

Antinatalism, Asymmetry, and an Ethic of *Prima Facie* Duties¹

Gerald Harrison

School of History, Philosophy and Classics
Massey University
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North 4442
New Zealand

g.k.harrison@massey.ac.nz

Abstract

Benatar's central argument for antinatalism develops an asymmetry between the pain and pleasure in a potential life. I am going to present an alternative route to the antinatalist conclusion. I argue that duties require victims and that as a result there is no duty to create the pleasures contained within a prospective life but a duty not to create any of its sufferings. My argument can supplement Benatar's, but it also enjoys some advantages: it achieves a better fit with our intuitions; it does not require us to acknowledge that life is a harm, or that a world devoid of life is a good thing; and it is easy to see why it does not have any pro-mortalist implications.

Benatar (2006) believes that virtually all procreative acts are morally wrong. So do I. However, I arrive at this conclusion via a different route. I argue that duties require victims. As such, we have a duty not to create the suffering contained in any prospective life but we do not have a duty to create the pleasures contained in any prospective life.

My argument is capable of complementing Benatar's, but it does not entail it and enjoys some advantages over it. For instance, Benatar's central case depends on showing that coming into existence is always a harm: a difficult pill to swallow. But my argument shows procreation to be wrong even if being brought into existence confers a considerable benefit to the individual brought into existence.

Benatar wants to respect our intuition that we do nothing wrong in omitting to procreate. However, most of us have the intuition that omitting to procreate is not wrong even if most lives are a benefit to those subject to them (for after all, most people *do* think that lives are a benefit to those subject to them). Benatar, by arguing that we substantially harm anyone we bring into existence, provides us with a *new* reason to think that one does nothing wrong in not procreating. But he does not provide an account of how there could be nothing wrong in not procreating *even if the life one would create*

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would be of great benefit to the exister. My view does. Finally, my view makes it very clear why suicide is neither obligatory nor supererogatory.²

I.

Benatar argues that there is an important asymmetry between pleasures and pains: a state of affairs in which no pain is being suffered is good, however a state of affairs in which no pleasure is being experienced is not bad unless there is someone for whom the absence of pleasure is a deprivation.

The main support that Benatar gives for this asymmetry is that it explains our intuitions about a range of other cases, the most important being the common-sense moral view that “while there is a duty to avoid bringing suffering people into existence, there is no duty to bring happy people into being” (2006, p. 32; see also McMahan 2002, p. 300). Creating a suffering person would create some pain, and that is bad. But there is no positive duty to create a predominantly pleasurable life, because even though the pleasure it contains would be good if it existed, absent pleasure is not bad unless there is someone for whom it is a deprivation. So if one does not create a life, even a life that one knows for sure will contain more pleasure than pain, one does nothing wrong.

In fact, it is positively wrong to create even a pleasurable life. Even a pleasurable life will contain some suffering. The suffering, if created, would be bad. The absence of the suffering would, however, be good. This is the kernel of Benatar’s main case against procreation: non-existence avoids creating any suffering, and so that is good. Non-existence also avoids creating any pleasure, but that is not bad (because absent pleasure is not bad unless it is bad for someone). Thus, non-existence is preferable to existence.

Many find Benatar’s asymmetry thesis difficult to accept. “Yes”, they will say, “it may well be that absent pleasure is not bad unless there is someone for whom it is a deprivation. But by the same token, absent pain is not good either unless there is someone who benefits by its absence. Similarly though pain is bad when someone is suffering it, pleasure is good when someone is enjoying it. As most lives contain far more pleasurable experiences than painful ones, coming into existence is not a harm: quite the reverse, it is a considerable benefit over non-existence”. Alternatively, some might prefer to concede that absent pain is good even when there is no one for whom it is good, but will maintain that absent pleasure is bad even when there is no one for whom it is bad.

Anyone who responds like this has to find an alternative explanation for our moral judgements in the wretched life/pleasant life cases. They will have to explain why we must not create lives that will be characterised by great suffering, yet do nothing wrong if we neglect to create lives that will be characterised by great pleasure.

I believe there is an intuitively attractive alternative explanation available if we look to the *prima facie* duty ethical framework and focus on a plausible feature of the concept of duty: that duties presuppose victims.

II.

