

# Saving Posterity from a Worse Fate

Niko Kolodny

June 30, 2019

## 1 Introduction

Suppose we must choose among different outcomes, in which people fare better or worse.<sup>1</sup> Suppose different people, or different numbers of people, will ever exist at such outcomes. That is, suppose our choice affects the growth of the population, or the identities of future people. Which outcomes are wrong for us to choose?

Consider the simplest sort of case. Suppose that Eleanor, but no one else, will exist whatever we choose. What's up to us is merely whether her neighborhood will be the Good Place, where she will flourish, or the Medium Place, where she will get by. It would be wrong, we might think, to put her in the Medium Place.

Some qualifications right away. First, the fact that someone will fare badly if we make a choice is a less compelling reason, if any reason at all, when they will fare badly only because of their own choices, despite our best efforts to provision them, to present them with good opportunities, to put them in a position to fare well, should they make the right choices. When I speak in this paper of our choice affecting how people fare, therefore, it should be understood as shorthand for affecting how people are provisioned, what opportunities they have access to. That, rather than how they ultimately fare, is what makes a claim on us.

Second, of course, we may have agent-relative reasons to give greater weight to ourselves, to our projects, and to our relationships. We may be prohibited from taking certain means to otherwise desirable outcomes. And there may be impersonal values — such as the progress of art and science, biodiversity and the health of natural ecosystems — that bear on our choice, apart from their effects on how people fare. But let's set these aside for the moment. Restricting our attention to how people fare in the outcomes that we might choose, which outcomes are wrong for us to choose?

Third, we might well think that it isn't wrong to leave Eleanor in the Medium Place, if she wouldn't be too badly off there: if, to put it crudely, she would be above a threshold of sufficiency such that failing to raise her even higher, even at no cost to us, would be

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<sup>1</sup>Thanks to audiences at UPF, Princeton, Queens, the 2019 Society for Applied Philosophy Conference at Cardiff University, as well as written comments from Tom Dougherty, Johann Frick, Andrew Lister, Philip Pettit, Veronique Munoz-Darde, and Jay Wallace.

at most supererogatory. But suppose that she's not yet at that threshold, although she's above the threshold of being glad to have been born.

Granting that it is, intuitively, wrong to leave Eleanor in the Medium Place, why is it? There are two broad ways of thinking about it. The more familiar way might be called "Benefit Thinking." Benefit Thinking explains why it is wrong to leave Eleanor in the Medium Place by pointing out that we benefit people (in this case, Eleanor) more by putting her in the Good Place than we benefit people (again, still just Eleanor) by putting her in the Medium Place.

It's another way of thinking about it, which might be called, "Worse-Fate Thinking," that I want to explore. Worse-Fate Thinking explains why it would be wrong to put Eleanor in the Medium Place by pointing out that people in the Medium Place (namely, Eleanor) are left to a worse fate in the Medium Place. Put another way, the people in the Medium Place (namely, Eleanor) have reason to prefer how things are for people (again, as it happens, Eleanor) in some alternative outcome (namely, the Good Place). Put still another way, leaving Eleanor in the Medium Place is wrong because increases the number of people fated to exist a lower level of well-being. If we choose the Good Place, the number of people at every level less than good is zero. If we choose the Medium Place, by contrast, the number at some level less than good increases to one.

One's first thought may be that the second answer, that we are saving people from something worse, has greater moral force. Isn't it more urgent to save people from something worse than merely to benefit them? But one's second thought may be to discount the first thought, as one or another illusion of "System 1." Surely benefitting Eleanor by putting her in the Good Place rather than the Medium Place comes to the same thing as saving her from the worse fate of the Medium Place by putting her in the Good Place. So Worse-Fate Thinking is no different from Benefit Thinking.

I argue, however, that Worse-Fate Thinking is different from Benefit Thinking, as becomes clear when we consider choices that affect the numbers or identities of people. Furthermore, the principle, "Worse-Fate," that I formulate to represent this alternative to Benefit Thinking gives intuitive answers to many of the questions of population ethics. To indulge in some still-to-be-explained jargon, Worse-Fate accounts for the "procreation asymmetry," avoids the "repugnant choice," and delivers plausible results in "mixed same-number" cases, of the kind that argue for the "no difference" view (Parfit 1984).

What's the catch? One catch, it might be said, is that Worse-Fate implies that a choice may not be required, and may even be wrong, when it benefits people more. But this is just to say that Worse-Fate Thinking diverges from Benefit Thinking. And it is surprisingly hard to come up with non-question-begging grounds to favor Benefit Thinking over Worse-Fate Thinking: to view Benefit Thinking as the more natural extension of our ordinary concern for how people fare. Perhaps both Worse-Fate and Benefit Thinking are equally natural extensions, and we should do justice to both. In that case, Worse-Fate can be amended, into Worse-Fate-Pareto. That avoids the most persuasive counterexamples, or apparent counterexamples, to Worse-Fate.

A second catch is that Worse-Fate gives verdicts that pattern in seemingly “incoherent” ways: e.g., violating “transitivity.” However, I don’t see a compelling reason to worry about such “incoherence” in Worse-Fate’s verdicts, so long as they reflect, as I believe they do, “incoherence” in our intuitive judgments.

On its own, Worse-Fate implies that a choice to cause someone to be can be wrong even though it leaves no particular person worse off than that person would have been in any alternative. How then can anyone complain? And if no one can complain, how can it be wrong? This is Parfit (1984)’s “non-identity problem.”

However, Worse-Fate can be seen as part of a more complex view, Worse-Fate-As-Answer, according to which people can complain about being caused to be in ways that violate Worse-Fate. They can complain about such choices, even though they are not left worse off, on the grounds that such choices harmed or invaded them, without their consent and without sufficient justification — where such justification might be that people would have suffered worse fates had some other choice been made.

Whether we can accept any of these ideas, Worse-Fate, Worse-Fate-Pareto, or Worse-Fate-As-Answer, I don’t know. Perhaps we are committed, and rightly so, to Benefit Thinking. But if so, then this paper at very least sets up a collision with error that gives us a sharper appreciation of that deep truth.

## 2 Taxonomy

Some labels will help us to keep things straight. Say that someone is “contingent” relative to a choice set if whether that person ever exists depends on the choice we make: there’s at least one choice in the set where that person exists at some time, and at least one other choice in the set where that person never exists. Someone is “non-contingent” relative to a choice set if in every choice in the set, that person (like Eleanor) exists at some time. A “same-people” choice set involves only non-contingent persons. A “pure” choice set involves only contingent persons. A “mixed” choice set involves some contingent and some non-contingent persons. In a “same-number” choice set, the same number of persons exist no matter what choice we make. In a “different-number” choice set, the number varies with the choice we make.

Observe that in different-number choice sets, at least some people who exist in the choice with the higher number must be contingent. So that leaves us with five categories:

	None contingent	All contingent	Some contingent, some not
Same number	Same people	Pure same number	Mixed same number
Different number	[Not possible]	Pure different number	Mixed different number

Our strategy for covering all of these categories proceeds in four steps. We begin with “pairs”: choice sets with only two options. First, we assume trade-off rules that tell us

which option it is wrong to choose in same-people pairs. Second, we argue that since such trade-off rules are not sensitive to whether people are contingent, the rules settle pure and mixed same-number pairs. Third, we propose a way to transform different-number pairs into same-number pairs, so that the rules settle different number pairs as well. Finally, we generalize to choice sets with more than two options by saying that an option is wrong if would be wrong if it were in a pair with another option in the set.

I assume that we have full information about what will happen if we make a choice, including what choices will then be available to us. I assume that a choice  $A$  that is available to us in the future, if we make some choice  $B$  now, is a choice that we can make now: that is, we can make the composite choice of making  $B$  now and  $A$  later.

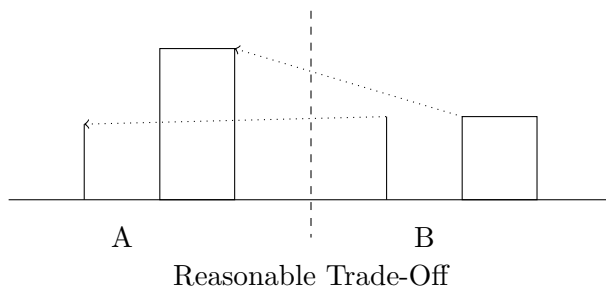
### 3 Same-people choices

Let's start with same-people choices, where our moral judgment feels most at home.

#### 3.1 Trade-off rules

The first matter to consider is trade offs. Saving some people from worse fates may have the opportunity cost of failing to save other people from worse fates. How should we make such trade offs? Other things equal, we have more reason to save people from, as it were, worse worse fates: lower lower levels. And other things equal, we have more reason to save more people rather than fewer people from a worse fate.

Consider the following choice, in which one person drops from 101 to 100, in order to bring 99 from 101 to 200:



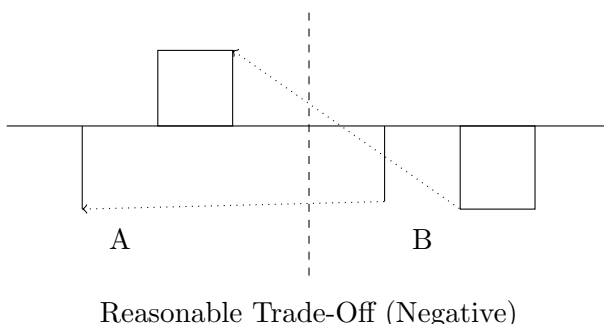
Arguably, it isn't wrong to choose  $A$ . On the one hand, we give some, but not absolute, priority to reducing (perhaps to zero) the number who occupy lower levels: to saving people from worse worse fates. The fact that  $B$  has one fewer at a lower level (i.e., 100) than  $A$  has counts more in  $B$ 's favor than that  $A$  has one fewer at a higher level (i.e., 101) than  $B$  has counts in  $A$ 's favor. On the other hand, we give weight to how many fewer people occupy lower levels: to saving more people rather than fewer from a worse fate. Since  $A$

saves so many more from 101 than  $B$  saves from 100, this second effect, arguably, swamps the first.

Without presuming to specify what the trade-off rules are, let's assume that there are some trade-off rules such that for any same-people pair  $\{A, B\}$ , the rules tell us either that  $A$  is not wrong or that  $B$  is not wrong, given  $\{A, B\}$ . This leaves a lot open, of course. But the aim of this paper is not so much to tell us how to treat same-people choices as it is to tell us, once we have decided how to treat same-people choices, to extend that treatment to the other, more exotic choices. So far, then, we have just a kernel of a Worse-Fate principle, which tells us at least when choices are wrong given same-people pairs.

### 3.2 Zero Embargo

Although, in the examples so far, all of the people in question had lives worth living (represented by positive levels) in every outcome, Worse-Fate and the trade-off rules should also be understood to cover people with lives not worth living (with negative levels). For example, perhaps it is wrong to choose  $B$ , even though the fate for a single person of being at -101 in  $A$  is worse than the fate for a single person of being at -100 in  $B$ .



Among the trade-off rules may be Zero Embargo, which gives absolute priority to reductions in numbers at levels below zero over reductions in numbers at levels above zero.

Zero Embargo: Given the choice of an outcome with  $n$  people each at some positive level, it is wrong to choose an outcome of  $m$  people (no matter how few) each at some negative level (no matter how close to zero) and  $n - m$  people (no matter how many) each at some positive level (no matter how high).

### 3.3 Sufficiency

These trade-off rules may imply a sufficiency threshold or thresholds. That is, the trade-off rules may be such that, first, no choice that leaves everyone above some threshold is wrong. In other words, above that threshold, any way of making “trade offs” is permissible. Second, the trade-off rules may be such that any choice that leaves someone below the (same or

different) threshold is wrong when the other choice in the pair leaves everyone above that threshold.

