

WHY IT IS BETTER NEVER TO COME INTO EXISTENCE

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I

There is a common assumption in the literature about future possible people that, all things being equal, one does no wrong by bringing into existence people whose lives will be good on balance. This assumption rests on another, namely that being brought into existence (with decent life prospects) is a benefit (even though not being born is not a harm). All this is assumed without argument. I wish to argue that the underlying assumption is erroneous. Being brought into existence is not a benefit but always a harm. Many people will find this deeply unsettling claim to be counter-intuitive and will wish to dismiss it. For this reason, I propose not only to defend the claim, but also to suggest why people might be resistant to it.

II

As a matter of empirical fact, bad things happen to all of us. No life is without hardship. It is easy to think of the millions who live a life of poverty or of those who live much of their lives with some disability. Some of us are lucky enough to be spared these fates, but most of us who do nonetheless suffer ill-health at some stage during our lives. Often the suffering is excruciating, even if it is only in our final days. Some are condemned by nature to

years of frailty. We *all* face death.¹ We infrequently contemplate the harms that await any new-born child: pain, disappointment, anxiety, grief and death. For any given child we cannot predict what form these harms will take or how severe they will be, but we can be sure that at least some of them will occur. (Only the prematurely deceased are spared some but not the last.) None of this befalls the non-existent. Only existers suffer harm.

Of course I have not told the whole story. Not only bad things but also good things happen only to those who exist. Pleasures, joys, and satisfaction can be had only by existers. Thus, the cheerful will say, we must weigh up the pleasures of life against the evils. As long as the former outweigh the latter, the life is worth living. Coming into being with such a life is, on this view, a benefit.

However, this conclusion does not follow. This is because there is a crucial difference between harms and benefits which makes the advantages of existence over non-existence² hollow but the disadvantages real. Consider pains and pleasures as exemplars of harms and benefits. It is uncontroversial to say that:

- 1) the presence of pain is bad
and that
- 2) the presence of pleasure is good.

However, such a symmetrical evaluation does not apply to the *absence* of pain and pleasure, for:

- 3) the absence of pain is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone,

whereas

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

My view about the asymmetry between 3) and 4) is widely shared. A number of reasons can be advanced to support this. First, this view is the best explanation for the commonly held view that while there is a duty to avoid bringing suffering people into existence, there is no duty to bring happy people into being. In other words, the reason why we think that there is a duty not to bring suffering people into existence is that the presence of this suffering would be bad (for the sufferers) and the absence of the suffering is good (even though there is nobody to enjoy the absence of suffering). In contrast to this, we think that there is no duty to bring happy people into existence because, while their pleasure would be good, its absence would not be bad (given that there would be nobody who would be deprived of it).

It might be objected that there is an alternative explanation for the view about our procreational duties, one that does not appeal to my claim about the asymmetry between 3) and 4). It might be suggested that the reason why we have a duty to avoid bringing suffering people into being, but not a duty to bring happy people into existence, is that we have negative duties to avoid harm, but no corresponding positive duties to bring about happiness. Judgments about our procreational duties are thus like judgments about all other duties. Now for those who deny that we have any positive duties, this would indeed be an alternative explanation to the one I have provided.

However, even of those who do think that we have positive duties only a few also think that amongst these is a duty to bring happy people into existence. For this reason, my explanation is preferable to the alternative.

A second support for my claim about the asymmetry between 3) and 4) is that, whereas it seems strange to give as a reason for having a child that the child one has will thereby be benefited, sometimes we do avoid bringing a child into existence because of the potential child's interests. If having children were done for the purpose of thereby benefiting those children, then there would be greater moral reason for at least many people to have more children. In contrast to this, our concern for the welfare of potential children who would suffer is taken to be a sound basis for deciding *not* to have the child. If absent pleasures were bad irrespective of whether they were bad for anybody, then having children for their own sakes would not seem odd. And if it were not the case that absent pains are good even where they are not good for anybody, then we could not say that it would be good to avoid bringing suffering children into existence.

Finally, support for my claim can be drawn from a related asymmetry, this time in our retrospective judgments. Bringing people into existence as well as failing to bring people into existence can be regretted. However, only bringing people into existence can be regretted *for the sake of* the person whose existence was contingent on our decision. One might grieve about not having had children, but not because the children which one could have had have been deprived of existence. Remorse about not having children is remorse for ourselves, sorrow about having missed child-bearing and child-rearing experiences. However, we do regret having brought into existence a child with an unhappy life, and we regret

it for the child's sake, even if also for our own sakes. The reason why we do not lament our failure to bring somebody into existence is because absent pleasures are not bad.

