

## Ethics in Focus with David Benatar and David Wasserman

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**Christiane Wisehart (producer):** Welcome to the Ethics in Focus series of Examining Ethics with Andy Cullison, hosted by The Janet Prindle Institute for Ethics.

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**Sandra Bertin (producer):** I'm Sandra, one of the producers on the podcast. Thank you for joining us and welcome to our series, Ethics In Focus. For new listeners, the Ethics in Focus series is a special presentation of full-length interviews with some of expert guests. Ethics in Focus features conversations about ethics without explanations that are designed to appeal to people already familiar with the field of ethics. We'll still have our regularly scheduled episodes at the end of every month, but every once in a while we'll drop one of these bonus Ethics in Focus interviews. Our other producer, Christiane, has more about today's show.

**Christiane Wisehart:** Today's edition of Ethics in Focus features our host Andy Cullison's conversation with David Benatar and David Wasserman, the authors of *Debating Procreation: Is it Wrong to Reproduce?* out now from Oxford University Press.

**Andy Cullison:** If you spent time studying the literature about the ethics of procreation, you've no doubt heard of our guests. David Benatar is a professor of philosophy and head of the department of philosophy at the University of Cape Town in Cape Town, South Africa. David Wasserman is a faculty member at the department of bioethics in the United States National Institutes of Health. They join me to talk about their book, which deals with questions about reproduction that are often ignored in ethics and philosophy, but center on one question in particular, is it wrong to reproduce?

[interstitial music]

**Andy:** Gentleman, thank you for joining us. Professor Benatar, thank you for joining us.

**David Benatar (guest):** Thank you. My pleasure, nice to be with you.

**Andy:** And Mr. Wasserman, thank you for joining us.

**David Wasserman (guest):** Thank you.

**Andy:** The book is *Debating Procreation: Is it Wrong to Reproduce?* And I thought it might be good to start out by getting some of the basic terminology on the table and let our listeners understand the two positions being defended here, before we get down to looking at arguments for and against these positions. So I'm going to start with Professor Benatar. Could you tell us what natalism and antinatalism are and tell us what your position on these views is?

**David Benatar:** Antinatalism's probably the easier term to define. It's a position that is opposed to procreation. Often the contrast to that is pronatalism, but I suppose one could also use the

term natalism as a contrast. And I am an antinatalist myself, I believe it's wrong for people to have children.

**Andy:** Mr. Wasserman, you defend that procreation is sometimes permissible, but it's noted that your view is somewhat unorthodox. Can you give us a rough idea as to where you might draw the line and why your view might be considered, quote unquote, unorthodox.

**David Benatar:** Yeah, I should just say, by way of background, that the unorthodox was a contrast with a heretical view that David Benatar was espousing. So I just wanted to make clear that I was not defending conventional wisdom, which I think David would concede. And I hope I will make clear. So my only view is that some procreation is permissible and I set a bar, which is, at the same time, fairly low and fairly high. It's fairly low, because I think it's morally permissible with some qualifications that I could get into for prospective parents to have any child they reasonably expect to have a life worth living, a life that future individuals would regard as worth the serious ills and adversities that any human being can expect.

Now, there are a lot of reasonables in my formulation of this, but I don't think there's a precise standard. I think that prospective parents make a decision to have a child in a very specific context, and it's within that context that they need to make that judgment. I don't think, however, that they need to choose, if it's even possible to choose, to choose the best possible child to have or the child who will be the better off. They don't need to aim for a threshold above a more than decent life and I think that such selectivity may even be questionable that parents ought to be in the business of doing best for whatever child they have, as long as their reasonably confident that that child will have a life worth living, that that child, him or herself, regards as worth living. Of course, Professor Benatar thinks that no parent or virtually no parent can have that reasonable confidence.

But the way in which my view is demanding is that I think that parents need to be motivated a certain way or act for certain reasons. I think that, in large part, because any person's life is full of terrible risks and serious harms, prospective parents ought not be exposing a person to those risks unless part of their reason for doing so, and it can only be part of their reason, is because they want that individual to enjoy the goods of life, the goods that they believe will outweigh those risks and ills. And I don't think that either part of that view is widely shared.