### 3.4 Equality and “Leveling Down”

Worse-Fate — the principle that we should prevent people from suffering worse fates, making trade offs as appropriate — does not express an preference for equality as such. Indeed, this idea not only does not require, but moreover prohibits, “leveling down.” At least, this is so for any case of leveling down such that most will agree (or at least feel defensive about not agreeing) that it should be prohibited, or at least not be required. Given a same-people pair  $\{A, B\}$ , if  $B$  differs from  $A$  only in that the number in a higher occupied level  $H$  in  $A$  is reduced by  $n$  and the number at some lower occupied level  $L$  in  $A$  is increased by  $n$ , and all are below the level of sufficiency, then  $B$  is wrong.  $B$  simply assigns those additional  $n$  to the worse fate of  $L$  (rather than  $H$ ), while offering nothing in return: that is, without saving anyone else from a worse fate.

### 3.5 Non-rigidity

When evaluating whether a choice saves people from worse fates, we should consider only the number of people at each level, whoever they may be. We should not consider how much better or worse particular people fare. Consider how out of place, in same-people cases, it seems to be sensitive to how much better or worse off particular people are.

To illustrate:

	X	Y
A	10	100
B	100	99

A stylized version of Rawls’s difference principle would imply, and Worse-Fate would agree, that it is wrong to choose  $A$  over  $B$ . Suppose we, accordingly, choose  $B$ .  $Y$  then replies: “But  $B$  makes the worst-off person in  $B$ , namely me,  $Y$ , worse off than he would be in  $A$ .”  $Y$  confuses Worse-Fate with a far less plausible principle: Rigidly designate the worst-off person in the actual outcome. It is wrong to choose any outcome that leaves that particular person worse off than that person would be in some other outcome. As Rawls (2001, p. 59) explains of the actual difference principle, “the term ‘the least advantaged’ is not a rigid designator.”

Worse-Fate should also be distinguished from other, perhaps more plausible, “rigid” principles, according to which whether a choice is wrong depends on how much better or worse off particular people would be if we chose differently. For example, there is the rigid principle that it is wrong to choose an outcome that fails to minimize the maximum difference between someone’s level in that outcome and that person’s highest level in any outcome (compare Meacham (2012)). Still, even this more plausible rigid principle seems mistaken. Suppose:

	X	Y	Maximum difference
A	1	120	9 (=10-1)
B	10	100	20 (=120-100)

The rigid principle in question judges *B* to be wrong, since in *B*, *Y* is 20 short of his maximum, whereas in *A*, *X* is only 9 short of his maximum. Yet if, in *B*, *Y* complains that he could have been at 120 rather than 100, why isn't it a sufficient answer that someone else, namely *X*, would then have been at 1 rather than at least 10? This is not to deny that *Y* has such a pro tanto complaint about *B*, only to say that it is answered by the fact that *A* saves *X* from a worse fate.

#### 4 Pure same-number cases

Because Worse-Fate is non-rigid, it treats pure same-number cases in precisely the same way as same-people cases. So Worse-Fate implies, intuitively, the deontic equivalent of Parfit (1984)'s "Same Number Quality Claim or Q" at least as restricted to pure cases: that it is wrong to cause a group of contingent people, the Lows, to live lives at a lower level, still worth living, when we could cause instead the same number of entirely distinct contingent people, the Highs, to live lives at a higher level. Parfit's "Depletion" and "The 14-Year-Old Girl" are the canonical cases.

True, if we choose the Lows, we do not make those particular people worse off. But again Worse-Fate is non-rigid; it is insensitive to how particular people fare. And, as we saw, in same-people cases, rigid principles are implausible.

#### 5 Mixed cases

According to Worse-Fate, for similar reasons, an option in a mixed same-number case is wrong just if the corresponding option in a corresponding same-people (or pure same-number) case would be. Whether a person is contingent makes no difference. The relevant difference between contingent people and non-contingent people, presumably, has to do with how particular people would have fared in other outcomes: roughly that contingent people would not have been better or worse off in other outcomes, whereas non-contingent people would have been. But again Worse-Fate is not rigid. It is insensitive to how particular people would have fared in other outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

This gives us intuitive results in mixed same-number cases. Consider Parfit (2017)'s "Case Four":

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<sup>2</sup>Contrast (Voorhoeve and Fleurbaey 2016); Frick (2017, p.357); Otsuka (2018). McMahan (2013) explores the possibility that it may depend on what happens in other outcomes on the grounds that it entitles people to regret what might have been.

	Tom	Dick	Harry
<i>A</i>	50 years of pain		One day of pain
<i>B</i>		One day of pain	Two days of pain

As Parfit observes, a view that favored non-contingent people, such as Harry, perhaps on the ground that Harry would otherwise have been worse off, might make it wrong, counterintuitively, to choose *B*.

Worse-Fate, by contrast, implies that it is wrong to make a choice in a mixed case that would be wrong in the corresponding same-people case. To construct such a case, we simply shift cells to the right to fill in any empty cells, like so:

	Dummy	Harry
<i>A'</i>	50 years of pain	One day of pain
<i>B'</i>	One day of pain	Two days of pain

Since *A'* is wrong and *B'* isn't given  $\{A', B'\}$ , *A* is wrong and *B* isn't in Case Four.

Again, we need not deny that Harry has a pro tanto complaint about *B*: namely, that he would have been better off under *A*. The question is whether this complaint is answered. It is, if we say:

Answer: A complaint about a choice is answered if (i) it saves someone from a worse fate or (ii) avoids complaints at least as strong.

Granted, choosing *B* does not avoid a complaint from Dick, at least not of the kind that Harry has: namely, that Dick would have been better off under *A*. Dick would not have existed. But *B* does save someone from a worse fate, which is enough to answer Harry's complaint. Perhaps there is some residue of Harry's pro tanto complaint, reflected in the thought that he is still owed an apology of a kind: "We're sorry that we had to make you worse off, but if we hadn't, we would have left someone to a worse fate."

Complaints of non-contingent people, such as the complaint of Harry about *B*, can still matter in mixed cases. Change the case so that Tom in *A*, like Harry in *B*, will suffer two days of pain. Then Harry would have an unanswered complaint about the choice of *B*, since *B* neither saves anyone from a worse fate, nor avoids complaints like Harry's.

Harry's complaint might thus be a tie-breaking reason to choose *B*. If so, then it would imply that we should choose Pregnancy Testing over Pre-Conception Testing in Parfit (1984, p. 367), and so why we should resist his "No-Difference View." Granted, one might be skeptical of tie-breaking reasons. If the reason has any weight at all, then why can't its presence do more than simply break ties?<sup>3</sup> But in this case, we side-step this rhetorical

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<sup>3</sup>The thought expressed by this rhetorical question, that the reason has weight in ties only if it has weight in near ties, may underlie Parfit's reasoning when he writes: "I conclude that the two programmes are equally worthwhile. If Pre-Conception Testing would achieve results in a few more cases, I would judge it to be the better programme" (p. 369). The thought would explain why the conclusion expressed the first sentence is supposed to follow from the judgment expressed in the second sentence.



question. It is only when there are ties that the relevant reason is present: namely, that Harry has not just a complaint, but an unanswered one.

## 6 Pure different-number cases below zero

Now let us consider how to extend Worse-Fate to (pure and mixed) different-number cases. Before getting lost in the details, the basic strategy is, first, to transform different-number cases into same-number cases and, second, to apply to the transformed cases whatever trade-off rules that we have already decided are appropriate for same-number cases.

How we transform different-number cases depends on whether we are considering people in “negative territory,” with lives below zero, or people in “non-negative territory,” with lives at or above zero. Let’s begin by considering cases in which anyone who exists will be in negative territory.

Let’s also suppose, for the moment, that at most one person exists. Other things equal, we save people from a worse fate by replacing a person at a lower level, say, -100, with someone at a higher level, say, -50. The best that we can do by way of saving people from a worse fate, however, is simply not to bring anyone into existence. So long as someone comes to be, we are assuming, they will be below zero. So they will have reason to prefer how things are for people in an outcome in which no one exists: “how things are for people” being that no people exist.

Now let’s suppose that more than one person may exist, while continuing to suppose that anyone who exists is below zero. Bringing one fewer person into existence (by supposition at some negative level) prevents one more person from the worse fate of existing at some negative level.

This licenses the following accounting fiction: treat bringing one fewer person into existence (by supposition at some negative level) as equivalent to replacing a person (at that negative level) with someone at zero. Replacement by someone at zero, like not being brought into existence at all, saves one person (who would otherwise be at some negative level) from a worse fate.

By doing this, we can transform a different-number case into a same-number case. Each fewer person brought into existence becomes, as it were, a person brought into existence at zero. Once we have reduced it to a same-number case, then we can apply whatever trade-off rules we would apply in a same-number case. More generally:

If outcome  $A$  in a pair  $\{A, B\}$  has fewer people than outcome  $B$  (all of whom, recall, are below zero) add people at zero to  $A$  until the groups are the same size, making a new outcome  $A'$ . Then apply the trade-off rules to the resulting pair,  $\{A', B\}$ , to determine which, if either, is wrong.  $A$  is wrong given  $\{A, B\}$  iff  $A'$  is wrong given  $\{A', B\}$ .  $B$  is wrong given  $\{A, B\}$  iff  $B$  is wrong given  $\{A', B\}$ .

This explains why we should choose Parfit’s “Hell One” with a few below zero over “Hell Two” with vastly many only slightly better off (Parfit 1984, p. 406). The comparison becomes one between Hell Two and, as it were, Hell One’, where people are added at zero to equalize the numbers. Assuming plausible trade-off rules, given {Hell One’, Hell Two}, Hell Two is wrong and Hell One’ isn’t. So given {Hell One, Hell Two}, Hell Two is wrong and Hell One isn’t.<sup>4</sup>

## 7 Pure different-number cases above zero

Now let’s consider cases in which anyone who exists will be in non-negative territory. Let’s begin, as before, by supposing that at most one person exists.

Now no one’s existing would not save anyone from a worse fate. Existing at some level at or above zero is not a worse fate than not existing. It’s not a condition such that someone in it would have reason to prefer how things are for people — namely, not existing — at the alternative. Nor does someone’s existing save anyone from a worse fate. Not existing is not a worse fate than existing at a level at or above zero. Indeed, it makes little sense to describe nonexistence as a “condition” such that someone “in that condition” would have reason to prefer existing at a level at or above zero.

This is perhaps the key difference between Worse-Fate and Benefit Thinking. While seeking to prevent people from suffering worse fates would not give us any reason to create people with lives worth living — to “prevent people from not existing” — seeking to benefit people would give us reason to create people with lives worth living, at least if we benefit people by creating them with lives worth living.

Now let’s suppose that more than one person may exist, while continuing to suppose that anyone who exists is at or above zero. Given that anyone who exists will be at or above zero, we should not, in contrast to the approach of previous subsection where everyone was in non-negative territory, treat one fewer person at a positive level as equivalent to replacing a person at a positive level with a person at zero. Being at zero rather than at some positive level is a worse fate. But simply not existing rather than being at some positive level, which is what we are actually considering, is not a worse fate.

So I suggest an alternative way of reducing such different-number cases to same-number cases. This is simply to ignore the best-off people in the more populous outcome. First I illustrate how this would work. Then I try to justify it.