I realize that the judgments that underlie this asymmetry are not universally shared. For example, positive utilitarians — who are interested not only in minimizing pain but also in maximizing pleasure — would tend to lament the absence of additional possible pleasure even if there were nobody deprived of that pleasure. On their view there *is* a duty to bring people into existence if that would increase utility. Usually this would be manifest as a duty to bring happy people into existence. However, under certain circumstances the duty could be to bring a suffering person into being if that would lead to a net increase of happiness, by benefiting others. This is not to say that all positive utilitarians *must* reject the view about the asymmetry of 3) and 4). Positive utilitarians who are sympathetic to the asymmetry could draw a distinction between (i) promoting the happiness of people (that exist, or will exist independently of one's choices) and (ii) increasing happiness by making people. They could then, consistent with positive utilitarianism, judge only (i) to be a requirement of morality. This is the preferable version of positive utilitarianism. If one took (ii) also to be a requirement of morality, then one would be regarding persons merely as means to the production of happiness.

If my arguments so far are sound, then the view about the asymmetry between pain and pleasure is widespread and the dissenters few. My argument will proceed by showing how, given this common view, it follows that it is better never to come into existence.

To show this, it is necessary to compare two scenarios, one (A) in which *X* exists

and one (B) in which *X* never exists. This, along with the views already mentioned, can be represented diagrammatically:

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

It is uncontroversially the case that 1) is bad and 2) is good. However, in accordance with the intuitions mentioned above, 3) is good even though there is nobody to enjoy the good, but 4) is not bad because there is nobody who is deprived of the absent pleasures.

Drawing on my earlier defense of the asymmetry, we should note that alternative ways of evaluating 3) and 4), according to which a symmetry between pain and pleasure is preserved, must fail, at least if common important judgments are to be preserved. The first option is:

1) Bad	3) Good
2) Good	4) Bad

Here, to preserve symmetry, the absence of pleasure (4) has been termed "bad." This judgment is too strong because if the absence of pleasure in scenario B is "bad" rather than "not bad" then we should have to regret that *X* did not come into existence. But we do not think that it is regrettable.

The second way to effect a symmetrical evaluation of pleasure and pain is:

1) Bad	3) Not Bad
2) Good	4) Not Good

To preserve symmetry in this case, the absence of pain (3) has been termed "not bad" rather than "good," and the absence of pleasure (4) has been termed "not good" rather than "not bad." On one interpretation, "not bad" is equivalent to "good" and "not good" is equivalent to "bad." But this is not the interpretation which is operative in this matrix, for if it were, it would not differ from, and would have the same shortcomings as, the previous matrix. "Not bad" means "not bad, but not good either." This is too weak. Avoiding bringing a suffering child into existence is more than merely "not bad." It is good. Judging the absence of pleasure to be "not good" is also too weak in that it does not say enough. Of course the absence of pleasure is not what we would call good. However, the important question, when the absence of pleasure involves no deprivation for anybody, is whether it is also "not bad" or whether it is "bad." The answer is that it is "not good, but not bad either" rather than "not good, but bad." Because "not bad" is a more complete evaluation than "not good," that is the one I prefer. However, even those who wish to stick with "not good" will not thereby succeed in restoring a symmetry. If pain is bad and pleasure is good, but the absence of pain is good and the absence of pleasure not good, then there is no symmetry between pleasure and pain.

Having rejected alternative evaluations, I return to my original diagram. To

determine the relative advantages and disadvantages of coming into existence and never coming to be, we need to compare 1) with 3), and 2) with 4). In the first comparison we see that non-existence is preferable to existence. The advantage is a real one. In the second comparison, however, the pleasures of the existent, although good, are not a real advantage over non-existence, because the absence of pleasures is not bad. For the good to be a real advantage over non-existence, it would have to be the case that its absence were bad. To illustrate this, consider an analogy which, because it involves the comparison of two existent people is unlike the comparison between existence and non-existence in *this* way, but which nonetheless may be instructive. *S* is prone to regular bouts of illness. Fortunately for him, he is also so constituted that he recovers quickly. *H* lacks the capacity for quick recovery, but he *never* gets sick. It is bad for *S* that he gets sick and it is good for him that he recovers quickly. It is good that *H* never gets sick, but it is not bad that he lacks the capacity to heal speedily. The capacity for quick recovery, although a good for *S*, is not a real advantage over *H*. This is because the absence of that capacity is not bad for *H* (and *H* is not worse off than he would have been had he had the recuperative powers of *S*). *S* is not better off than *H* in any way, even though *S* is better off than he himself would have been had he lacked the capacity for rapid recovery.