**Andy:** Let's turn to Professor Benatar's core arguments and views. So the book begins with Benatar's defense of the antinatalist position. And Professor Benatar, you have three core arguments here and I'd like to just go through each in turn. So let's just start with the first argument. You have something that you call the asymmetry argument for the antinatalist position. Could you summarize what that argument is for us?

**David Benatar:** Yes, I can. I should probably say at the outset that's probably the most technical of the arguments. But the rough idea is that there is an asymmetry between good things in life and bad things in life. So I'll briefly sketch out the symmetrical part and then I'll mention the asymmetrical part. I think that the presence of a harm is a bad thing and the presence of a benefit is a good thing. And I think when we come to the absences of harm and benefits, we find an asymmetry. So I think the absence of a harm is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone, whereas the absence of a benefit is not bad, unless there is somebody for whom that absence is a deprivation. So what that means is if we're thinking about cases of bringing

somebody into existence, we need to consider the possibility that that person's going to suffer harms and the avoidance of those harms by avoiding creating the child is a good thing.

We also need to recognize when we don't create a child, that there will be no child that will enjoy the benefits that child would have if it were created, but the absence of those benefits, I think, is not bad, because there's nobody who is surprised. So that's an asymmetry and obviously some people then are just going to dispute the asymmetry. But in the book and in an earlier book I wrote, I gave a series of arguments for why I think we ought to accept this asymmetry.

**Andy:** If you think the absence of harm is a good, even if no one can experience that absence or benefit from that absence, but you don't think the absence of a good is a bad, in a decision to not bring a child into existence, with respect to the harms avoided, you've done a good thing, with respect to the goods you've avoided, you haven't done a bad thing. Is that the idea?

**David Benatar:** Exactly, exactly.

**Andy:** And so, the avoidance of harm somehow gets a kind of, in the overall calculus in deciding whether or not to procreate, the absence of harm weighs in more heavily.

**David Benatar:** That's correct.

**Andy:** Now, let's talk about, as you say, that's one of the more technical arguments, so I don't think we'll need to go into the technical details, that's one of those things where we can ask our listeners to check out the books. The quality of life argument is another one of your three core arguments for the antinatalist position. Could you summarize that argument for our listeners?

**David Benatar:** Yes. In a way, they're two arguments bundled into one there. So one argument is to say that the quality of human life, even the best human lives, is much worse than most people think. And here I cite a range of psychological phenomena, which have been amply demonstrated by psychological studies, which show why people are actually not the best judges of quality of human life. They're all kinds of bad things that happen on day-to-day level, but also happen over the course of a lifetime that people tend to underestimate and not factor in to the extent that they should. If you think about, over the full course of a life, there's a chance of something really terrible happening to any one of us is really immense. And so, I think that that's one kind of quality of life argument.

Related, and I've already implied it a little bit, is a risk argument, so even if you thought that it was possible that some individuals would escape terrible things in their life, the chance of something terrible befalling any one individual is so high that I think there's something indecent about bringing a child into existence and exposing it to those risks, when it cannot consent to them and cannot agree to them.

**Andy:** Let's go through the misanthropic argument now.

**David Benatar:** So the other arguments are what I call philanthropic arguments, because they're really concerned with the well-being of the being that you would bring into existence and concerned about avoiding harm to those beings. The argument is a misanthropic one, in that it appeals to the dark side of human nature, to the terrible things that humans do to one another,

to animals, and also to the environment, thereby affecting other humans and animals. And I cite, again, a whole host of empirical and other literature that shows just how destructive humanity is. I think there's a temptation for many people to say, "Well, look, my child isn't going to be that destructive. My child isn't going to do a lot of damage." And so, one of the things I've tried to do is to show how even the people with the best of intentions actually inflict quite a lot of damage and they do quite a lot of harm and so they're quite good misanthropic arguments for avoiding creating more people.

I should say that I don't think the misanthropic argument produces quite as categorical an antinatalist conclusion as the philanthropic arguments do, but I certainly think that it is added evidence for an argument for an antinatalist position. One final thing I should say about the misanthropic argument is that I do spend some time showing why I think it's not inconsistent with or incompatible with the philanthropic arguments. I think you can be both concerned about human beings and wanting to avoid suffering to them, while also recognizing the damaging power of humanity.