The term “*prima facie* duty” was coined by W. D. Ross to refer to a type of action that has a tendency to be right, other things being equal ([1930] 1988, pp. 19-20). Any number of *prima facie* duties can apply to a particular situation, and they can and will

² Benatar’s view is often thought to have pro-mortalist implications (see McGregor and Sullivan Bissett in this issue of the journal).

often conflict. When *prima facie* duties conflict, we must judge which consideration trumps. The point about *prima facie* duties is that they “are analogous to ‘forces’ that pull an action towards rightness or wrongness” (Huemer 2005, pp. 203-204). In the absence of an opposing force – an opposing *prima facie* duty – then the action is pulled all the way to rightness or wrongness.

The list of our *prima facie* duties is a matter of debate. But that need not concern us too much, for in what follows I will focus on some of the most plausible and very general *prima facie* duties.

The objective is to provide a pleasing alternative explanation for our intuition that it is wrong to create suffering people, but not wrong to omit to create happy people. To this end consider two highly plausible *prima facie* duties: the *prima facie* duty to prevent suffering, and the *prima facie* duty to promote pleasure.

The *prima facie* duty to prevent suffering explains why it would be wrong, other things being equal, to create suffering people.³ Creating a suffering person would be to create some suffering: suffering we have a *prima facie* duty to prevent. To explain why we have no duty to create happy people consider a plausible conceptual claim about duties in general: duties presuppose victims. One can only have a duty to do X, if failing to do X would wrong someone. In other words if one cannot identify someone who would be wronged by one’s failure to fulfil the supposed *prima facie* duty, then the duty does not exist.⁴ If this is true (and I will defend it against some objections shortly) then the *prima facie* duty to promote pleasure does *not* generate a duty to create happy people. Why? There is no victim if one does not create a happy person. The happy person who would have been created has not been left frustrated and deprived in some anteroom to existence. He or she does not exist, never did exist, and never will exist. Without victims who exist, or did exist, or will exist, there can be no duty: and thus there is no duty to create happy people. Compare this with cases of suffering people. Preventing suffering is a *prima facie* duty and it generates a duty not to create suffering people, for if one fails to fulfil this duty then there is a victim: the miserable person one created.

So, if duties require victims in the event of non-performance, we can explain why there is a duty not to create suffering people, and why there is no duty to create happy people. Benatar’s alternative explanation is that there is a duty not to create happy lives because contrary to most people’s assumption, doing so positively harms those who are brought into existence. But mine has the advantage of explaining why we have no duty to create happy people *even if doing so would greatly benefit those we create*. As I suspect most people have the intuition that we have no duty to create

3 For the sake of simplicity I am focussing on suffering. But the suffering contained within a life is not all that is objectionable in it.

4 It might be objected that such a claim is obviously false, as there are plenty of cases in which no one has been wronged, yet a wrong has been committed. For instance, the assassin who mistakenly shoots a wax replica of his target in the belief that it is really her. In such a case no one has been wronged, yet intuitively we do not want to let the assassin off the hook. The first point that can be made here is to draw on the distinction between something being bad, and something being wrong. The assassin did nothing wrong, but his act was bad as it proceeded from bad motives. The second point is that though no actual wrong was committed this does not mean that the assassin is any less blameworthy for his deed. For what is required for blameworthiness is not ‘actual’ wrongdoing, but just subjective wrongdoing. If the agent intended to do something that would have been actually wrong had he successfully done it, then the agent is fully blameworthy even though he did not do anything wrong (see Haji 2002 for such an account).

happy people even on the assumption that doing so would greatly benefit them, my explanation has an intuitive edge over Benatar's. So there we have it: the *prima facie* duty view combined with a plausible-sounding claim about duties (that they presuppose victims in the event of non-performance) can get us the result we want.

Nevertheless, it might be objected that my central claim, that duties presuppose victims in the event of non-performance, is false. There are some wrongs that do not seem to wrong anyone. For instance, destroying all the vegetation on a small isolated island in the middle of nowhere seems wrong, even if it is clear that no one is going to be in any way harmed. If one has wronged someone, one is not entitled to his forgiveness, yet it is plausible that there is a duty to forgive. If that is right, then this would seem to be a duty that has no victim in the event of non-performance. Finally, perhaps there is a *prima facie* duty to create good states of affairs. Failing to create a good state of affairs need not involve wronging anyone, and so we have another counterexample.

Regarding the putative *prima facie* duty to create valuable states of affairs: I agree that it is plausible there is such a duty when failure to fulfil it would wrong someone. But it is far less plausible that there is such a duty when there would be no victim of non-performance: when there would be no one who would be wronged by the failure. And consider that if one insists otherwise – if one insists that there is a *prima facie* duty to create valuable states of affairs even when no one would be wronged by one's failure to do so – then one generates a presumptive positive duty to create happy people. And that is counterintuitive.