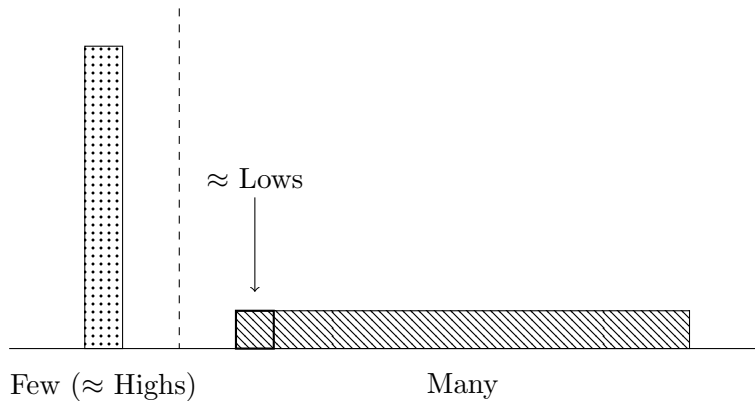
If outcome  $A$  in a pair  $\{A, B\}$  has more people than outcome  $B$  (all of whom, recall, are at or above zero) subtract from  $A$  the best-off people from  $A$  until the groups are the same size, making a new outcome  $A'$ . Then, as before, apply the trade-off rules to the resulting pair,  $\{A', B\}$ , to determine which, if

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<sup>4</sup>As Alex Voorhoeve pointed out to me, this accounting fiction — adding a person at zero for each fewer person — is more questionable if, disagreeing with Section 3.4 above, we hold that equality itself matters. Hell One’ has significant inequality, whereas Hell One does not.

either, is wrong.  $A$  is wrong given  $\{A, B\}$  iff  $A'$  is wrong given  $\{A', B\}$ .  $B$  is wrong given  $\{A, B\}$  iff  $B$  is wrong given  $\{A', B\}$ .

Worse-Fate thus implies that it is wrong to make the repugnant choice: to bring it about that the Many exist with lives barely worth living, rather than that the Few exist with better lives Parfit (1984).



Repugnant Choice

We subtract a sufficient number from the Many (any of whom counts as among the “best off” in Many) so as to equalize numbers with the Few.<sup>5</sup> We are then left with a pure same-number case like Depletion, where the Few have become the Highs and the Many have become the Lows. We have already agreed that it would then be wrong to choose the Lows over the Highs. So, likewise, it would be wrong to choose the Many over the Few.<sup>6</sup>

Now on to justification. To explain how this approach embodies Worse-Fate Thinking, why it is an appropriate generalization of the single-person case with which we began this section, we proceed by cases. As shorthand, say that  $A$  “loses” to  $B$  iff  $A$  is wrong and  $B$  isn’t given  $\{A, B\}$ .

First, suppose  $B$  does not lose, according to the trade-off rules, to  $A'$ , the reduced outcome with the surplus, best-off population removed. Could  $B$  somehow lose to  $A$ , the unreduced outcome with the surplus population restored? Or suppose that  $A'$  loses to  $B$ . Could  $A$  somehow not lose to  $B$ ? (The Repugnant Choice illustrates both possibilities.) In other words, could the unreduced  $A$  somehow do better against  $B$  than does the reduced

<sup>5</sup>In the diagrams, different fill patterns in the bars indicate different people. So, this diagram represents a pure different number case, in which none of the people in Many exist in Few.

<sup>6</sup>Another strategy for avoiding the Repugnant Choice is to appeal to the loss of impersonal values (see section 10.2.2) that the Many entail and, perhaps, to deny Negative Transitivity (see section 11.2). Compare Parfit 2016.

$A'$ ? It is hard to see how. For  $A$  merely adds to  $A'$  people at some levels or other. Adding people at some level can't reduce the number at some level. And saving people from a worse fate requires reducing the number at some level.

The next sort of case: Suppose that  $B$  loses to  $A'$ . And suppose that all of the surplus best off subtracted from  $A$  were at or above the highest level in  $B$ . Can  $B$  somehow not lose to  $A'$ ? Or suppose that  $A'$  does not lose to  $B$ . Can  $A$  somehow lose to  $B'$ ? (Ignoring the Best Off, below, illustrates this second possibility.) In other words, could  $B$  somehow do better against the unreduced  $A$  than against the reduced  $A'$ ? Not given our supposition that all of the surplus best off subtracted from  $A$  are at or above the highest level in  $B$ .  $B$  does not save from a worse fate any of the best off "added back" to  $A$ , since each person added back is at least as well off as anyone in  $B$ .

In the final sort of case,  $B$  again loses to  $A'$ , or  $A'$  does not lose to  $B$ , but now not all of the best off subtracted from  $A$  were at or above the highest level in  $B$ . It's less clear what to say about such cases. With an admittedly weaker rationale, and perhaps only as a placeholder, however, I will say that  $B$  still can't do better against  $A$ .

The weaker rationale is that the advocate of  $A$  can say, against the advocate of  $B$ , "Choose from  $A$  any population same in number to  $B$ , even the worst off in  $A$ , and  $A$  does more to save the members of that population from worse fates than does  $B$ ."

Whether or not we accept this rationale, we can treat this approach as a placeholder for some more nuanced treatment of such cases. None of the cases that we have cause to consider in this paper are of this form. That is, to address classic examples such as the repugnant conclusion, mere addition, and so on, we only need to consider cases in which the best off subtracted from  $A$  are all better off than the best off in  $B$ .

## 8 Pure different-number cases above and below zero

To address pure different-number pairs with people above and below zero, we simply combine the two approaches. To address choice sets with more than two options, we say that an outcome is wrong given a set if it is wrong when paired with another option in the set. We can now state Worse-Fate in a more general form.

**Worse-Fate:** Given a choice set,  $S$ , consider each pair of outcomes,  $\{A, B\}$  in  $S$ . Suppose  $A$  has no more people below zero than  $B$ . Construct  $A'$  by adding people at zero to  $A$  until the number of people below zero and dummy zeros in  $A'$  is the same as the number below zero in  $B$ . Rechristen  $B$  as  $B'$ . Suppose that  $B$  has no fewer people at or above zero than  $A$ . Construct  $B''$  by subtracting the best-off people in  $B'$  until the number of people at or above zero in  $B''$  is the same as the number of people at or above zero in  $A$ . Rechristen  $A'$  as  $A''$ . Then apply the trade-off rules to the resulting same-number choice set  $\{A'', B''\}$  to determine which, if either, is wrong. If and only if  $A''$  loses to  $B''$ , then  $A$  loses to  $B$  (and vice versa). Abstracting from considerations other

than how the people in question fare, it is then wrong, given  $S$ , to choose an outcome  $X$  in  $S$  if and only if  $X$  loses to some  $Y$  in  $S$ .

Worse-Fate delivers the right answers in a stylized version of the procreation asymmetry. Given a choice between GOOD, with a child with a life worth living, and NO, with no child, neither choice is wrong. We subtract the child in GOOD so as to make the two populations equal: i.e., equally zero. That leaves us with two equivalent options, neither of which loses to the other. Given a choice between BAD, with a child with a life not worth living, and NO, BAD is wrong. We add a dummy zero to NO so as to make the two populations equal: i.e., equally one. Since it is better to be at zero than below it, BAD loses to NO.

Put another way, according to Worse-Fate Thinking, it is wrong to leave people to a worse fate, a condition such that they would have reason to prefer how things are in some alternative. This is why BAD over NO is wrong. The person who exists in BAD has reason to prefer how things are in NO. By contrast, NO over GOOD is not wrong. No one is left to any fate in NO. There is no person with reason to prefer how things are in GOOD.<sup>7</sup>

The stylized procreation asymmetry assumes a possibly artificially limited choice set, where one cannot instead make, say, a non-contingent child even better off, but not as well off as the child one would have. If one had such a choice, then Worse-Fate implies that, as far as concerns how people fare, one should make it. This does not necessarily mean, however, that it is wrong to have a child when one could instead make a non-contingent child better off. One might have other reasons, such as agent-relative reasons, to have one's own child.

## 9 Conflicts with Benefit Thinking

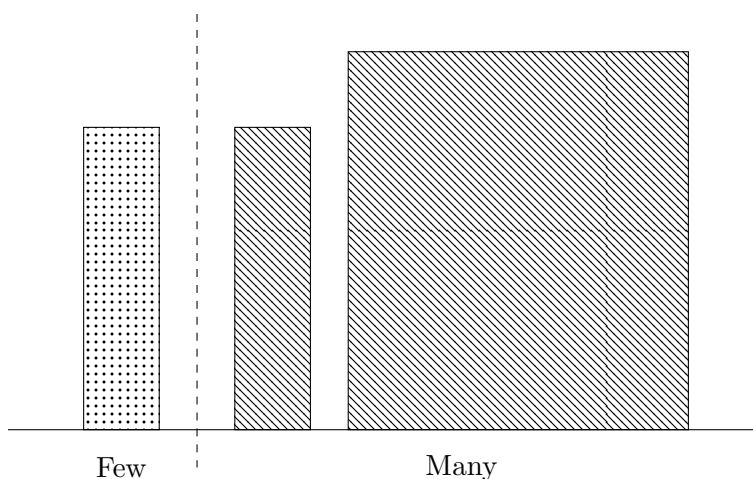
So far, so good for Worse-Fate. But now objections rush in.

### 9.1 Benefit Requires

Some may object that in the example below, while Worse-Fate permits us to choose the Many over the Few, it does not require us to.

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<sup>7</sup>This brings out an important structural similarity to the “Variabilism” of Roberts (2011) and the “SHMV” of Meacham (2012). An important difference, though, is that these alternative approaches are, roughly, rigid and so deliver, to my mind, implausible or undermotivated verdicts.



### Ignoring the Best Off

Is this acceptable?

The traditional utilitarian answer is no, because it is always wrong to fail to bring about a greater sum of happiness. The familiar reply is to deny that we have reason to bring about a greater total quantity of happiness. What matters are people, not happiness.

A sophisticated proponent of benefit thinking, however, can retrench and say, more plausibly, the following. First, it net benefits a particular person to cause them to be with a life worth living, even if they would not have been worse off otherwise (Parfit 2017). Second, we have reasons, bearing on permissibility, to benefit people, for their sake, not to increase the sum of happiness. In a stronger form, the claim would be:

**Benefit Requires:** If  $B$  net benefits people more than  $A$ , then it is wrong to choose  $A$  given a choice set that includes  $A$  and  $B$ .

“Net benefits people more” can be understood in two different ways:

**Sum:**  $B$  sum net benefits people more than  $A$  iff  $B$  has a higher sum total of (possibly priority-weighted) net benefits than  $A$ .

**Pareto:** Let  $P$  be a function from an outcome to its population.  $B$  Pareto net benefits people more than  $A$  iff there exists an injective function  $F : P(A) \mapsto P(B)$  such that (1) for each  $j \in P(A)$ ,  $F(j)$  is net benefitted in  $B$  at least as much as  $j$  in  $A$ , (2) for some  $j \in P(A)$ ,  $F(j)$  is net benefitted in  $B$  more than  $j$  in  $A$  and (3) for each  $k \in P(B) \setminus \text{ran } F$ ,  $k$  is above zero.

In other words, we can pair each person in  $A$  with a distinct counterpart in  $B$ , such that every counterpart is at least as well off, some counterpart is better off, and anyone in  $B$  left unpaired with anyone in  $A$  is above zero.

There is reason to reject Benefit Requires, on either interpretation. On the sum interpretation, Benefit Requires requires us to make the repugnant choice. After all, the sum of the benefits we give to the Many is greater than the sum of those we give to the Few. And if we accept priority, that reasons to provide increments of net benefit to a person diminish as those increments bring the person to a higher level, then the case only becomes stronger.<sup>8</sup>

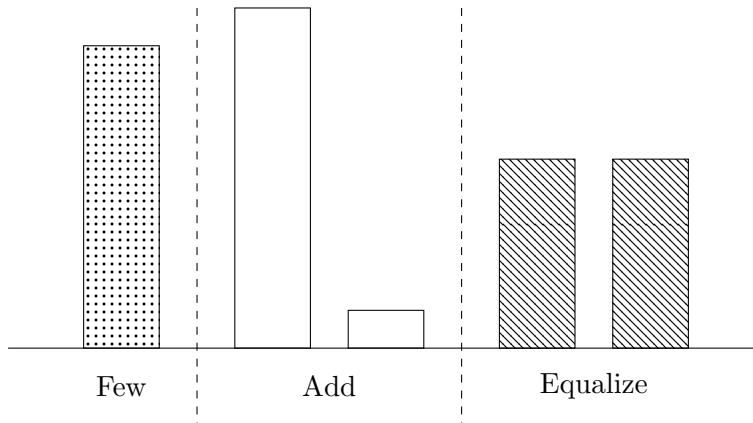
On the Pareto interpretation, Benefit Requires requires us to choose GOOD, over NO, in the procreation asymmetry.