We can ascertain the relative advantages and disadvantages of existence and non-existence in another way, still in my original matrix, but by comparing (2) with (3) and (4) with (1). There are benefits both to existing and non-existing. It is good that existers enjoy their pleasures. It is also good that pains are avoided through non-existence. However, that is only part of the picture. Because there is nothing bad about

never coming into existence, but there is something bad about coming into existence, all things considered non-existence is preferable.

III

One of the realizations which emerges from some of the reflections so far is that the cost-benefit analysis of the cheerful — whereby one weighs up (1) the pleasures of life against (2) the evils — is unconvincing as a comparison between the desirability of existence and never existing. The analysis of the cheerful is mistaken because it involves making the wrong comparison. If we want to determine whether non-existence is preferable to existence, or vice versa, then we must compare the left- and the right-hand sides of the diagram, which represent the alternative scenarios in which *X* exists and in which *X* does not exist. Comparing the upper and the lower quadrants on the left, tells us something quite different; namely, how good or bad a life *X*'s is.

Understanding this difference makes it clear that, although existence holds no advantages over non-existence, some lives have advantages over others. Not all cases of coming into existence are equally disadvantageous. The more the positive features of a life outweigh the negative ones, the better the life, and so the less disadvantageous existence is. But so long as there are some negative aspects, the life is not preferable to never having come into existence.

Following from this, there is a difference between saying that it is better not to come into existence and saying how great a harm it is to come into existence. So far I have argued only for the first claim. The magnitude of the harm of existence varies from person to person, but I want to suggest now that the harm is very substantial for everybody. However, it must be stressed that the view that it is better never to come into

existence is logically distinct from my view about how great a harm existence is. One can endorse the first view and yet deny that the harm is great. Similarly, if one thinks that the harm of existence is not great, one cannot infer from that that existence is preferable to non-existence.

We tend to forget how great the harms are that we all suffer. There is a strong tendency to consider how well our lives go relative to others. If we live longer and with less ill-health and greater comfort than others, we count ourselves lucky. And so we should. At the same time, however, we should not lose sight of how serious the harms we all suffer are. That people do tend to lose sight of this is one important psychological reason why many feel resistance to my conclusion that coming into existence is not a benefit. Many people have very little difficulty seeing why relatively poor quality lives may not be a benefit. They would have far less difficulty extending this judgment to all lives, if they really saw how great the harms are that all people suffer.

Take death for example, because it is something that we all face. We consider a death at forty as tragic, but tend to be pretty casual about a death at ninety. Clearly, the latter person's life is far preferable to the former's (all other things being equal), but that does not detract from the intrinsic harm of a death at ninety. Imagine how different our evaluation would be of a death at ninety if people commonly lived to one hundred and twenty years. By contrast, there was a time when people rarely lived until their fifties. I take it that at that time living until forty was not regarded as such a tragedy.³ It becomes clear how flexible our common evaluations are about which deaths are serious harms. My view is that all deaths are serious harms, *ceteris paribus*. How great the harm is relative to others or to the current norm (which itself

is determined by the life-span of others) can vary, but there is a serious intrinsic tragedy in any death. That we are born destined to die is a serious harm.

Not all share this view of death. One opposing perspective would see death as equivalent to pre-conception non-existence. Those who have this outlook will deny that death is a harm. They may even seek to suggest that my view suffers contradiction in that I think non-existence preferable to existence, but then see the cessation of existence as a harm. If coming into existence is a harm, how can going out of existence also be a harm? The answer is this. Whereas pre-conception non-existence or the non-existence of possible people who never become actual is not something which happens to anybody, death (the *cessation* of existence) is something that happens to somebody. It happens to the person who dies. Whereas Epicurus is correct that where death is, I am not and where I am, death is not, it does not follow that I have no reason to regard my death as a harm. It is, after all, the termination of me and that prospect is something that I can regret intensely.