I will not dispute that the other cases mentioned involve the violation of duties (though I believe there is room to do so). However, I do not think it is too difficult to locate someone who has been wronged in such cases and thus do not think the cases provide devastating counter-examples to my thesis. For instance, if there are circumstances where someone has a *prima facie* duty to forgive someone (rather than it being something supererogatory), I would find it plausible to think that the other person *was* entitled to forgiveness and would thus be wronged if it was not given (though it may be entirely inappropriate for him to demand it or resent its absence). Plus a general duty to cultivate a forgiving nature can be understood as a duty one owes to oneself. I wrong myself – let myself down – if I fail to cultivate that disposition in myself; similar remarks could apply to cases of wanton destruction of isolated island vegetation.

These are not knockdown replies and so there will be some who are unconvinced. But even if there are some duties that have no victims in the event of non-performance, this does not really pose a significant threat to the plausibility of the explanation I am offering. It would have to be conceded that not all duties presuppose victims, but it would remain plausible that *in general* the failure to find a victim strongly suggests that there is no duty to be violated, especially in the case of the two *prima facie* duties mentioned: the duty to promote pleasure and the duty to prevent suffering (and perhaps many others). We have seen how this delivers the right verdict in the happy life/suffering life cases. This is in itself a powerful source of support for the view. And in further support, we often conclude that there is nothing wrong with an activity once it becomes apparent that there is no victim. We often draw this conclusion even in light of quite powerful countervailing intuitions that the said activity is wrong. For instance, some have an intuition that there is something wrong with homosexual sex between consenting adults; and virtually all of us have the intuition that there is some-

⁵ Thanks to Thaddeus Metz for suggesting these sorts of case.

thing morally wrong with acts of incest, even between consenting adult siblings above the agent of consent and who have no prior familial relationship with one another. But if, when we inspect these cases more closely, we come to think that these activities do not wrong anyone we, or many of us, will take this to provide powerful *pro tanto* reason to think the activities are not wrong after all and that our intuitions to the contrary are simply misguided.

So, an independently plausible claim about duties – that they presuppose victims – can explain why there is a duty not to create miserable people yet no positive duty to create happy people. The account is simple, and importantly, it achieves the right result even if it is true that one greatly benefits someone by creating him. Given that most people do believe that being created confers a great benefit yet still do not consider it a duty to create such lives, this result is intuitively satisfying.

III.

The absence of a positive duty to procreate does not yet show procreation to be positively *wrong*. However, I believe closer inspection reveals that there is a positive duty *not* to procreate, other things being equal.⁶ Consider, we have already seen that the pleasures contained in a potential life are not pleasures anyone has a *prima facie* duty to create: no one would be wronged by the failure to create him. But there is a *prima facie* duty to prevent the (inevitable) pains contained in any potential life. Thus, when it comes to creating a new life, even a very happy one, there is a *prima facie* duty to prevent the suffering it contains but no *prima facie* duty to create the pleasures. And so the *prima facie* duty to prevent the suffering is unopposed and thus decisive. In the absence of any special reason to think otherwise, we have a duty not to procreate: a duty derived from the *prima facie* duty to prevent the suffering contained in any life.

A common objection to Benatar's antinatalist position is that being created does not harm us. Our lives contain far more pleasures than pains and thus we have been positively benefited. Better to be. A similar objection might now be made to my view. The pleasures of a life eclipse its sufferings, at least in the bulk of cases, and therefore the duty to prevent suffering does not apply to most prospective lives. The *prima facie* duty to prevent suffering applies to net suffering. And most lives contain no net suffering.

It is easy to see why such a reply will not work. The type of moral consideration that conflicts with, and so can potentially trump, a *prima facie* moral duty is another *prima facie* moral duty. The claim that there is no net suffering resulting from a procreative act, presupposes that the potential pleasures in a life can be used to trump some lesser

6 It might be objected that this detracts from my account's intuitive attractiveness. For while most people have the intuition that there is no positive duty to create happy people, most people also have the intuition that there is nothing wrong in creating happy people (although I should mention that by no means everyone has this intuition – I do not). If the name of the game is uncritical respect of as many intuitions as possible, then the objector would have a point. However, I do not think it is. Not all intuitions are equal. I cannot argue the point in detail here, but intuitions it would have been adaptive for people to be disposed to have; that are hard to accommodate in one's body of other intuitions; and that concern matters over which we have strong emotions; are intuitions whose credibility I consider to have been placed in doubt (on this see Huemer, 2008). I believe the intuition that there is nothing wrong with procreation satisfies *all* of these criteria and so is not one I think any great effort should be made to accommodate. Furthermore, it is worth noting that historically remarkably little philosophical attention has been given to the morality of procreation, despite its obvious significance. The antinatalist conclusion is a surprising one. But when an issue has been neglected we should not be surprised by a surprising result when we cease to neglect it.

quantity of suffering it contains. But that presupposes there is a *prima facie* duty to promote the potential pleasures in a life by creating a new person. There is not.