**Andy:** The core difference between, say, the quality of life argument and the misanthropic argument, if I understand, is the quality of life argument has to do with thinking about the risks that you're going to put your child through, in terms of suffering, and the potential benefits might not outweigh that, and the risks are so great that without consent, you'd do something bad. But the misanthropic argument, if I understand correctly, is more about risking bringing someone into the world who's going to do the bad things. Is that the idea?

**David Benatar:** Exactly.

**Andy:** Mr. Wasserman, I know you have something to say about each of these arguments, the asymmetry argument, the quality of life argument, and the misanthropic argument. Could you briefly explain some of your thoughts on these arguments in turn?

**David Wasserman:** Okay, sure. Well, I'll start with the asymmetry argument, because I have the least to say about that. Had Professor Benatar gone into more detail on the argument, I would have had some objections to raise, but I think those objections have been raised by other people, other philosophers more attracted to the technical character of the argument who got there first with more ammunition than I could bring to bear. So I will just say that I don't find the asymmetry itself compelling, in part, for the common sense reason that I don't think that... I still find that the critical part, the asymmetrical part of the asymmetry, rather ad hoc. But again, that's just an objection, not an argument.

But what interested me more was the limited role it played in his overall argument. I find, as I believe he says at one point, and he can correct me, that the asymmetry argument establishes, if it's correct, that bringing someone into existence is a harm, but it doesn't establish the magnitude of the harm. And so, to me, the real moral action is in the quality of life and now the misanthropic argument. And I focus on the quality of life argument, in part, because I find that that most emotionally and morally compelling. I think it's a powerful argument against complacency. I don't think it's a powerful argument against procreation. And in the book I argue not that everything's coming up roses or is likely to in any future generation, but that there are massive, massive differences in the quality of life among people that I believe Professor Benatar

shows insufficient appreciation of and that those differences can only be appreciated with the kinds of standards we have within human lives.

I think that he often adopts standards for evaluating life that are just outside a human vantage point. I think that a conception of human flourishing has to take into account at least some human limitations, including the fact that we're mortal beings. I don't find the reasons that several philosophers argue, I don't find the prospect of immortality appealing, I don't even find it comprehensible as a mortal human being. I think that there are many people I know of who I believe, obviously, we all face severe [inaudible 00:15:29] limitations, although none as severe as I think Professor Benatar believes in assessing or predicting other people's lives. But I think that lives can go enormously well and I think that the arguments that Benatar gives, that they don't, arguments made in terms of specific theories of well-being, either place too much of a premium on the immediate experience of suffering, which obviously can be real and terrible and not on suffering as part of a kind of package.

I mean, obviously, in a case like giving birth to a child, which for better or worse, I've never experienced, but also in terms of the broader retrospective, someone on his or her deathbed looking back at a life full of ups and downs, and I think that unwarranted [inaudible 00:16:28] in terms of experiential good and the impossibly high standards in terms of objective good, simply place too high a bar on human well-being. I mean, there's another critic of Professor Benatar who puts it simply that there are times when being not as good as possible is simply not good, rather than bad. And that mundane conclusion, I think, goes a long way toward challenging the implications of the examples and specific arguments Benatar makes in the quality of life argument. And, I mean, I certainly could go into more detail. I don't think I should, at this point. But the philanthropic argument-

**Andy:** Let me pause you there, just so I can kind of try and distill something for our listeners on our response to the quality of life argument. So I gather the main thrust of your objection is going to be examining Professor Benatar's value calculus that places too much of a premium on certain kinds of experiences. And if you don't place that premium, then you don't think some of the weighing would favor not procreating. Is that roughly the idea?

**David Wasserman:** That's part of it. I mean, what I should've said, but I didn't get it early enough, is that he goes systematically through the three standard approaches to well-being, hedonic or experiential and that's my criticism of his hedonic argument. I think the second type of theory is a desire-satisfaction theory and I think that, largely, the way Benatar treats desire-satisfaction, it collapses either into hedonic or objective [inaudible 00:18:21], which is the third kind. And so, I focus on hedonic, in which I think his arguments suffer from that unwarranted premium and objective list theories, for which I think they set an impossibly and unreasonably high standard.