IV

One important objection to the comparison I have made between *X*'s coming into existence and *X*'s not coming into existence is that it is not possible to compare existence and non-existence. It is said that non-existence is not any state in which somebody can be and so it is not possible for it to be better or worse than existence. Others have already responded to this objection. For example, Joel Feinberg has noted⁴ that comparing the existence of *X* with the non-existence of *X* is not to compare two possible conditions or states of *X*. Rather it is to compare the existence of *X* with an alternative state of affairs

(scenario B, in my schema) in which *X* does not exist. Such a comparison is possible.

Note that when I say that non-existence is "better than," "preferable to" or "has an advantage over" existence, I am not committed to saying that it is better, preferable, or advantageous for the non-existent. The non-existent are not, and so things cannot literally be better for them or to their advantage. When I say that non-existence is preferable, that judgment is made in terms of the interests of the person who would or has otherwise come to exist. The claim is that for any person (whether possible or actual), the alternative scenario of never existing is better.⁵ It is because the evaluation is always made in terms of the person that would (or does) exist (that is, the person in scenario A) that my view is not what has been called "impersonalist,"⁶ even though the comparison is with a state of affairs (scenario B) and not with the state of a person.⁷

V

That existence is a harm may be a hard conclusion to swallow. Most people do not regret their very existence. Many are happy to have come into being because they enjoy their lives. But these appraisals are mistaken for precisely the reasons I have outlined. The fact that one enjoys one's life does not make one's existence better than non-existence, because if one had not come into existence there would have been nobody to have missed the joy of leading that life and so the absence of joy would not be bad. Notice by contrast, that it makes sense to regret having come into existence because one does not enjoy one's life. In this case, if one had not come into existence then no being would have suffered the life one leads. That is good, even though there would be nobody who would have enjoyed that good.

Now it may be objected that one cannot possibly be mistaken about whether one's existence is preferable to non-existence. It might be said that just as one cannot be mistaken about whether one is in pain, one cannot be mistaken about whether one is glad to have been born. Thus if "I am glad to have been born," a proposition to which many people would assent, is equivalent to "It is better that I came into existence," then one cannot be mistaken about whether existence is better than non-existence. The problem with this line of reasoning is that these two propositions are not equivalent. Even if one cannot be mistaken about whether one *currently* is glad to have been born, it does not follow that one cannot be mistaken about whether it is better that one came into existence. We can imagine somebody being glad, at one stage in his life, that he came to be, and then (or earlier), perhaps in the midst of extreme agony, regret his having come into existence. Now it cannot be the case that (all things considered) it is both better to have come into existence and better never to have come into existence. But that is exactly what we would have to say in such a case, if it were true that being glad or unhappy about having come into existence were equivalent to its actually being better or worse that one came into being. This is true even in those cases in which people do not change their minds about whether they are happy to be have been born.

VI

If what I have said is correct, then there can be no duty to bring people into existence. Does it also show that it is actually wrong to have children, or is procreation neither obligatory nor prohibited? Is it the case that our duty not to bring people into existence applies not only to those who suffer relative to others, but to all possible people? An affirmative answer would be

sharply antagonistic to some of the most deeply seated and powerful human drives, the reproductive ones. In evaluating whether it is wrong to have children we must be acutely aware and suspicious of these features of our constitution, for they possess immense powers to bias us in their favour. At the same time, to embrace the view that procreation is wrong after failing to consider the moral significance of these drives would be rash.

Children cannot be brought into existence for their own sakes. People have children for other reasons, most of which serve their own interests. Parents satisfy biological desires to procreate. They find fulfillment in nurturing and raising children. Children are often an insurance policy for old age. Progeny provide parents with some form of immortality, through the genetic material, values, and ideas that parents pass on to their children and which survive in their children and grandchildren after the parents themselves are dead. These are all good reasons for people to want to have children, but none of them show why having children is not wrong. Serving one's own interests is not always bad. It is often good, but where doing so inflicts significant harm on others, it is not usually justified.

One way, then, to defend the having of children, even if one accepts my view that existence is a harm, is to deny that that harm is great. One could then argue that the harm is outweighed by the benefits to the parents. However, there is some reason to think that even if one takes the extra step and agrees that existence is a *great* harm, it still *might* not be immoral to have children. I hasten to add that, for reasons I shall make clear, I am not convinced of this. I offer the possible defense of having children not because I think that this activity *must* be acceptable — perhaps existence is so bad that it *is* wrong to have children —

but because something as valued as procreation must not be condemned lightly.