Certainly there are circumstances under which it is plausible that we might be justified in subjecting someone to some suffering in order to promote some greater quantity of pleasure. For instance, perhaps it can be right to subject an existing person to 10 units of suffering if doing so is the only way to gain him 1000 units of pleasure. But that is because in such cases there is a conflict between the *prima facie* duty to prevent suffering, and the *prima facie* duty to promote pleasure. When it comes to procreative acts the pleasures contained within a potential life are not ones we have a *prima facie* duty to promote. So if the potential life contains 10 units of suffering and 1000 units of pleasure, there is no *prima facie* duty to create those 1000 units of pleasure, though there *is* still a *prima facie* duty to prevent the creation of those 10 units of suffering. Thus the pleasures contained within a potential life cannot trump its pains.⁷

Our actual duties are determined by the sum total of *prima facie* duties operative in any given situation. And so far I have focussed on two, albeit very significant and widely agreed-upon *prima facie* duties: the duty to prevent pain and the duty to promote pleasure. My object here is not to offer any kind of exhaustive list of *prima facie* duties. But I will briefly mention one more very plausible *prima facie* duty because it too yields a *prima facie* duty not to procreate.

It is plausible there is a *prima facie* duty not to do anything that will seriously affect another without gaining his prior consent. To create someone is to profoundly affect him.⁸ And clearly one cannot give prior consent to be created. To create someone is to *subject* someone to a life. Thus, the *prima facie* duty not to seriously affect another without his prior consent also generates a *prima facie* duty not to procreate.⁹ Of course, it is often right to do things to others without their prior consent (pushing someone out of the way of an oncoming truck; making children go to school etc.) But in such cases there is always some other *prima facie* duty (or duties) that conflicts with and plausibly trumps the duty in question.¹⁰ When it comes to potential lives there are no duty *prima facie* duties to create the lives in question (not if we are focussing on

7 The example might give the misleading impression I consider the disvalue of the suffering contained in a life to be a simplistic function of its quality and quantity. I do not. The badness of some suffering for the person suffering it is affected by a range of considerations, including how it is distributed in a person's life and the quality and quantity of pleasures contained in the life among other things (for instance, see Benatar 2006, pp. 61-64). A small amount of suffering in a life that contains little else is worse than a larger amount of suffering in a life that contains much pleasure besides. We have no *prima facie* duty to promote pleasures contained in a potential life and so such pleasures cannot be offered up as possible trumps for the suffering it contains (unlike in an actual life), but that most certainly does not mean that the pleasures have no bearing on the badness of the suffering, and thus on the weight of the duty to prevent them. After all, it would be absurd to say that it would be more wrong to create a life that contained 20 units of suffering and 100 of pleasure than a life that contained 10 units of suffering and 10 units of pleasure!

8 A proponent of a strong person-affecting view would object that one cannot be affected either for the better or worse through being created as one can be made better or worse off if one already exists. I follow Benatar and Feinberg in rejecting this view and holding that someone can be harmed or benefited even if they are not made better or worse off (Benatar 2006, p. 20-33; Feinberg, 1992).

9 Seanna Shiffrin has also highlighted the moral significance of the fact it is impossible to consent to be created and that as such procreation is not a "straightforward, morally innocent endeavor" (1999, p. 118). Shiffrin's views are discussed in Asheel Singh's article in this issue of the journal.

10 It might be objected that there are other accounts available here. For instance, perhaps what explains why it is right to push someone out of the way of an oncoming truck is that the person would have consented to action if they had been informed and rational. I believe such accounts are flawed for a num-

duties owed to the potential exister). Just as the duty to prevent the pains in a potential life went unopposed, so too does the duty to not seriously affect another without his prior consent.