**Andy:** So then, the thrust of the disagreement between you and Professor Benatar would be over which theory of well-being to select and looking carefully at what those theories of well-being are going to say about-

**David Wasserman:** I think we both don't want to commit ourselves to a particular theory of well-being. I think he makes arguments for each of the three, and I counter with arguments for each of the three.

**Andy:** Okay. Fair enough.

**David Wasserman:** So that's it's being thought on a terrain that's been mapped out by other philosophers.

**Andy:** Okay. So then, your thoughts on the misanthropic argument?

**Christiane:** There, I think that human beings are capable of doing enormous evil, I think that they continue to do enormous evil. My assessment of the evil differs from Professor Benatar's because I don't give as much moral weight to the harms to non-human animals as he does, although, partly as a result of his arguments, more than I did before I started thinking about these issues in a concerted way. But I also believe that to not have children because one thinks there's a significant likelihood one's children will do a great deal of evil is to engage in, I'm using a phrase I didn't use in the book, a kind of preventative extinction. I think that, in procreation, one is at least permitted to give one's offspring the benefit of the doubt, if one is prepared to be a sufficiently vigilant parent.

Now, of course, there's no guarantees. There are very [inaudible 00:20:26] middle-class Islamic parents in England and other places whose well-raised children ran off to join ISIS, so I don't think there are guarantees. I think there can be reasonable assurance, which can be challenged or shattered in specific cases.

**Andy:** After spelling out your reasons for rejecting some of these antinatalist arguments and rejecting antinatalism generally, and I'll say, for our listeners, there's much more you have to say about antinatalism in the book, you turn your attention toward defending a sometimes it is permissible to procreate and, as you said at the beginning of this interview, you have a kind of bar that's low in one sense by high in another. But I wanted to talk to you about a distinction early in this defense that you make, and I think it has some bearing on how you set the bar low sometimes and high in another sense. You have this distinction between what you call child-centered reasons to procreate and, I suppose, what you might call non-child-centered reasons. So first, can you tell us what this distinction is and give us some examples of reasons that parents might have that are child-centered and then some examples of reasons that are non-child-centered?

**David Wasserman:** Okay, well, it's a distinction, but I think it's a distinction that I think is actually very blurred in practice. One, because I think that no parents act for truly child-centered reasons, which are reasons that concern the good of the future child, whoever it will be. And I can give some examples of that, come from an actual qualitative study of prospective fathers who gave, among their most frequent reasons for wanting to have a child, to share what I have and know with the child, to have a special bond that develops between a parent and child, to give love and affection to a child and to give a child a good home. Now, these are reasons which I think, at least, in part, concern a future child. Obviously, it's not a particular child at that point that the prospective father hasn't even conceived. There are an infinite number of possible

children that that intention or hope could be bestowed on. But I think, nevertheless, those are what I have in mind when I talk about child-centered reasons.

Other reasons are not anti-child-centered, certainly, I mean although some conceivably could be, they concern keeping up with fertile peers, avoiding the stigma or infertility or giving one's parents grandchildren, giving one's existing child a younger sibling, and I think a lot of these reasons, too, have future-child-centered aspects. I mean, if you want a sibling for your current child, you're not looking for an entertainer or distraction or a babysitter, you're looking for a mutually enriching relationship. So you're looking not only for the good of the existing child, but for the good of the future child who will have what you hope will be a loving older sibling. Obviously, that hope isn't always born out, at least initially. So that's the basic distinction and those are examples. It's not an exotic or mysterious distinction.

**Andy:** And it seems to have some bearing on what you have to say about the permissibility of having a child. So I guess the first question, leading up to fleshing out what the view is, do you think it's permissible to have a child without having some child-centered reason or other?