It is morally significant that most people whose lives go relatively well do not see their lives as a harm. They do not regret having come into existence. My arguments suggest that these views may be less than rational, but that does not rob them of all their moral significance. Because most people who live comfortable lives are happy to have come into existence, prospective parents of such people are justified in assuming that, if they have children, their children too will feel this way. Given that it is not possible to obtain consent from people prior to their existence to bring them into existence, this presumption might play a key role in a justification for having children. Where we can presume that those whom we bring into existence will not mind that we do, we are entitled, the argument might go, to give expression to our procreational interests. Where these interests can be met by having either a child with a relatively good life or a relatively bad life, it would be wrong if the parents brought the latter into existence, even where that child would also not regret its existence. This is because, if the prospective parents are to satisfy their procreational interests, they must do so with as little cost as possible. The less bad the life they bring into being, the less the cost. Some costs (such as where the offspring would lead a sub-minimally decent life) are so great that they would always override the parents' interests.

Those cases in which the offspring turn out to regret their existence are exceedingly tragic, but where parents cannot reasonably foresee this, we cannot say, the argument would suggest, that they do wrong to follow their important interests in having children. Imagine, how different things would be if the majority or even a sizeable minority of people regretted coming into

existence. Under such circumstances this possible justification for having children certainly would be doomed.

The argument for why it might not be immoral to have children is somewhat worrying. For example, its paternalistic form has been widely criticized in other contexts, because of its inability to rule out those harmful interferences in people's lives (such as indoctrination) that effect a subsequent endorsement of the interferences. I am not so sure that this objection has force in the context of having children. This is because the harmful action of bringing people into existence is distinct from the factors that cause the subsequent approval of that action by the offspring. In this way it appears different from the harm of indoctrination.

However, other similar concerns remain. Coming to endorse the views one is indoctrinated to hold is one form of adaptive preference, where a paternalistic interference comes to be endorsed. However, there are other kinds of adaptive preference of which we are also suspicious. Desired goods which prove unattainable can cease to be desired ("sour grapes"). The reverse is also true. It is not uncommon for people to find themselves in unfortunate circumstances (being forced to feed on lemons) and adapt their preferences to suit their predicament ("sweet lemons").⁸ If coming into existence is as great a harm as I have suggested, and if that is a heavy psychological burden to bear, then it is quite possible that we could be engaged in a mass self-deception about how wonderful things are for us. Some may find this suggestion implausible. They should consider a few matters. First, there is the phenomenon of how people's quality-of-life evaluations differ and change. Amongst people without any serious disease or disability it is often thought that such conditions are sufficiently serious harms to make never

coming to exist preferable to existence with such harms. Sometimes the claim is even stronger, that ceasing to exist is preferable to continued existence with such diseases or disabilities. Very often, however, people who have or acquire these same appalling conditions adapt to them and prefer existence with these conditions to never existing (or ceasing to exist). This might suggest, as some disabilities rights advocates have argued, that the threshold in judgments about what constitutes a minimally decent quality-of-life is set too high. However, the phenomenon is equally compatible with the claim that the ordinary threshold is set too low (so that at least some of us should pass it). The latter is exactly the judgment which we can imagine would be made by an extra-terrestrial with a charmed life, devoid of any suffering or hardship. It would look with pity on our species and see the disappointment, anguish, grief, pain, and suffering that marks every human life and judge our existence, as we (relatively healthy and able-bodied humans) judge the existence of bedridden quadriplegics, to be worse than the alternative of non-existence. Our judgments of what constitutes acceptable limits of suffering are deeply rooted in the state of our well-being. How can we be so confident that we are not guilty of self-deception?

But why should such self-deception be so pervasive? One explanation is the strong evolutionary reasons why we might be disposed to view our lives as a benefit. Such a view facilitates survival, of the individual and the species.