## 9.2 Benefit Permits

There is, however, a weaker version of Benefit Thinking. Consider a choice set containing just Few and Add in the example below (ignoring Equalize for the time being).

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<sup>8</sup>One might try to avoid the repugnant choice by appealing to a deontic version of Temkin (2012)'s Consolidate Additional Benefits principle: that there is reason to give a few large benefits instead of giving many smaller benefits, even when the sum of benefits to the many is greater and the many are worse off. So there is reason to give large benefits to the Few, instead of smaller benefits to the Many (Parfit 2017). But, first, it is not clear that CAB applies to the repugnant choice. Temkin (2012) writes that "many find CAB compelling, at least for those cases where if many people have their burdens increased a little this would have relatively little overall impact on their lives, whereas if a few people have their burdens increased substantially this would have a substantial impact on their lives" (pp. 69-70). But the benefit of existence, even a lower level, would seem to have a substantial impact on one's life. Second, CAB may not save us from the repugnant choice. Suppose CAB argues for choosing the Few over the Many in a choice between the two. Nevertheless, CAB should allow us to add  $n$  Manys at  $L$  while lowering  $n$  Few by  $L$  (since the same number of benefits, of the same size, go to people with less). So, we ought to take each step down, but once we reach the Many, we ought rather to choose the Few. So, we have cycling. Suppose we then say, as I will say in section 11.4, that, when presented with just the choices in that cycle, any choice is permissible. Then it is permissible to choose the Many from a set that includes the Few.



Mere Addition

Once we subtract the better off people in Add, i.e., the first bar, the Few become like the Highs in a pure same number case, and the worse off people in Add, i.e., the second bar, become like the Lows. Thus, as it is wrong to choose the Lows over the Highs, it is wrong to choose Add over Few.

Is this acceptable? No, one might answer, on the grounds of:

Benefit Permits: If  $B$  net benefits people more than  $A$ , then it is not wrong to choose  $B$  given  $\{A, B\}$ .

This is another, weaker expression of Benefit Thinking.

On the sum interpretation, we again have reason to reject Benefit Permits. It permits the repugnant choice.

But what about Pareto Permits: i.e., Benefit Permits interpreted by Pareto? As I argue in section 10, it isn't clear to me that there is a compelling argument, beyond the intuition that Add over Few is not wrong, for any form of Benefit Permits.

In any event, if we like, we can incorporate Pareto Permits into Worse-Fate, by revising the definition of "loses." Recall how Worse-Fate works. It begins by looking at each pair of choices  $\{A, B\}$  in the choice set. It transforms each such pair into a same-number choice  $\{A'', B''\}$  (by adding zeros to equalize numbers in negative territory and subtracting the best off to equalize numbers in non-negative territory). If and only if  $A''$  is wrong and  $B''$  isn't wrong, we say that  $A$  "loses" to  $B$ . It is then wrong to choose  $X$  in the set that loses in this sense to some  $Y$  in the set. To incorporate Pareto Permits, we change the definition of "loses" to read:

If and only if  $A''$  is wrong and  $B''$  isn't wrong and  $A$  does not Pareto net benefit people more than  $B$ ,  $A$  loses to  $B$ .



In other words, a choice that Pareto benefits can always, as it were, force a draw. Even if a choice would otherwise lose to another, it doesn't so long as it Pareto benefits. Call the principle that results from Worse Fate by so revising "loses": "Worse-Fate-Pareto."<sup>9</sup>

This might seem ad hoc, but there is a way of looking at it that makes it seem less so. The thought would be that in our judgments about ordinary, same-people choices, such as that of Eleanor, are driven simultaneously by two impulses: Worse Fate Thinking and Pareto Benefit Thinking. The moral question we have put to ourselves is: When we consider what our choice will mean for how people fare, what choice are we permitted to make? We answer the question—implicitly and, needless to say, not at all transparently—with three ideas: first, that saving someone from a worse fate makes a choice permissible; second, that Pareto benefitting makes a choice permissible; and, third, that at least as far as how people fare are concerned, nothing else makes a choice permissible. We fail to appreciate that they these are different impulses, however, because they all drive in the same direction. Given any same-number pair, the choice, if there is one, that Pareto net benefits, such as putting Eleanor in the Good Place, will also save people from a worse fate, and vice versa. It's only given different-number choice sets that a choice that Pareto net benefits may not save people from a worse fate, and vice versa. In such a case, the appropriate extension of our judgments about ordinary, same-people choices is to permit either. That is how we do justice to both impulses: to save from worse fates and to Pareto benefit.

### 9.3 The Sadistic Choice

A further worry about Worse-Fate is that it may lead to what Arrhenius (2000) calls a:

Sadistic Choice:  $A$  differs from  $B$  only in that  $A$  has a group all at or above zero whereas  $B$  has a group all below zero, but  $A$  loses to  $B$ .<sup>10</sup>

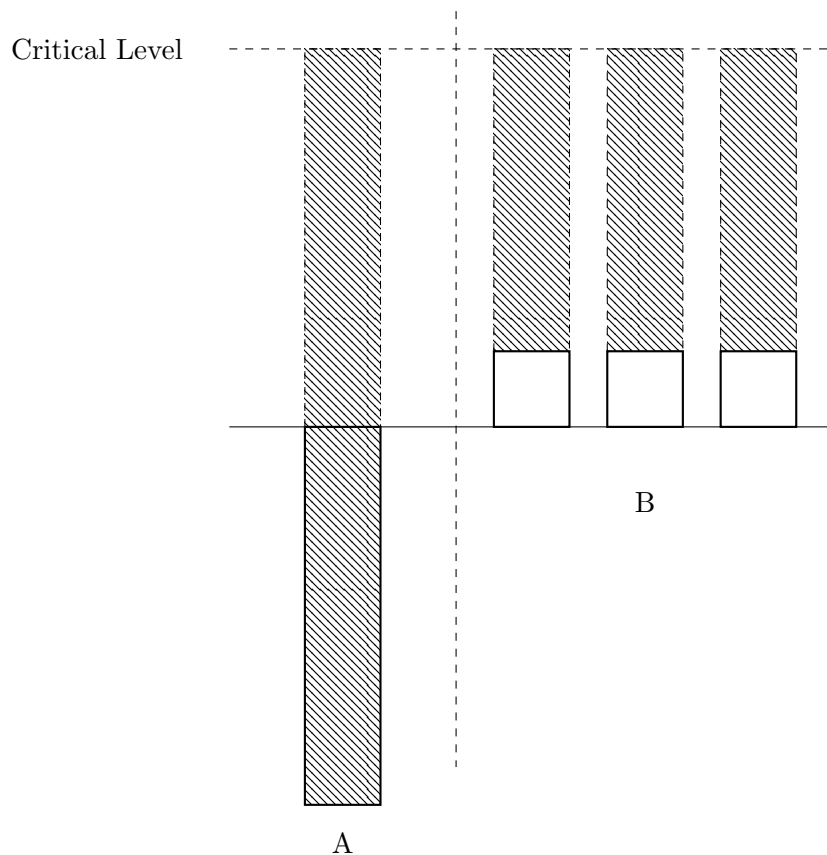
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<sup>9</sup>Some might contend that it is wrong to choose Add over Few if a non-contingent person ends up worse off: that is, if there is a non-contingent person in the second bar in Add. To accommodate this, we might add the constraint that  $B(i) = i$  where  $i \in P(B)$ . This would not, as far as I can see, lead to the sort of problems for rigid principles that we saw earlier.

<sup>10</sup>Arrhenius proves, roughly and translated into deontic terms, that any theory that accepts all four of Negative Transitivity, Dominance, Addition, and Non-Priority Principles cannot avoid permitting the instantiation of at least one of the Repugnant, Anti-Egalitarian, and Sadistic Choices.

- Dominance Principle: If  $A$  has the same number as  $B$ , and every person in  $A$  is better off than any person in  $B$ , then  $A$  beats  $B$ .
- Addition Principle: If when we create  $B$  simply by adding to  $A$  people all with lower welfare,  $A$  beats  $B$ , then when we create  $C$  simply by adding to  $A$  more people with even lower welfare,  $A$  beats  $C$ .
- Minimal Non-Extreme Priority Principle: There is always some  $n$  such that if  $A$  has one person below zero and  $n - 1$  others at very high welfare, whereas  $B$  has  $n$  people at low but positive welfare,  $B$  does not beat  $A$ .
- Anti-Egalitarian Choice:  $A$  has higher average welfare than  $B$  and  $A$  is perfectly equal whereas  $B$  is unequal, but  $B$  beats  $A$ .

The Sadistic Choice is implied by views that hold it against a choice that it adds people above zero but below some positive “critical level” (Blackorby and Donaldson 1984; Blackorby, Bossert, and Donaldson 1995). In the example below, the thick lines represent welfare levels as usual.<sup>11</sup>



Sadistic Choice: Critical Level

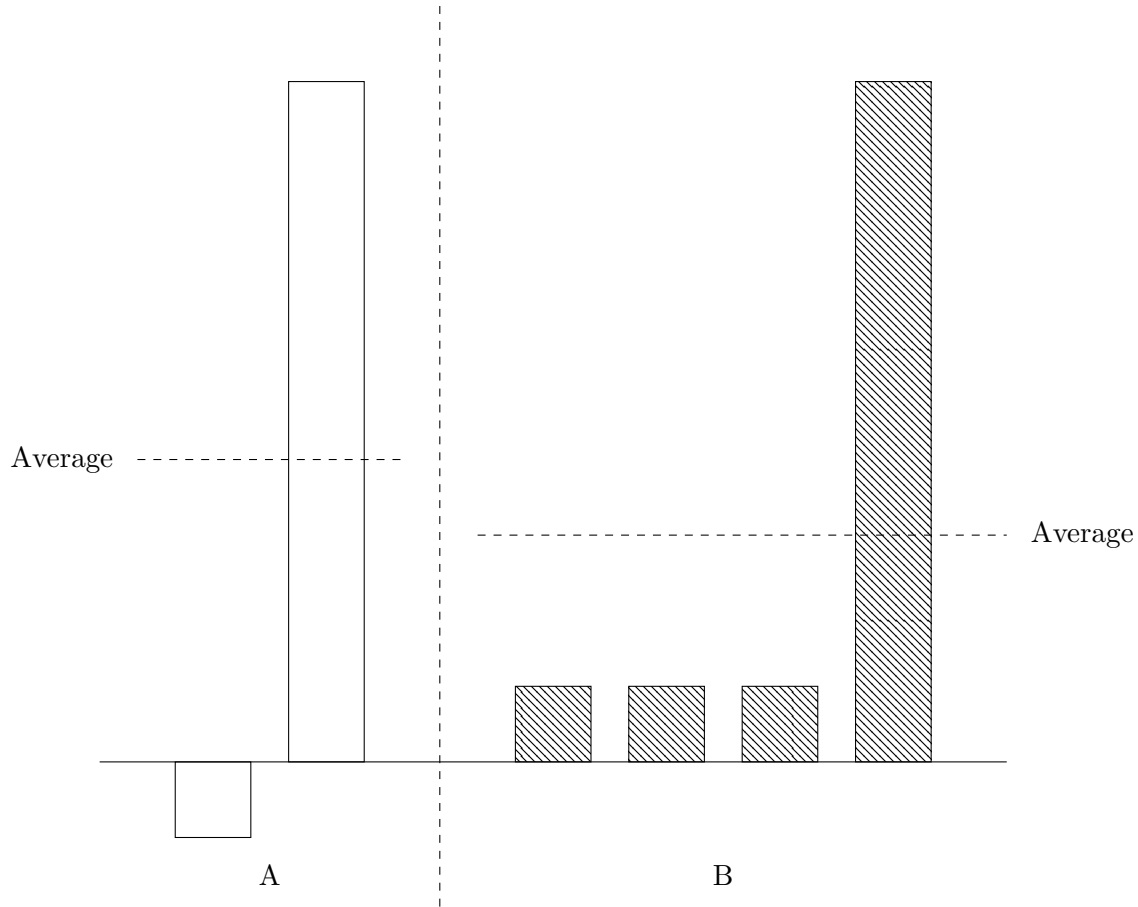
Since the critical level is 50, a rule that tells us to minimize aggregate shortfall would tell us to choose *A*, which has a total shortfall (shaded) of 100, over *B*, which has a total shortfall of 120. However, *B* differs from *A* only in that *A* has a group all below zero and *B* has a group all above zero. (Compare Parfit (1984, p. 415)’s (A).)