**David Wasserman:** Well, I don't think it is, but as I concede, I don't have anything like a knockdown argument for that. I think that there's a tremendous debate about whether there are types of action that need to be done with certain intentions to be permissible. And for example, I use the example of promises in the book, I believe, clearly, or most people would agree, it is wrong to make a promise with the intention of breaking it. But there may be some disagreement about whether it is permissible to make a promise with the expectation of keeping of it, but not the intention of keeping it, although those may be hard to tell apart in an actual case of promise making. But I would think that a good faith promise is made with the intention of keeping it and that one shouldn't promise if one lacks that intention, as well as that expectation.

I mean, you can hardly have a credible intention if you think there are vanishing small odds of keeping the promise. And similarly, for the child, I think you have to intend it's good and that intention requires the expectation that it could have a good life, if you think those odds are vanishingly small, you can't really have that intention. And in the book I make various partial analogies which I then qualify and concede that none of them is fully satisfactory, but say that in the case of procreation, the main reason I think for a moral requirement that one actually seeks the good of the future child, whoever it may be, is that life is so damn difficult and risky, even in the best of circumstances. I mean, it's more than a nod to the antinatalist arguments. I mean, I think that they create a motivation or impose a motivational burden on prospective parents that a lot of pronatalists don't recognize.

**Andy:** There does seem to be a strong preference for having these child-centered reasons then and based largely on antinatalist concerns. Would that be an accurate statement?

**David Wasserman:** Yeah. I mean, it would be quite a fun experiment to imagine a world so different than ours that none of the harms and evils that Professor Benatar so vividly describes were present. I mean, that's certainly the case where a moral requirement would be a lot weaker in such a very distant world.

**Andy:** Interesting. So the next part of your position or, I guess, sort of there's two core views that get defended in this latter part of the book. One has to do with what kinds of reasons ought

to factor into procreation decisions. After that, you take up the question as to whether we have reasons to prefer bringing, I'll just say, happier or better off children into the world, if given a choice. And you consider whether it would be wrong to opt to bring a child that you have reason to think would be less well off and you ultimately seem to conclude that it's not wrong to opt to bring a child into the world, that you know would be less happy or less well off than some other possible child. Could you walk us through your reasoning here?

**David Wasserman:** Yeah. Well, it's convergent reasoning. I mean, I can start by saying that the basic idea is that whichever child you have, we're assuming now that this child is going to have a decent life, a life that it will undilutedly regard as worth living, which again, is something that Professor Benatar would question. But, I mean, I need to get the argument off the ground, because if I share his belief... if I embrace his quality of life argument all of this would become irrelevant, so assuming you have a choice among children, all of whom you reasonably expect to have such a life, it's just a matter of complete indifference to whichever child you choose that there's some other child that you could've had that would've had a better or worse life. It's not even like a case where you give a gift to one of two existing children and one child says, "Why did you give it to me, you should've given it to my less happy sibling," or "My happier sibling was on a roll, you should've supported him."

In this case, whichever child is picked is the child, the other one is just other one. There is no other one, there's just a multiplicity of possible children not chosen or a finite number of embryos not implanted. From that child's point of view, it makes no difference whatsoever that some other child could've had a better life, so why should the parents be concerned, well if they're consequentialist parents, they should be interested in bringing more child affecting good into the world. They can say, "We're going to pick A over B, because A's life will be better for A than B's like will be for B." But I don't find that an inappropriate parental or motivation for prospective parents or they could say, "Look, we want to realize human flourishing as much as possible, so we're going to pick the child that's going to flourish as much as possible." And again, I don't think that should be part of the parental project. Or they could say, "We want to add as much good as possible to the world or as much happiness to aggregate well-being, so we'll select that happiest child," and none of these seem like good reasons.

And so, there are two points that I just want to make that are sort of counter punching, challenging arguments that are made against that. One is the idea that it's perverse to seek a child who will be worse off, and I completely agree. I mean, someone who says, "I want a child who will, for whatever reasons, be less happy than one who will be more happy," is, and this comes from, I borrow this from [Guy Tehana 00:31:21], is wishing that child ill, in a sense, even if the parents are committed to doing as much good as possible for the child. But the idea of randomly choosing or choosing on the basis of some affinities that happen to be associated with well-being is not choosing because the child will be worse off.

