amount of 90-year-olds will rise by 151%¹¹. This rise will lead to an increase in spending for elderly healthcare which amounts to 126%¹². This is a significant increase, which needs to be paid by a relatively smaller workforce than in 2020.¹³

Hardwig states that a duty to die is likely to occur when these burdens will become too significant. He also mentions emotional burdens, such as the destruction of life-plans in his argument.¹⁴ On the surface, a duty to die seems like a fairly harsh idea, but Hardwig has a very potent point. His criticism on the individualistic fantasy is complementary to Emanuel's view of the American immortal. Both recognise a bio-ethical culture of life prolonging which is not favourable. However, imposing a duty to die on someone might come over as rough and inconsiderate. Hardwig recognizes that throughout his piece. How then should we formulate this idea, or build policy?

The proposition

In his article, "Why I hope to die at 75", Ezekiel Emanuel sets a maximum age which he would like to reach, namely 75 years old. However, he is not planning on committing suicide or receiving euthanasia at that age. Based on his arguments which I mentioned earlier in this essay, he states that he prefers not to receive treatment to any occurring illnesses after reaching this age. Emanuel sees 75 a unique moment where he will have reached a rich and complete life and made joyful memories. He admits that 75 years

¹⁰ Hardwig, "Is There a Duty to Die?," 36.

¹¹ "Infographic impact van vergrijzing," RIVM, last modified August 2019, [https://www.rivm.nl/infographic-impact-van-vergrijzing#:~:text=De%20druk%20op%20de%20zorg,informeel%20zorg%20\(mantelzorg\)%20toe](https://www.rivm.nl/infographic-impact-van-vergrijzing#:~:text=De%20druk%20op%20de%20zorg,informeel%20zorg%20(mantelzorg)%20toe).

¹² RIVM, "Infographic impact van vergrijzing."

¹³ "Bevolkingspiramide," CBS, accessed December 16, 2020, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/visualisaties/bevolkingspiramide>.

¹⁴ Hardwig, "Is There a Duty to Die?," 38.

is somewhat arbitrarily chosen, as is the age cap of 72 years in *Midsommar*, which I mentioned in the introduction as my inspiration for this essay. However, these age limits do somewhat overlap.

For the proposition which I want to make, I will use the age of 75, like Emanuel. At 75, hopefully your offspring will be left with good memories of a vital you, rather than memories of a fragile and demented version of you. Thus, after 75, flu shots, cancer treatment and pacemakers are out of the question.

By acting on this idea, the view on the meaning of life can be vitally challenged and changed. A life which has a clear limit makes for realistic goals, realistic visions of the future and a different outlook on many social constructs. For example, retirement ages could be lowered, because the taxation costs of healthcare will dramatically decrease. This would mean that there is more time left to spend one's free time – and money – whilst still being mobile. Moreover, on a complete macro-level, the human impact on the planet would also drop significantly, since there will be fewer humans that contribute to a consumer culture.

I fully accept and understand possible objections to my ideas. Objecting to this idea is a very natural response. As mentioned before, survival is in the DNA of the human animal. However, the reality is that survival is not the purpose of humans anymore. We have no antagonistic natural forces left on planet Earth, except for ourselves. We are slowly killing ourselves by overeating, overconsuming, and warming a planet. Let us then at least have a death which serves the community, by relieving a burden, and making room for future generations.

As an objection, we must consider the objection which I have called the “David Attenborough case”. Whilst writing this essay and discussing with other students, the example of David Attenborough kept coming up. “What if I am a genius, and I am super fit and still have a lot to contribute to the community after 75?” This is an understandable thought. However more so, it shows the way of thinking of the

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is sure of their own
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Western immortal. The Western immortal is sure of their own exceptional skills and does not believe in limitations. Like I already stated before, these cases are very exceptional. Emanuel uses the Nobel Prize laureates to illustrate this argument: “The average age at which a Nobel Prize-winning physicist

make their discovery is 48.” Like physicists, classical composers peak at around 40 for their maximal, and most valuable output, and on average compose their last significant piece of music at 52¹⁵. It is realistic to accept that one is not a “David Attenborough case”.

15 Emanuel, “Why I Hope to Die at 75, An argument that society and families—and you—will be better off if nature takes its course swiftly and promptly.”

To end, let us accept that there is an inherent goodness in accepting that life is limited. Do we really want to spend the last years of our lives bedbound, fragile and/or demented? I believe that by opting for an age-limit, one will focus on the life which is lived in one's years, instead of maximizing the years in one's life. The current Western immortal's obsession with health, could make place for a sense of adventure and vitality.

Conclusion

It is vital to the population problem, that we take a serious look at different perspectives. Instead of asking if we should opt for forming policy around controlling birth rates, I have shown that there is more to the population problem. The aging of a population is a real issue. And to break the taboo; the aging of the population can also be a burden. On a family and on society as a whole.

The aging of the population is partly caused by a Western cultural phenomenon which in this essay I have called the Western immortal. The Western immortal is obsessed with healthcare, sports and prolonging their life. Ezekiel Emanuel wants to challenge the ideas of this Western immortal, by using the statistics of the aging process. He believes that there is no strength to the views of the Western immortal. Instead of prolonging life, the Western immortal will more likely prolong chronic illness.

A problem which comes with the existence of the Western immortal and the aging of a population, is the problem of burdens. In his essay, John Hardwig argues that when people become too much of a burden to their loved ones, they can have a duty to die, to allow their family members and loved ones to carry on with their lives, ambitions and to recover financially. I have extended this argument to apply to society as a whole. I understand that this seems unnatural in every way. But as I have expressed in this essay, a lot of our views of aging are a social construct.

One last time, let me be clear. I have not argued for the fact that every 75-year-old should apply for Euthanasia today (or jump of a cliff, as happens in *Midsommar*). However, it is vital to challenge the current view of aging in the Western world. Therefore, serious thought must be given to a proposition, which is largely inspired by Ezekiel Emanuel's views of aging. If one would choose to stop prolonging life at 75, and let nature take its course, a more sustainable future lies ahead. It offers a different outlook on life. An outlook on life which – hopefully – will not be troubled by sickness and mental deterioration, but by an outlook on life which will be aimed towards maximizing happiness.