It therefore seems there are at least two *prima facie* duties that push towards making procreative acts wrong overall: our *prima facie* duty to prevent pain and our *prima facie* duty not to seriously affect someone else without his prior consent. Other things being equal, these generate a duty not to procreate. Fulfilling this duty will mean that no more lives are created and this, I am allowing, is a bad state of affairs, even if it is not bad *for* anyone. However, it is not a state of affairs we can have any duty to prevent obtaining, for preventing it would mean subjecting people to lives and creating pains we have a duty to prevent, while not preventing it would not wrong anyone.

Nevertheless, some are going to have difficulty accepting that someone can be *wronged* by a deed that greatly benefits him. If life is a benefit to the exister, how can it be wrong to have bestowed such a benefit? If we are happy to be alive, and grateful to our parents for having created us and would not want things to be another way, can we really take the idea that we have been wronged seriously? Is it plausible that we could be wronged yet happy for having been so wronged? Grateful even? Yes, there is nothing odd about this: there are many such cases. For example, most would agree that lying is *prima facie* wrong. But one can benefit from being lied to. Someone can break a promise to us, and this can work to our benefit, yet we have been wronged nevertheless. Or take another plausible *prima facie* duty: the *prima facie* duty not to do something that seriously affects another without first gaining his consent. If someone hacks into someone else's bank account and places a bet on a horse on his behalf, but without first gaining his consent, then that person has been wronged even if the horse wins and they are considerably better off, as a result. If someone did that to me, I would be very pleased and grateful – but I would still think I had been wronged. I may think it would be inappropriate for me to complain about it, but that is different. In short then, there is nothing remotely incoherent or surprising in the idea that someone can be wronged, even wronged quite seriously, yet benefit by the wrong, be happy that the wrong was committed, and not want things to have been otherwise.

In summary then, one can have a duty to do X (or omit to do X) if failure to fulfil the duty would wrong someone. If this is correct, then there cannot be a *prima facie* duty to procreate deriving from a *prima facie* duty to promote pleasure. But the sufferings a potential life contains are sufferings we have a *prima facie* duty to prevent. Added to this it is plausible we have a *prima facie* duty not to subject others to lives without first gaining their consent.

There are important parallels with Benatar's view. My view, like his, entails that it is the sufferings contained in a potential life that count, and not its pleasures. But unlike Benatar this is not because absent pleasures are not bad unless there is someone for whom they are a deprivation. Rather, it is because the pleasures we have a duty to promote are those that we would have wronged someone by not promoting, and none of the pleasures contained within a prospective life are of this kind.

ber of reasons, in part because such accounts would seem to resurrect the duty to procreate, and would also deliver counter-intuitive verdicts about other cases. However, it would be beyond the scope of this paper to argue the matter. The point I wish to make in this paper is that the *prima facie* view I have outlined delivers intuitively attractive verdicts about creating happy people versus creating miserable people and also yields the antinatalist conclusion.

Whatever the ingenuity of Benatar's argument, it is difficult to accept that one has been harmed by being brought into existence only if the life one has been subject to is one that contains far more pleasure than suffering. It is difficult to accept that it would have been better never to have been born. The case I have made above does not require accepting such things. For my argument is consistent with us having been benefited by being created: with it being better to be.

IV.

It is often thought that antinatalism yields pro-mortalism. It is easy to understand why. If an antinatalist argues that being created harms us, it is natural enough to think it best for us to cease living as soon as possible in order to limit the harm in question.¹¹ My route to antinatalism in no way implies a duty to commit suicide, nor any special reason to think suicide supererogatory or prudent.

I have argued we have no duty to promote the pleasures contained in a potential life. That does not mean we lack a duty to promote the pleasures contained in an actual life. Quite the reverse: we have a duty to promote the pleasures in any actual life, for if we fail to do so there certainly *is* someone whom would be wronged by our failure.

The fact that we have a duty to prevent the pains contained in a potential life by not bringing it into being, does *not* mean that we have a duty to prevent the pains contained within our actual lives by ceasing to live them. Suicide would certainly prevent any further suffering in that life. But it would also prevent any further pleasures, and as mentioned above, those pleasures are ones we have a duty to promote.

Existence transforms the situation from one in which life's pleasures count for nothing morally, to one in which they count for a great deal. Once someone exists then we certainly have *prima facie* duties to promote his pleasures, prevent his sufferings and not do anything that will seriously affect him without his prior consent. If we have duties to ourselves, then we have *prima facie* duties to ourselves to promote our own pleasures and prevent our own suffering. Assuming that in most circumstances suicide would not be the best way of promoting our pleasures, then far from having a duty to kill ourselves, (and even farther from it being supererogatory) we have a duty to stay alive as long as possible, other things being equal. And if we do not have duties to ourselves, then it remains highly imprudent to commit suicide in most circumstances.