And the second point, claim, which is made by a number of philosophers is that because parents can't now identify a particular future child, prospective parents can't. They need to treat their future child as a kind of a group or use their child de dicto to refer to whoever their future child is. And so, by picking the embryo or the gamete pair that is predicted to be the happiest, they're making their future child better off. But I just think that's either confused or playing on a confusion to which philosophers and laypeople may succumb. It's going to be a different child



and that child will not be made better off or worse off by the choice, whatever it is. I mean, I have a much longer argument in other places, for that.

And finally, I do a lot of borrowing in here from other philosophers whose views I don't agree with otherwise, but I borrow an argument from Jeff McMahan that if one is committed to the view that one has a moral reason to pick a happier than a less happy child or a child who will be better off than one who will be not as well off, one is committed to having more children or has a moral reason to have more children, which challenges what, I believe, is called the procreative [inaudible 00:33:27] asymmetry by Professor Benatar. And that's an asymmetry that I think is a tenet of common sense morality about procreation. And I think that result is more counterintuitive than saying, "It's okay to select either child."

**Andy:** It seems to be that the key rationale here is the sorts of reasons that parents ought to bring to bear in deciding to procreate shouldn't be things like maximizing happiness in the world or something like that. They ought to be more geared toward, I guess, child-centered reasons. And if you think about it that way, the child who's going to be less well off, from the perspective of what's good for them, they don't care if you could have brought a happier child into the world or not, that's sort of irrelevant from the decision about whether or not to bring this particular child into the world. Right?

**David Wasserman:** Right. I should just make one qualifying note, I don't think that prospective parents should completely ignore the impact on third parties. I mean, if they're going to have a child who will just make it impossible for them to raise their other children reasonably, they shouldn't do it, whatever that child's own prospect. So I don't want to make it look like the only relevant considerations concern whatever particular child they would choose.

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**Sandra:** Oxford University Press has generously provided us the book that we were discussing on the show today. To learn more about Oxford University Press visit them on the web at [global.oup.com](http://global.oup.com). To get a link for a 30% discount on *Debating Procreation: Is it Wrong to Reproduce*, go to our show notes page for this episode by visiting our site [examiningethics.org](http://examiningethics.org). When you visit our website you can sign up for our monthly newsletter. If you sign up for the newsletter, you'll be automatically entered to win a free book from Oxford University Press. Thanks again to Oxford University Press for sponsoring today's show. Now, let's get back to Andy's interview with David Benatar and David Wasserman.

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**Andy:** Professor Benatar, did you want to weigh in on, perhaps, anything that Mr. Wasserman said regarding any of your three core arguments or anything that Mr. Wasserman has said in summarizing some of his positive position?

**Sandra:** Well, he said so much that I think it's hard for me to engage with all of the points, so let me just make a few general ones. First of all, I don't deny for a moment that bringing a child into existence and parenting that child can be good for the parents, that it can be good for any existing siblings, if they might be good for society as a whole in some ways, or for members of society, so I accept all of that. The question is whether it's justifiable to inflict a harm on the child

that you would bring into existence, in order to derive those other benefits for one's self. So that's the one question that I think we need to focus on.

And I want to try and give this a bit of clarity. So consider the terrible things that can happen to people. I mean, think about in our kind of society, where people don't die at very young ages from infectious diseases, I mean, that's terrible, but once you've got that under control, people tend to die from things like cancer, various kinds of degenerative diseases. If you look at the United States, one in four men and one in five women will die from cancer. Those deaths are pretty horrific deaths. When you create a child you are exposing it to a very high risk of a death of that kind and the dying process that leads up to it. If it's not cancer that gets you, it's very likely to be something else that's terrible.

And then, I want you to ask yourself, when your contemplating bringing this child into existence, how much good would there need to be in their life in order to outweigh the unspeakable suffering that the being will suffer in anticipation of its death while it's dying? And when I think you concretize it in this way, imagine another example, imagine you consider the possibility, let's say, that your child will be raped and you imagine some horrific rape and now you're engaged in some kind of activity where you ask yourself, how much good would there need to be in their life to outweigh this terrible evil. I think when you start telling me how good there would need to be to outweigh the bad, you very rapidly begin to sound indecent and callous.