Average utilitarianism (and principles, such as Hurka (1983)’s and Ng. (1989)’s, that approximate average utilitarianism at some population levels) also leads to a Sadistic Choice.

However, we reject Negative Transitivity and, if we accept Zero Embargo, we reject the Minimal Non-Extreme Priority Principle.

<sup>11</sup>Assume that the people are different, although this isn’t indicated by a change of pattern.

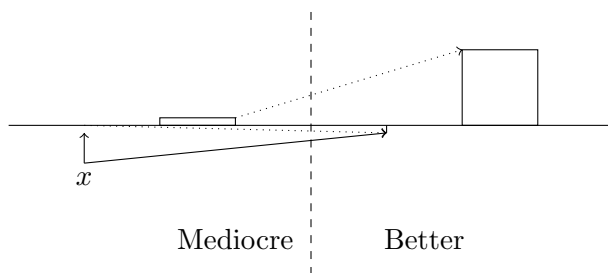
(This is unsurprising, since average utilitarianism can be thought of as a variable critical level view, where the critical level is the average.)



Sadistic Choice: Average Utilitarianism

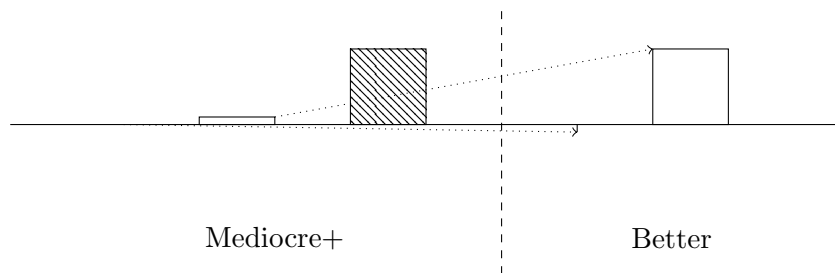
Since the average in  $B$  is lower, average utilitarianism tells us to choose  $A$ . However,  $A$  differs from  $B$  — that is, ignoring the last bar in both — only in that  $A$  has a group all below zero and  $B$  has a group all above zero.

Can a Sadistic Choice be constructed from Worse-Fate? Here is one recipe. Choose an outcome, Mediocre, that has just one person,  $x$ , at zero and several others all at some equal, positive, Mediocre Level. So long as we reject Zero Embargo, we should be able to construct an outcome, Better, with the same numbers such that  $x$  or a counterpart is now negative, all rest are at some positive, equal level, and Mediocre loses to Better by the trade-off rules.



Constructing a Sadistic Choice: Step 1

Now create Mediocre+ by adding to Mediocre a new population equivalent to the second bar of Better.



Constructing a Sadistic Choice: Step 2

According to Worse-Fate, Mediocre+ loses to Better. This is because Mediocre loses to Better and the new people added to Mediocre are people whom, in a comparison with Better, Worse-Fate ignores. But the choice of Better over Mediocre+ satisfies the definition of a Sadistic Choice. Mediocre+ differs from Better — that is, ignoring the last bar in both — only in that Better has  $x$  below zero and Mediocre+ has a group all at or above zero: namely, the second bar.

Should we be troubled by this? My sense is that the problem with Better over Mediocre+ is like the problem with the choice of Few over Add: that it violates Benefit Permits.<sup>12</sup> To move from Better to Mediocre+ is to Pareto net benefit. Ignoring the equivalent last bars, Mediocre+ brings  $x$  up to zero and adds the second, lower but still positive bar.

What gives the choice of Better over Mediocre+ a “sadistic” character that the choice of Few over Add lacks is that, without the benefit,  $x$  is below zero. But that’s, I suspect, a red herring. We could construct a similar trio of cases where Better would leave  $x$  not below zero, but instead at some low, but still positive, level. Still, I suspect, the same

<sup>12</sup>Another problem, some might say, is that the choice of Better over Mediocre+ also violates “Separation.” See section 11.1.

concern would arise: namely, that Mediocre+ loses to Better even though it Pareto net benefits.

To sum up, on the one hand, if the problem really is that someone is left below zero, then we can block this construction simply by accepting Zero Embargo. On the other hand, if the problem is the more general one of violating Benefit Permits, then that's an old problem, not a new one. If one is troubled by it, then one can simply accept Worse-Fate-Pareto.

## 10 Arguments for Benefit Thinking

We have discussed reasons to reject Benefit Thinking: namely, that, in certain forms, it requires or permits the repugnant choice, or requires GOOD over NO in the procreation asymmetry. If we wish, by opting for Worse-Fate-Pareto, we can incorporate a certain degree of Benefit Thinking into Worse-Fate, without these consequences. But the question remains whether there are any grounds to accept Benefit Thinking. Two main grounds appear time and again in the literature. But, on reflection, they have surprisingly little force.

The first is that only Benefit Thinking can explain the intuitive verdicts in same-number cases. This is simply false. Worse-Fate explains them just as well.

The second ground is that only Benefit Thinking can explain why we have reason to ensure the survival of humanity. This too is false. There are other reasons, albeit ones mostly independent of Worse-Fate.

### 10.1 Same-number cases

For some time, I (like others, e.g., Ng. (1989, p. 237)) felt compelled to accept not only Benefit Permits, but also Benefit Requires by the following reasoning. "Clearly, in ordinary, same-people cases it is not only not required, but moreover wrong to leave, say, Eleanor in the Medium Place, when we could instead put her in the Good Place! How are we to explain this, if not by appeal to Benefit Thinking? The same goes for pure same-number cases. Doesn't the correct verdict in Depletion require the Benefit Thinking?"

But as an argument for Benefit Thinking over Worse-Fate Thinking, this argument has no force. For Worse-Fate on its own explains the correct verdicts. It is wrong to leave Eleanor in the Medium Place, or to Deplete, not because we fail to bestow more benefits, but instead because we leave the worst off to a worse fate. In other words, our moral judgments in the least controversial, most certain cases tell just as much in favor of Worse-Fate Thinking as they do in favor of Benefit Thinking.

## 10.2 The end of humanity

Another argument for Benefit Thinking, which Frick (2017), in criticism, calls the “argument from additional lives,” runs as follows: “Not only is it not wrong to postpone the end of humanity, but moreover it is wrong, in some cases, not to postpone it. What reason is there to postpone the end of humanity but to provide future people with the benefit of being caused to be with lives worth living? But once we accept this, aren’t we forced to the Benefit principles? Indeed, aren’t we pressed even to Benefit Requires and even to the sum interpretation?” (Bennett 1978; Ng. 1989, p. 237; Temkin 2012, p. 414; McMahan 2013, p. 26; Parfit 2017, p. 119).

The reply is that there are other reasons to postpone the end of humanity, besides the benefits that we would thereby confer on future humans.

### 10.2.1 Interests of non-contingent people

What are these reasons? First, the fact that non-contingent people (mostly those dead or already alive) would be worse off if humanity were to end earlier may argue for postponing the end of humanity. In following Worse-Fate, we will be, to some extent, responsive to such reasons. Postponing the end of humanity may save non-contingent people from a worse fate.

### 10.2.2 Impersonal values

Second, impersonal values may argue for postponing the end of humanity. The things of impersonal value in question range from the general to the specific: sentient life, valuing, humanity, art and science, and so on. What matters is that the impersonal values have the following four properties.

(1) The things of impersonal value give rise to reasons to ensure that they continue to be instantiated into the future. Perhaps this is because we have reasons to preserve existing things of value (Frick 2017; Scheffler 2018). Perhaps it is because what is of value is, in part, a certain development, or narrative, or career through time, which the premature end of humanity would cut short (Bennett 1978). Perhaps it is simply because the premature end of humanity would prevent things of impersonal value from being instantiated: certain discoveries never made, certain works of art never given shape.<sup>13</sup>

(2) Postponing the end of humanity plays an important, perhaps essential, role in ensuring that these things of impersonal value continue to be instantiated into the future.

(3) These things of impersonal value give us reasons independently of their effects on how anyone fares. Of course, partaking of these impersonal values is what makes people’s lives worth living, and so whether these values are available for people to partake of bears on how people fare, which in turn gives us reasons. But these reasons, derived

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<sup>13</sup>Reasons of this last kind are not only reasons for us to postpone the end of humanity, but also reasons for a creator to create humanity.

from how people fare, differ from reasons derived from the impersonal values themselves.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the interests of people provide reasons that weigh against the reasons derived from impersonal values. It may be wrong to purchase a future for those values at the price of human suffering.

(4) The reasons deriving from impersonal values are more holistic and less additive than reasons deriving from the interests of people.

I find it implausible that the reason to serve a given person's interests weakens as additional people are added to an outcome. Why should that reason weaken simply because there are more other people, even people distant in time and space? Accordingly, I find it implausible that we can avoid the repugnant choice by saying that, as more people are added, the reason to benefit each additional person diminishes.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, it is entirely

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<sup>14</sup>Discussions of these issues often blur the distinction between interest-based and impersonal-value-based reasons.

As long as extinction can be deferred, human life, and posthuman life, can continue indefinitely, with unimaginable numbers of people enjoying the goods of life, which might in time become vastly superior to the goods accessible to human beings thus far, just as the goods accessible to us are vastly superior to those that were accessible to our remote evolutionary ancestors. To most of us, it is appalling to think that instead of this incalculable number of people enjoying these incalculable benefits, there might instead be only the emptiness of a world devoid of consciousness (McMahan 2013, p. 26).

Offhand, the indefinite continuation of "human" and "posthuman life," the deferral of "the emptiness of a world devoid of consciousness," would seem to be values independent of people's levels of well-being.

We can first distinguish between the quality of people's lives and the quantity of well-being per person. These might diverge. The best things in your life might be of a higher quality than the best things in mine, and your life might go worse than mine only because you would have many fewer of these best things (Parfit 2016, p. 117).

On the one hand, Parfit treats "quality," roughly, as a dimension that, multiplied by "duration," gives the "quantity of well-being." On the other hand, he treats "quality" as something that, while still important qua contribution to well-being, independently weighs against the quantity of well-being. But this seems like odd double counting. It seems that when we view quality as something with independent weight, we are not viewing quality as something that is important qua contribution to well-being, but are instead viewing quality as important qua realization of impersonal values. Indeed, that is how Parfit seems to describe it later in the same paper: "There would be no art, or science, no deep loves or friendships, no other achievements, such as that of bringing up our children well, and no morally good people" (p. 123). That would be a loss in itself, presumably, even if other contributions to well-being somehow more than made up for it.

<sup>15</sup>For such an approach to the repugnant choice, see Hurka (1983) and Temkin (2012) on "capped ideals." In fact, what seems to drive Hurka to claim that increasing the population matters more as the population approaches zero is not the thought that each person's well-being counts for more as the population approaches zero, but instead that each person's existence contributes more to the impersonal value of humanity's existence or survival as the population approaches zero. If so, then his population principle amalgamates two quite different moral concerns: the well-being of persons and "a special value in the existence of animal species" (p. 496).