Of course, there may be many circumstances in which suicide *is* the right or permissible and prudent course of action: situations in which one is suffering and where there is no prospect of the suffering ending or being adequately compensated for by future pleasures. However, we can leave the details of when exactly suicide is permissible, prudent, or (perhaps) positively obligatory to one side. For the point here is that my particular way of arriving at the antinatalist conclusion does not in any way provide a reason to commit suicide nor does it do anything, in itself, to suggest that suicide might be obligatory or prudent. Whether one is always entitled to kill oneself; to what degree (if at all) the *prima facie* duty to promote pleasure applies to oneself; to what degree (if at all) the *prima facie* duty to prevent pain applies to oneself: all of these

11 Benatar does devote considerable space to explaining why his view does "not imply that death is better than continuing to exist, and a fortiori that suicide is (always) desirable" (2006, p. 212). Absent pleasure is not bad unless there is someone for whom it is a deprivation, and clearly there is someone for whom it is a deprivation when someone is already up and running. So denying yourself future pleasures by killing yourself is bad, other things being equal. To think that Benatar's main argument for antinatalism implies pro-mortalism is just to ignore the asymmetry thesis that is central to it.

matters are left open. So whatever one's view on the permissibility or otherwise of suicidal acts, the case for antinatalism that I have presented should leave it untouched.¹²

V.

So far I have focussed exclusively on duties to the one who will be created and have argued that such duties generate a duty not to procreate (but no duty to commit suicide). However, that does not imply that it would *always* be wrong to procreate.¹³ Duties to third parties can, and sometimes will, generate a permission or duty to procreate. For instance, the *prima facie* duty to prevent harm could generate a duty to create a new life if creating a new person would prevent another from coming to some very significant harm (for instance, creating a source of bone marrow for a relative who would otherwise suffer terribly). But there are good reasons to think that such occasions will be very rare, and that procreation will generally be wrong.

Most would agree that the duty against creating harm is more stringent than the duty to prevent harm. The harm one's procreative act might prevent would therefore need to be greater in significance than the suffering it creates. It would be even more rare for there to be a situation in which procreating could bring benefits to others substantial enough to overcome the duty not to create the suffering in that new life. The typical benefits associated with procreative acts – enhancing one's happiness; providing a playmate for a son or daughter; ensuring the family line continues and so on - do not seem likely to have the clout necessary. Intuitively it would normally be morally impermissible to subject someone to suffering of the same significance as that contained in the average life in order to enhance someone else's happiness or to provide someone else with the benefit of a playmate, or to continue the family line.¹⁴

Smilansky suggests that "the existence of *promises* to have children can also be a moral consideration towards a possible duty to have them" (1995, p. 46). But it is implausible that any *prima facie* duty to keep that promise could have the clout necessary to trump the *prima facie* duty not to create the suffering contained in a life or the *prima facie* duty to avoid seriously affecting another without his consent. To borrow an example from earlier: if John has made a promise to Jane to hack into Tom's bank account and place all his savings on a horse (one he is fairly sure will win), then I think most of us would still consider John's act wrong overall. The fact he was fulfilling a promise to Jane does little, if anything, to alter that judgement.

VI.

The antinatalist view I have presented in this paper is compatible with Benatar's, is as robust as Benatar's, and owes a great deal to it. But it is not the same view. It does not require one to believe that life is not a benefit to the procreated, nor does it require that one accept that a world devoid of life is a better place than one with life. Nevertheless,

12 An exception would be if one holds that killing oneself is obligatory when doing so is the only way of ensuring that a new life is created. Of course, such an act would not strictly speaking be a 'suicide' given that it would be performed with the intention of benefiting someone else. But, the fact remains that if one held this kind of view, then the realisation that duties are asymmetrical in the way I have outlined would alter matters such that one could no longer consider killing oneself for the sake of creating a new life to be a duty.

13 Nor does Benatar's view (see 2006, pp. 98-99; 191-193).

14 I am assuming that the sufferings contained in a life are nearly always very significant. But of course, I am not claiming that the sufferings nearly always eclipse the pleasures. The point, rather, is that it is only the sufferings that we can consider, given that we have a *prima facie* duty not to create them, but no *prima facie* duty to create the pleasures.

my view yields the same substantial moral conclusion: that there is a duty not to procreate, but does so while respecting our intuition that we do no wrong in not procreating even if the lives we would have created would have been ones brimming with pleasure and that would have massively benefited those subject to them.

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