If it's hard for me to see how pleasures somebody might have in life, the professional satisfaction they might have, whatever personal satisfaction they might have, how those things could be a warrant for bringing into existence a child that will suffer a horrific fate [inaudible 00:38:39]. So what I would say to prospective parents who are contemplating bringing a child into existence is very vividly imagine the terrible things that, in aggregate, are likely to happen to your child and then start doing [inaudible 00:38:52] for me and tell me how much good there would need to be. I think people are going to be a lot more hard-pressed to justify procreation when they're thinking about that.

Also, if we look at the misanthropic argument, we'd want to say that ordinary people, raised well by good parents, do a lot of damage. Those of us who live in the developed world or lead lives of people in the developed world do lots of damage to the environment that has a large impact on future generations, on animals, on people that are existing today. If you think about most people in the world consuming meat and animal products, just think about the numbers of animals that are suffering unspeakably in order to feed that habit. There's a lot of evil that's done, often unwittingly and intentionally not with malice, but ordinary people, that we don't regard as evil. I think these are very real considerations that people need to consider.

**Andy:** You're going to have a hard time coming up with a list of goods that would outweigh these things. I suppose another relevant consideration might have to do with something like consent or a prediction that the person you're bringing into existence would consent to these things. At the very beginning, you said it's irresponsible or bad to subject people to these kinds of risks when you can't get their consent. So I just wondered what you thought about the following view. Someone might say, "Well, I can't get the actual consent of the child to be, but I can run a kind of inductive argument, most of the people I encounter would say, 'Had I been given the opportunity to consent, knowing what I know now, I would've consented.'" And so, they make this kind of reasonable prediction, whatever child I have, when they get to be 30 or so,

would have consented to this. Is that an objection you grapple with in the book or do you have any thoughts about that kind of reasoning.

**David Benatar:** Yes, I have, and I've considered that argument and responded to it. I think part of the worry there is one of adaptive preferences. So imagine when you're thinking about lobotomizing somebody without their consent and you lobotomize a whole lot of people without their consent before and you find that they don't really mind.

**Andy:** Oh, I see.

**David Benatar:** Because it's after the fact, and now they're quite happy in their current condition.

**Andy:** Right

**David Benatar:** We wouldn't take that as an authorization. We wouldn't say that after the fact that they're happy with their diminished state. That's a warrant to do it up front without their consent. Well, imagine you manage to enslave people, but at the same time give them a daily dose of medicine that makes them content with their enslavement, I think there's something similar going on with the biological adaptation to life. We've got these powerful life drives, and that's the kind of worry I have.

**Andy:** Yeah, or give someone a love potion. Everyone I've given this love potion to loves the fact that they're in love with me, so they would all consent. I see. That's an interesting counter. All right. Well, I think we should probably end there. So first, Mr. Wasserman, thank you for joining us.

**David Wasserman:** Thank you for having me.

**Andy:** And Professor Benatar, thank you for joining us.

**David Benatar:** Thank you very much. It's been my pleasure. Nice to have a discussion with you and with my friend and colleague, David Wasserman.

[music]

**Christiane:** The book we've been discussing today is *Debating Procreation: Is it Wrong to Reproduce* by David Benatar and David Wasserman. Thanks again to Oxford University Press for providing us with copies of the book. To find out more about Oxford University Press visit them on the web at [global.oup.com](http://global.oup.com). Don't forget to visit our show notes page at [examiningethics.org](http://examiningethics.org). To get a 30% discount on *Debating Procreation*. Thanks again to Oxford University Press for sponsoring today's show.

**Andy:** Thanks for listening. If you'd like more information about the topics we've discussed today visit our show notes for this episode of *Ethics in Focus* at [examiningethics.org](http://examiningethics.org). When you visit, be sure to sign up for our newsletter. You'll be entered into our monthly book giveaway. Don't forget to tune in for more in our *Ethics in Focus* series, as well as our regular podcast, which is released the last Wednesday of every month. For updates about the podcast, interesting links, and more follow us on Twitter @[examiningethics](https://twitter.com/examiningethics). If you like what you've heard,

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