A further problem for supposing that there is a limit to what Parfit calls the "positive value of quantity" is that if the limit applies to quantity at a given time, then we court Parfit (1984, p. 410-11)'s Absurd

plausible that the contribution of, say, each additional verse to the flourishing of letters, or each additional painting to the flourishing of the visual arts, diminishes. This is why we do not face a repugnant choice for impersonal values: where we sacrifice a few Dutch Masters for a multitude of velvet Elvises. And there are other holistic, non-additive effects of contributions to impersonal values (some of which are implicit in the very description of the values). Temporal extent matters in a way that spatial extent does not (Bennett 1978; Lenman 2002). Sequence and narrative structure may matter. Continuity may matter.

### 10.2.3 Agent-relative reasons

Finally, we, the people making the choice, may have various agent-relative reasons to postpone the end of humanity (Bennett 1978; Lenman 2002). Scheffler (2018), in particular, describes “attachment-based” reasons of “interest,” “love,” “valuation,” and “reciprocity.” These agent-relative reasons may be closely related to the non-contingent-interest-based and impersonal-value reasons already mentioned. They may simply be reasons based in the interests of non-contingent people, but magnified since we are the non-contingent people. Or what appear to be agent-relative reasons may simply be the reasons that impersonal values give us, in light of what we, in our moment in time, are in a position to affect.<sup>16</sup>

In choices that affect future generations, we should take account of, on the one hand, these reasons of impersonal value and (insofar as they are distinct) these agent-relative reasons, and, on the other, the reasons to save people from worse fates. One possibility is that we should choose in two steps. First, we rule out choices that, by hastening the end of humanity, would be insufficiently responsive to these reasons of impersonal value and these agent-relative reasons. Second, of the choices left, we rule out those that Worse-Fate (or Worse-Fate-Pareto) judges to be wrong. It would then be wrong, or otherwise insufficiently supported by reason, to make any of the choices thus ruled out.

## 11 Incoherence

Another source of resistance to Worse-Fate is that it issues patterns of verdicts that are somehow “incoherent.” In brief, my reply is that this is not a problem so long as our intuitions themselves pattern in the same “incoherent” ways.

### 11.1 Separation

Worse-Fate violates:

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Conclusion.

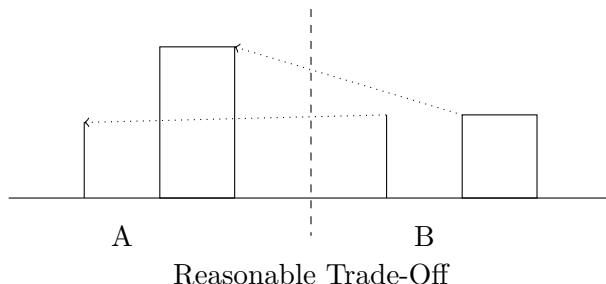
<sup>16</sup>If so, then a Martian who stumbled into our history, without any of our agent-relative reasons, would nevertheless have impersonal reason to help us keep ourselves around long enough, say, to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment.



Separation: Thinking of outcomes as sets of pairs of persons and levels, where  $A' \subseteq A$  and  $B' \subseteq B$ , if  $A'$  is wrong and  $B'$  is not given  $\{A', B'\}$  and if  $B \setminus B'$  is not wrong given  $\{A \setminus A', B \setminus B'\}$ , then  $B$  is not wrong given  $\{A, B\}$ .

The reasoning behind Separation might be put this way. If  $B'$  over  $A'$  is a good change, and if  $B \setminus B'$  over  $A \setminus A'$  is a neutral change, then how can both changes together —  $B$  over  $A$  — amount to a bad change?<sup>17</sup>

But is Separation compelling? Recall Reasonable Trade-Off.



Let  $B' = B$  and  $A' =$  the first bar of  $A$ . According to Worse-Fate,  $A'$  loses to  $B'$ ,  $B \setminus B'$  ( $= \emptyset$ ) does not lose to  $A \setminus A'$  ( $=$  the second bar of  $A$ ), but  $B$  loses to  $A$ . This is a violation of Separation, but anyone who accepts the procreation asymmetry should find this pattern of judgments intuitive.

## 11.2 Negative Transitivity

Worse-Fate and Worse-Fate-Pareto also violate:

Negative Transitivity: If  $A$  is not wrong given  $\{A, B\}$  and  $B$  is not wrong given  $\{B, C\}$ , then  $A$  is not wrong given  $\{A, C\}$ .

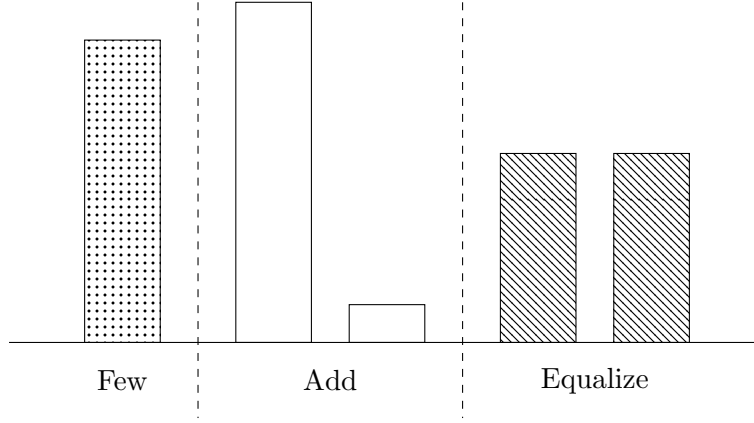
Suppose the outcomes are: NO child, child with a GOOD life, and a child with a GREAT life.<sup>18</sup> According to Worse Fate, GOOD does not lose to NO. It's permissible to have a child with a good life, if the only alternative is not to have a child. That is not for the child to suffer a worse fate. NO does not lose to GREAT. It's permissible not to have a child even if one could have a child with a great life. That is not to suffer any fate at all. But it is not the case that GOOD does not lose to GREAT. It would be wrong to choose to have a child with a good life rather than a great life. In that case, the child does suffer a worse fate.

<sup>17</sup>Compare the Broome (2005)'s puzzlement about the "greediness of neutrality," although that concerns, I think, Negative Transitivity, rather than Separation.

<sup>18</sup>The choice between NO and GOOD is like that facing "Sarah" and the choice between GOOD and GREAT or, perhaps, among NO, GOOD, and GREAT is like that facing "Clare" in Parfit (2017).

But why should this be a problem? The intransitive pattern of judgments that Worse-Fate implies is precisely the intuitive pattern! Worse-Fate implies that when both GOOD and GREAT are options, it is wrong to choose GOOD. No other choice from all three, or any two, is wrong.<sup>19</sup>

It is because of the failure of negative transitivity that Worse-Fate-Pareto blocks the “mere addition” argument for the permissibility of the repugnant choice (Parfit 1984; Parfit 2016). Recall the earlier figure:



Mere Addition

Suppose that it is not wrong to choose Add over Few. It does not seem wrong to choose Equalize over Add. By repeating the sequence of adding and equalizing, the population increases and the level declines until we reach the Many.

Worse-Fate blocks this argument at the start, by saying that it is wrong to choose Add over Few. Worse-Fate-Pareto blocks it later, by violating Negative Transitivity.

- Given {Equalize, Add}, Equalize is not wrong, since Equalize saves from a worse fate (and Add is wrong because it does not Pareto benefit).
- Given {Add, Few}, Add is not wrong, since Add Pareto benefits.
- Given {Equalize, Few}, Equalize is wrong, since Few saves from a worse fate and Equalize does not Pareto benefit.

<sup>19</sup>McMahan (2013) appears to use this case to argue for, roughly, Benefit Thinking. If we assume that there is weaker reason for GOOD than for GREAT, and that there is not weaker reason for NO than for GREAT, then it should follow that there is weaker reason for GOOD than for NO. But surely there isn't weaker reason for GOOD than for NO. So, McMahan concludes, there must, in fact, be weaker reason for NO than for GREAT. But I don't see any reason to accept this pattern of judgments. Worse-Fate explains the pattern of judgments that needs to be explained: namely, that any choice is permissible, except GOOD when given the option of GREAT.

This violates Negative Transitivity. Note also that:

- Given {Few, Add, Equalize} only Few is not wrong (since Add loses to Equalize and Equalize loses to Few).

### 11.3 Choice-Set Independence

Worse-Fate and Worse-Fate-Pareto violate:

Choice-Set Independence: If  $A$  is wrong given  $\{A, B\}$  then  $A$  is wrong given  $\{A, B, C\}$ .

Begin by noting that there is nothing incoherent, in general, in the idea that the permissibility of a choice can change as the choice set is expanded. For example, consequentialism straightaway violates the converse of Choice-Set Independence, where “not wrong” replaces “wrong.” Suppose  $C$  brings about a better outcome than  $A$  which brings about a better outcome than  $B$ . In that case,  $A$  is not wrong given  $\{A, B\}$  but  $A$  is wrong given  $\{A, B, C\}$

So why should there be anything troubling about a pattern of verdicts that violates Choice-Set Independence, so long as those verdicts are intuitive? Consider Greaves (ms.)’s illustration of how “necessitarianism”—the view that considers only the well-being of non-contingent people—violates choice-set independence.

	X	Y
A	100	1
B	90	90
C	50	

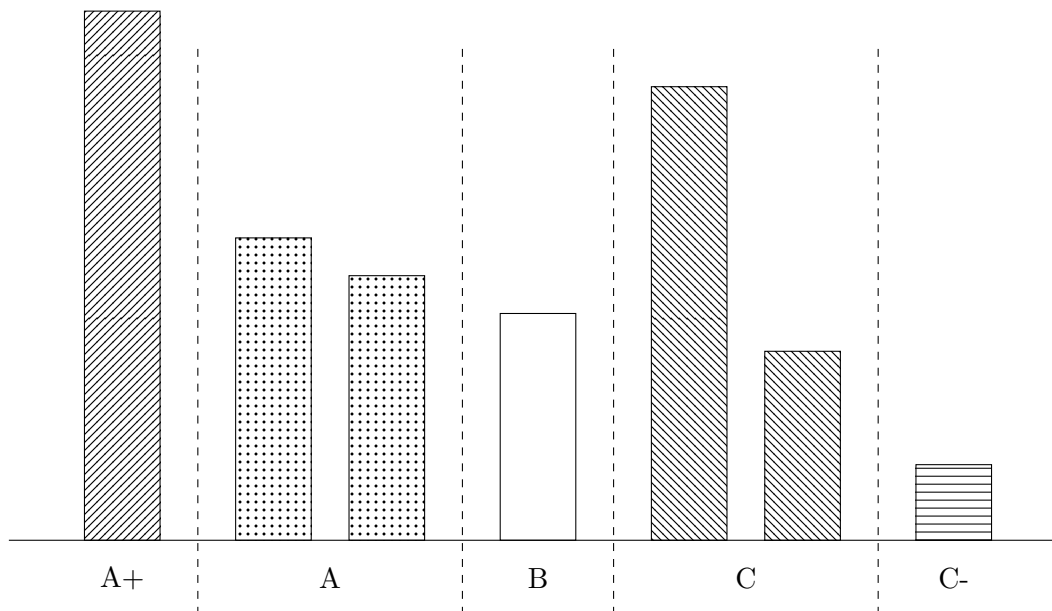
Given  $\{A, B\}$ ,  $Y$  is non-contingent. Since  $Y$ ’s well-being counts along with  $X$ ’s,  $A$  is wrong. Given  $\{A, B, C\}$ ,  $Y$  is contingent. Since  $Y$ ’s well-being no longer counts,  $A$  is not wrong. I agree that this is a compelling counterexample to necessitarianism. But what compels? Opposition to choice-set dependence itself? Or opposition to rigidity? Or simply recognition that necessitarianism gives the wrong answer—choose  $A$ !—given  $\{A, B, C\}$ ? Worse-Fate, it is worth noting, gives the right answer—choose  $B$ !—given  $\{A, B\}$ ,  $\{B, C\}$  or  $\{A, B, C\}$ .