These issues merit more substantial treatment than I am able to offer here. I am unsure, therefore, whether the suggested argument for the permissibility of (sometimes) having children is sound. However, the worry that adaptive preferences may be operative does provide one response to an objection some critics raise, that the fact

that most people do not regret having come into existence provides compelling reason to think that their lives are a benefit to them and therefore that my conclusion to the contrary must be false. What the adaptive preference concern shows is that the mere belief that one has been benefited is not sufficient to show that one has been benefited or that one's appraisal is rational. We would not take a slave's endorsement of his slavery as *conclusive* evidence that slavery is in his interests. In the face of an argument why he was not benefited by his enslavement, we would view with suspicion his enthusiasm for his own enslavement. We should do the same about people's enthusiasm for their having come into existence.

Even if having children is not immoral (given the presumption we might be entitled to make), my argument suggests, at the very least, that it is not morally desirable. Although our potential offspring may not regret coming into existence, they certainly would not regret not coming into existence. Since it is actually not in their interests to come into being, the morally desirable course of action is to ensure that they do not.

One implication of my view is that it would be preferable for our species to die out. It would be better if there were no more people. Many people, but not I, find such a prospect inherently intolerable.

Imagine that everybody entered a non-procreation pact or even without an agreement acted on the non-procreation ideal. No more children would come into the world and the human population would age and then become extinct. There is no chance of this occurring. If our species comes to an end, it will not be because we have freely chosen to bring this about (though it may result from other freely chosen actions). Nevertheless the possibility is one which must be considered because it is a theoretical implication of

my view. I agree that there would be some aspects of the demise of humans which would be tragic. The last generation to die out would live in a world in which the structures of society had broken down. There would be no younger working generation growing the crops, preserving order, running hospitals and homes for the aged, and burying the dead. The situation is a bleak one indeed. It is hard to know whether the suffering of the final people would be any greater than that of so many people in each generation. I doubt that it would, but let us imagine the opposite for the moment.

I have suggested (with some trepidation) that having children might not always be immoral. Assume first that this view is correct. What if, despite the permissibility of having children, people acted on the ideal, forwent having children and suffered tremendously as a result? How could that be acceptable as a moral ideal?

The first thing to note is that it would be an outcome which a generation willingly (albeit fearfully) would accept upon itself in the name of the moral ideal. It would be a supererogatory or heroic decision for

people to make (especially when they knew that all others were making it too). They would be accepting additional suffering upon themselves to spare possible future people the harm of existence. That would be something to be admired even though the consequences for the heroes would be extremely unpleasant. If we do not object to heroic sacrifice in other contexts, why should we object to it when it would prevent any further suffering?

But what if the assumption that having children is permissible is mistaken? Even then we should see that if there is something tragic about the demise of humanity, it is not the demise itself but the suffering that heralds it. I believe that people who think that the demise itself would be unfortunate would be hard-pressed to provide an explanation of this in terms of the interests of those who could have come into being. Who would there be to suffer the end of homo sapiens? One possible suggestion is that it would affect the people who knew it was going to happen. However, that would simply be another feature of the suffering that foreshadowed the end of human life.⁹

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NOTES

1. Only extremely rarely, if ever, is death a good, although it is often the lesser of two evils where continued life is unbearable.
2. The term "non-existence" is multiply ambiguous. It is applicable to those who never exist and to those who do not currently exist. The latter can be divided further into those who do not yet exist and those who are no longer existing. In the current context I am using "non-existence" to denote those who never exist. Joel Feinberg has argued that the not yet existent and the no longer existent can be harmed. I embrace that view. What I have to say here applies only to the never existent.
3. Today, in poorer parts of the world, life expectancy matches that of the developed countries in former centuries. Notice that we view the shortness of the lives of people in these poorer countries (and sometimes also of people in earlier times) as tragic, but precisely because we are comparing their life spans with the life spans to which we are accustomed.

4. Joel Feinberg, "Wrongful Life and the Counterfactual Element in Harming" in *Freedom and Fulfillment*, p. 19.
5. Some support for such comparisons can be drawn from considering the difference between *X*'s living a miserable life and *X*'s non-existence. Many people find even this comparison troubling, but others will have sympathy for the idea that non-existence is preferable for *X* who would otherwise exist. For them, this kind of comparison might be the thin edge of the wedge, leading to the other comparative scenarios I am suggesting.
6. See Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, chapter 17.
7. I defend this claim more fully elsewhere.
8. Often, although not always, this will start out as a way to save face, but even then it eventually can be internalized.
9. I am grateful to *APQ* reviewers for copious and insightful comments which have helped me to make significant improvements to this paper.