### 11.4 Acyclicity

Finally, Worse-Fate and Worse-Fate-Pareto violate:

Acyclicity: If  $A$  is not wrong and  $B$  is wrong given  $\{A, B\}$  and  $B$  is not wrong and  $C$  is wrong given  $\{B, C\}$ , then it is not the case that  $C$  is not wrong and  $A$  is wrong given  $\{A, C\}$

In the example below,  $A$  beats  $B$ , even though we ignore the first bar of  $A$ , and  $B$  beats  $C$ , since we ignore the first bar of  $C$ . But  $C$  beats  $A$ , since we consider both bars, and the loss in the second bar in  $C$  relative to  $A$  is, let's suppose, outweighed by the huge gain in the first bar of  $C$  relative to  $A$ .



Cycling

How troubling is this? Worse-Fate can still issue verdicts even when such cycles are present, if we add a clause to the final sentence:

Abstracting from considerations other than how the people in question fare, it is then wrong, given  $S$ , to choose an outcome  $X$  in  $S$  if and only if  $X$  loses to some  $Y$  in  $S$  and it is not the case that  $Y$  loses to some  $Z_1$ , which loses to some  $Z_2$ , which loses to..., which loses to  $Z_n$  (all in  $S$ ), which loses to  $X$ .

Given  $\{A+, A, B, C, C-\}$ , any choice other than  $A+$  is wrong. Given  $\{A, B, C, C-\}$ , only  $C-$  is wrong. Given  $\{A, B, C\}$ , no choice is wrong. Insofar as we are guided by Worse-Fate Thinking, we may well feel that something is wrong with the choice of  $A$ ,  $B$ , or  $C$ . Whichever we choose, some alternative would have saved the worst off from a worse fate. True; it's just that, in light of that fact, the best we can do is just choose one.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup>As far as I can see, this need not expose us to "money pumps," where we would pay some morally relevant cost  $x$  to trade  $C$  for  $B$  given just those two options, then pay  $x$  to trade  $B$  for  $A$  given just those

## 11.5 The Deontic and the Axiologic

“Incoherence” of the kind that we have been discussing may be problematic for axiological claims, about which outcomes would be better or worse than others. Consider Choice-Set Independence. Whether one outcome is better than another, one might say, should not depend on what other options it is compared with (although Temkin (2012) argues formidably that it does). However, the claims that we are considering are deontic claims, about which outcomes it would be wrong to choose. No one denies that what it is wrong to choose depends on the choices one has.

Of course, if deontic claims about what it would be wrong to choose require an axiological ordering of outcomes as better or worse, then these problems cannot be avoided. And Greaves (ms.) assumes that any moral theory (at least any sane one, that takes the consequences of choices seriously) needs an ordering of outcomes as better or worse. But I don’t see why. To be sure, a moral theory needs to say when and why choices can be wrong because of properties of the outcomes that they bring about. But, as Worse-Fate shows, that theory need not say anything about whether one outcome is better or worse than another. (And even if it does, one may suspect that it is simply reporting judgments about which outcomes one ought to choose, given a choice.) Indeed, talk of better and worse outcomes seems at best an unnecessary, and at worst a distorting, intermediate layer. Why say that choosing this outcome is wrong because (i) it is wrong to produce a worse outcome, (ii) this outcome is worse, and (iii) it is worse because of its properties and the properties of alternative outcomes? Why not cut out the middleman and just say that this choice is wrong, because of the properties of the outcome it would produce and of alternative outcomes?

## 12 Do we need a principle?

I have proceeded as though we need a principle that tells us how to take account of how future people fare. But it might be said that we need no such principle. Scheffler (2018), for instance, seems to suggest that we can avoid the thicket of population ethics by recognizing simply that the “positive... attachment-independent reasons of beneficence may be... reasons to ensure that the chain of human generations is extended into the indefinite future under conditions conducive to human flourishing.”

I’m not sure what he has in mind, but let us suppose that Scheffler is suggesting that so long as a choice leaves everyone above some sufficiency threshold, it is not wrong — at least not wrong because of its effects on how people fare — no matter what the size of the population.

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two options, and then pay  $x$  to trade  $A$  for  $C$  given just those two options. On the assumption of full information, including information about future choices available to us, we can never face such a series of choices. We have all of the choices available to us now:  $\{C, B - x, A - 2x, C - 3x\}$ . Given that set, every choice but  $C$  is wrong.

Worse-Fate is certainly compatible with such a view. Indeed, Worse-Fate implies such a view when the trade-off rules reflect a sufficiency threshold.

But worries linger. Scheffler’s formula is silent about how we should choose when not everyone can be above the threshold. Such silence is less of a problem, of course, if the threshold is lower and so there is less chance that we will ever be forced to leave people below it. However, if the threshold is higher, there is more chance that we will be forced to leave someone below it and so need guidance that the mere appeal to a threshold of sufficiency does not provide.

If the sufficiency threshold that applies to future people is the same threshold that applies to same-people cases, however, the threshold seems, to judge from intuitions about same-people cases, rather high. What level of healthcare provision for the current population is it, for example, such that “trade-offs” are no longer a matter of concern?

Now perhaps Scheffler has in mind a sufficiency threshold applying to future people that is different from the sufficiency threshold (if any) applying in same-people cases. But to say that a different threshold applies to future people seems to me hard to defend. Why should the well-being of future people count for less (or more)?

In any event, the threshold for future people, even if different from the threshold for present people, would also be, intuitively, rather high. Suppose that it costs us nothing at all to excavate ore here rather than there. If we excavate here, as a kind of side-benefit, we prevent some future miasma from being released. If it is released, then people in the future, each of whom enjoys the healthcare, education, etc. of a idealized Scandinavian social democracy, would have to spend a month of afternoons over their lifetime indoors, to avoid the harmless but unbearable unpleasantness until the miasma dissipates. Is it absurd to think that it would be wrong for us, made fully aware of this, to excavate there, rather than here?

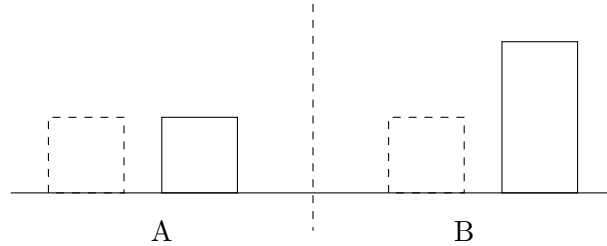
### 13 Ignoring the Unaffected

In a way that we have so far suppressed, the letter of Worse-Fate is at odds with its spirit. The issue is how Worse-Fate counts “unaffected” people. A person is “unaffected” relative to a choice set just when that person is at the same level of well-being at every choice in the set. Those who died long before we make our choice, for example, may be such unaffected people. Of course, any contingent person is affected; their very existence varies with the choice we make. But some non-contingent people may also be affected; although their existence does not vary with our choice, their well-being may.

A bit of terminology: For any outcome  $A$  in a choice set  $S$ , let  $A^*$ , the affected counterpart of  $A$ , be outcome that differs from  $A$  solely in that every person in  $A$  who is unaffected relative to  $S$  has been removed. Let  $S^*$ , the affected counterpart of  $S$ , be the set that replaces each element in  $S$  with its affected counterpart. Say that a principle is insensitive to the unaffected iff according to that principle,  $A$  is wrong (given  $S$ ) iff the

affected counterpart  $A^*$  is wrong (given the affected counterpart  $S^*$ ).

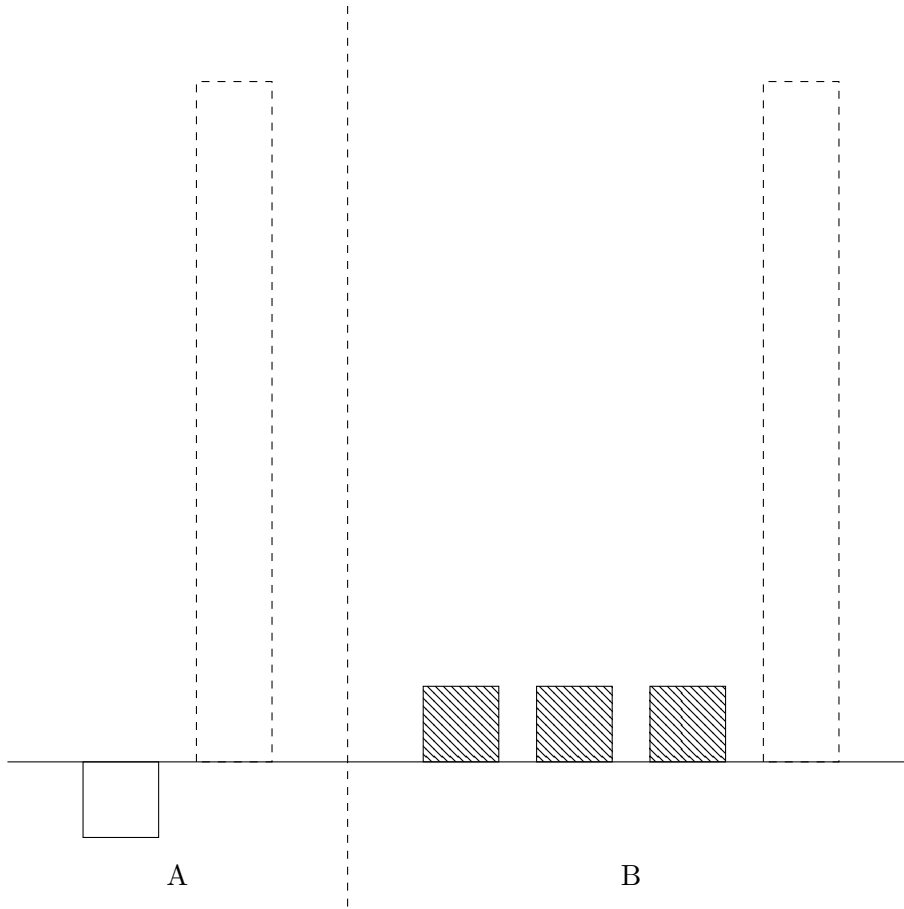
Many principles are, by contrast, sensitive to the unaffected. First, any principle that gives (sufficient) weight to equality is sensitive to the unaffected. In the following diagram, the unaffected are marked by dashed lines. Whereas  $A$  is more egalitarian than  $B$ ,  $B^*$ , with the unaffected removed, is just as egalitarian as  $A^*$ .



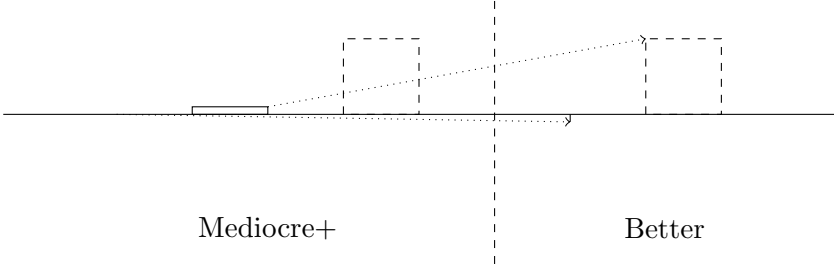
Average utilitarianism is also sensitive to the unaffected. Recall the diagram “Sadistic Choice: Average Utilitarianism,” in section 9.3. Suppose that the unaffected, marked by dashed lines, are the last bar of each choice. Whereas  $A$  has a higher average than  $B$ ,  $A^*$  has a lower average than  $B^*$ , where the unaffected are removed.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Yet another example of a view that is sensitive to the unaffected is the suggestion in section 10.2.2 that a person’s well-being counts for less as the size of the population increases.



As it stands, Worse-Fate is also sensitive to the unaffected. Suppose that the last bar in Mediocre+ and Better, marked by dashed lines, are unaffected. Worse-Fate holds that Mediocre+ is wrong. But Worse-Fate does not hold that the affected counterpart of Mediocre+ — i.e., the last bar removed — is wrong.



Worse-Fate should not be sensitive to the unaffected. Indeed, Worse-Fate should ignore the unaffected. After all, Worse-Fate cares simply about saving people from worse fates,



and no choice can save unaffected people from worse fates. Accordingly, we should modify Worse-Fate so that it judges outcomes only by their affected counterparts. We can now state it in its full generality:

Worse-Fate[-Pareto] Final Version: Given a choice set,  $S$ , consider each pair of outcomes,  $\{A, B\}$ , in the affected counterpart,  $S^*$  of  $S$ . Suppose  $A$  has no more people below zero than  $B$ . Construct  $A'$  by adding people at zero to  $A$  until the number of people below zero and dummy zeros in  $A'$  is the same as the number below zero in  $B$ . Rechristen  $B$  as  $B'$ . Suppose that  $B$  has no fewer people at or above zero than  $A$ . Construct  $B''$  by subtracting the best-off people in  $B'$  until the number of people at or above zero in  $B''$  is the same as the number of people at or above zero in  $A$ . Rechristen  $A'$  as  $A''$ . Then apply the trade-off rules to the resulting same-number choice set  $\{A'', B''\}$  to determine which, if either, is wrong. If and only if  $A''$  is wrong and  $B''$  isn't [and  $A$  does not Pareto net benefit people more than  $B$ ] then  $A$  loses to  $B$  (and vice versa). Abstracting from considerations other than how the people in question fare, it is then wrong, given  $S$ , to choose an outcome  $X$  in  $S$  if and only if  $X^*$ , the affected counterpart of  $X$  in  $S^*$ , loses to some  $Y^*$  in  $S^*$  and it is not the case that  $Y^*$  loses to some  $Z_1^*$ , which loses to some  $Z_2^*$ , which loses to..., which loses to  $Z_n^*$  (all in  $S^*$ ), which loses to  $X^*$ .

Worse-Fate-Pareto differs from Worse-Fate only in including the bracketed clause.<sup>22</sup>

## 14 Who can complain?

Recall Depletion. Each of the Lows has a life worth living. And each would not have existed otherwise. Suppose we accept both:

No Wrong without Complaint: Abstracting from considerations other than how the people in question fare, it is wrong to choose an outcome only if someone who exists in that outcome can complain about the choice.

No Complaint when Benefitted: Someone can complain about a choice only if they are not net benefitted by the choice.

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<sup>22</sup>Consider Parfit 1984, p. 420's objection to average utilitarianism:

Whether this would be bad, on the Average Principle, depends on facts about all previous lives. If the Ancient Egyptians had a very high quality of life, it is more likely to be bad to have a child now. It is more likely that this child's birth will lower the average quality of the lives that are ever lived. But research in Egyptology cannot be relevant to our decision whether to have children.

An average utilitarian might respond simply by modifying average utilitarianism to ignore the unaffected in the same way.

Then it is not wrong to choose the Lows over the Highs. And yet it seems that it is wrong, as Worse-Fate implies. So something has to give. This is the “non-identity problem.”

Moreover, even if one is not ready to accept these premises in their full generality, one may at least find it intuitive that the Lows could complain about our choice. At least my first reaction to these cases was (and the first reaction of many of my students is) that the Lows do have a complaint. That is, my first reaction was to think: “If we continue to degrade the environment, what will we tell our grandchildren?”

The first point to make is that Benefit Thinking is no better placed to solve the non-identity problem. Granted, a proponent of Benefit Thinking can simply reject No Wrong without Complaint. But then so too can a proponent of Worse-Fate Thinking.

The second point is that Worse-Fate can be part of a more complex view, which sustains the idea that the Lows can complain, whereas the Highs cannot, in part by rejecting No Complaint when Benefitted.

### 14.1 Complaint although Benefitted

On what basis can someone complain about a choice that net benefits them? One might complain that the choice was ill willed, or negligent, or took excessive risks one’s behalf. But when one is caused to be with a life worth living, there needn’t be ill will, or negligence, or excessive risk-taking.

But there may be other grounds to complain about being caused to be with a life worth living. One ground for complaint is that the choice may expose you to or cause you to suffer some specific harm (Shiffrin 1999; Harman 2004). A specific harm is a deprivation, bad experience, etc. abstracted from its effect on net well-being.<sup>23</sup>

It may suffice to answer this complaint that you consented. But when you are caused to be, you did not consent, because you could not consent. Now, even where you did not consent, because you could not consent, it may suffice to answer this complaint that it saves you from a graver specific harm (Shiffrin 1999). But causing you to be does not save you from a graver specific harm.

Another basis for complaint is that the choice intervenes in something that is yours: something that by all accounts you have a special claim to control. It may suffice to answer this complaint that you consented. And, even where you did not consent, because you could not consent, it may suffice to answer this complaint that it saves you from a graver specific harm. For example, suppose, finding you anesthetized, I see my one chance to surgically remove a fatal tumor. If I wait for your consent, it will be too late. This seems

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<sup>23</sup>Harman (2004) suggests that it may be wrong to choose *B* because it involves greater aggregate specific harm than *A*, even if *B* also involves greater aggregate specific benefit, and so greater net benefit, than *A*. But I worry that this will imply that *B* would lose to *A* even though each person in *B* has a life worth living, is better off than every person in *A*, and suffers less specific harm than anyone in *A*. This is because, if the population in *B* is larger than in *A*, then the aggregate specific harm in *B*, although much smaller for each person in *B* than for each person in *A*, will outweigh the aggregate specific harm in *A*. Compare Parfit (1984, p. 407)’s Ridiculous Conclusion.

permissible, because the surgery saves you from a graver specific harm. Now suppose that the surgery only improves your vision: saves you from having to replace your glasses with a stronger prescription, for example. While the surgery benefits you overall, it does not save you from a graver specific harm. Do you have no grounds for complaint if I take the initiative? Perhaps you do. And if optical surgery counts as an “intervention,” perhaps causing you to be is also an intervention—perhaps a far more significant one?

Of course, you may welcome being benefitted overall (Wallace 2013). So, you may feel conflicted about complaining. Indeed, you may have become attached to what was brought about, in which case the conflict may be particularly acute. However, the fact that you feel conflicted does not mean that I can adequately answer your complaint about what I did.

## 14.2 Worse-Fate-as-Answer

Suppose, then, that in causing even the Highs to be, they have some such basis for complaint. How might we answer it? We can say that had we not caused the Highs to be, we would have caused other people, the Lows, to be, and the Lows would have suffered a worse fate than the Highs. This seems a sufficient answer to the Highs’ complaint. “If it wasn’t you, it would have been the Lows, and they would have suffered a worse fate. Whatever complaint you have, their complaint would have been yet stronger.”

After all, this sort of justification seems to answer complaints about causing someone to be with a life not worth living. Suppose we have to choose between causing Bad to be, with a life so bad as not to be worth living, and someone, Worse, with a life still worse. Were Bad to complain, we could tell Bad: “But the alternative would have been even worse for Worse. Whatever complaint you have, Worse would have had an even stronger complaint. What would we have told him?”

If we can answer the Highs’ complaint in this way, then this suggests a different explanation of why it is wrong to choose the Lows. It is that we can tell the Highs, but not the Lows: “If we had chosen the alternative, there would have been people, instead of you all, with stronger complaints than you all have. What would we have told them?” This vindicates the thought that the Lows do, as it first seems, have an unanswered complaint about our choice, even though they would not have existed otherwise. “What will we tell our grandchildren?” isn’t confused, on this view. It’s the right (albeit rhetorical) question to ask.

Recall:

Answer: A complaint about a choice is answered if (i) it saves someone from a worse fate or (ii) avoids complaints at least as strong.

Clause (i) suffices to answer the complaints of the Highs. But clause (ii) may bind when more than one choice is not wrong according to Worse-Fate. There are two kinds of

complaints that might be avoided. Both kinds can be illustrated by Ignoring the Best Off, where neither the Few nor the Many are wrong according to Worse Fate.

First, if there are contingent people among the Few, then we cause someone to be if we choose the Few. Of course, we cause someone to be if we choose the Many. So whether we choose the Few or the Many, we give someone a complaint about being caused to exist. This very fact, according to (ii), answers the complaint of the Many. We can say, to the Many: “No matter what we chose, someone would have had the sort of complaint that you have.” This would mean that we do not wrong anyone by choosing the Many.

Second, recall that non-contingent people, such as Harry, may have a complaint about choices that leave them worse off, which can be a tie-breaking reason. So, returning to Ignoring the Best Off, suppose that (even if there are no contingent people among the Few) there is a non-contingent person among the second, better-off bar of the Many, who also exists, at a lower level, in the Few. That non-contingent person would have a complaint about choosing Few, since Few leaves him worse off. Perhaps, then, his complaint can answer the complaint of a contingent person whom we cause to be by choosing the Many, by saying: “Had we not made that choice, some particular person would have been worse off.”

This gives us the following:

Worse-Fate-As-Answer (or, alternatively, Worse-Fate-Pareto-As-Answer): Relative to a choice set,  $S$ , it wrongs a contingent person  $x$  to choose an  $A$  where  $x$  exists, unless (abstracting from considerations other than how the people in question fare)  $A$  is not wrong (relative to  $S$ ) according to Worse-Fate (or, alternatively, Worse-Fate-Pareto) and for every  $B$  in  $S$  such that  $B$  is not wrong and  $x$  does not exist at  $B$ , either (a) some  $y$  exists at  $B$  who does not exist at  $A$  or (b) some  $y$  who exists at  $A$  is worse off in  $B$ .<sup>24</sup>

If there is a contingent person among the Few, then clause (a) would mean that (at least as far as Worse-Fate is concerned) it does not wrong anyone among the Many to choose the Many over the Few in Ignoring the Best Off. Similarly, the Pareto version would mean that it does not wrong anyone in Add to choose Add over Few in Mere Addition, so long as there is some contingent person among the Few. If there is a non-contingent person among the second better-off bar in the Many, then clause (b) would mean that it does not wrong anyone among the Many to choose the Many over the Few in Ignoring the Best Off.

Worse-Fate-As-Answer might provide a deeper explanation of Worse-Fate. The root question is how we can justify our choice to the people whom we create. It seems a sufficient justification that, had we not created them, we would have created other people, and they would have had stronger complaints.

It may also provide a deeper explanation of the Pareto addendum. Suppose we choose Add over Few where there is some contingent person among the Few. It may be a sufficient

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<sup>24</sup>It’s a further question whether it not only wrongs someone, but also is wrong, to choose to  $A$ .

justification to the Adds to say the following. “Had we not created you, we would have created someone with complaints like yours. Moreover, one of you can point to how things are even for best off person among the Few, another of you can point to how things are even for next best person among the Few, and so on, and all of you Adds can jointly say that you prefer how things actually are for you.”

Even so expanded, Worse-Fate-As-Answer would imply that, in the stylized procreation asymmetry, we wrong the child created by the choice of GOOD. Although GOOD is not wrong given {GOOD, NO}, neither (a) nor (b) is satisfied. NO does not cause anyone else to exist, and NO does not make any particular, non-contingent person worse off.

However, in less stylized versions of the procreation asymmetry, non-contingent people, such as the parents, are made worse off by the choice of NO. And Worse-Fate-As-Answer explicitly abstracts from agent-relative reasons or impersonal reasons. Perhaps, once those reasons are considered, they can answer the complaints of the child caused to be by GOOD.

That being said, we can of course stipulate cases in which there are no such reasons. Take a case of Ignoring the Better Off in which all of the Few are non-contingent and all of the second-bar of Many are contingent. In such cases, the verdict of Worse-Fate-As-Answer, that we wrong each person in the second bar of the Many by choosing the Many, might seem to have all the sense of the suicide note of Hardy’s Little Father Time: “Done because we are too menny.”

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