

# Heavenly Procreation

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**ABSTRACT:** Kenneth Einar Himma (2009, 2016) argues that the existence of Hell renders procreation impermissible. Jason Marsh (2015) contends that problems of evil motivate anti-natalism. Anti-natalism is principally rejected for its perceived conflict with reproductive rights. I propose a theistic solution to the latter problem, but one that undermines neither Himma’s nor Marsh’s positions. Universalism is the theistic doctrine that all persons are permanently housed in Heaven postmortem. The acceptance of universalism is now widespread, but this paper offers further reason to embrace a particular variant of it. If universalism is true *and* there are opportunities to procreate in Heaven, then reproductive autonomy is largely maintained for all persons. Assuming Heaven is a harm-free place, there are no risks to children born in Heaven, unlike Earth (or Hell). While this requires human persons to accept *temporary* restrictions on procreation during our premortem lives, the bulk of reproductive autonomy is preserved since one will have infinite opportunities to reproduce in Heaven.

## 1. Introduction

What should theists say about procreation? Kenneth Einar Himma (2010, 2016) contends that those who endorse both Hell and pro-natalism are inconsistent. The reason being what Himma calls the *New Life Principle*, or NLP:

NEW LIFE PRINCIPLE:

It is wrong for would-be parents to bring a child into the world if they rationally believe there is a sufficiently high probability that the child will experience severe harm after birth that will endure throughout the child’s lifetime. (Himma 2016: 94)

The severe, enduring harm to which Himma alludes is Hell, which he conceives as “a state of eternal torment unmatched in severity by anything one can experience in this world” (2016: 94). For those who accept Hell’s existence and admit a non-trivial risk of ending up there, Himma’s argument puts pressure on many pro-natalist theists.

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<sup>φ</sup> My thanks to Anthony Ferrucci for helpful discussion and to Kenneth Einar Himma for stoking my curiosity on this topic.

There are, however, more pro-natalist *atheists* than pro-natalist theists, at least within professional philosophy. Recently, Jason Marsh has developed an argument that puts pressure on pro-natalist atheists who take the problem of evil seriously:

The premises of many evidential arguments from evil, if endorsed, may challenge the existence of a perfect God or even a minimally decent creator. But these premises equally appear to challenge the value of many human lives and by extension many acts of human procreation. If we convey, whether explicitly or implicitly, that the world risks being bad or far less good than we make procreation risky in general. If we communicate, less strongly, that the value of many but not nearly all lives is negative or ambiguous, we still raise important local challenges to procreation, according to which many shouldn't procreate. (Marsh 2015: 73)

Were the horrors of this world to impugn the permissibility of *divine* creation, one struggles to say precisely how it wouldn't also impugn the permissibility of *human* procreation. If successful, Marsh's argument forces those persuaded by problems of evil to explain their simultaneous pro-natalist stance. Vince Vitale (2017) turns Marsh's *modus tollens* into a *modus ponens*, contending that the apparent permissibility of human procreation supports the permissibility of divine creation.<sup>1</sup> And William Hasker draws an explicit parallel between God's choice to create libertarian-free creatures and a parent's choice to do the same:

As a start on answering the question, I am going to ask my readers to join me in a thought experiment. Imagine yourself, then, as a prospective parent shortly before the birth of your first child. And suppose that someone has offered you the following choice: On the one hand, the child will be one who, without any effort on your part, will always and automatically do and be exactly what you want it to do and be, no more and no less. ... Or on the other hand, you can choose to have a child in the normal fashion, a child that is fully capable of having a will of its own and of resisting your wishes for it, and even if acting against its own best interest. (Hasker 2020: 321)

Hasker then expresses his hope that readers will agree with him that "it is far better to accept the challenge of parenting a child with a will of its own, even at the price of pain and possible heartbreak" (2020: 231). By contrast, Thomas Flint wholly disagrees:

Where others are involved, especially others to whom we have some special relationship, we are especially concerned to lessen or eliminate the risks our actions may pose to them. For example, it is arguably immoral for a father to drive without wearing his seat belt. But it seems clearly worse for him to drive and not provide a proper child-restraint seat for his two-year-old daughter. If he could completely eliminate the risks which driving poses for her, surely he would do it in an instant. Openist cries of "How dull!"; "Take a chance!"; "Live a little!" and the like would presumably have minimal effect. (Flint 1998: 105)

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vitale (2020) for an extended defense of a pro-natalist theodicy.

When, years ago as a graduate student, I expressed support for Flint's anti-risk argument against open theism, my Hasker-sympathizing colleague countered that the anti-risk argument would make procreation impermissible. Whereas he viewed this as a *reductio* of the anti-risk argument, I regarded it as a *reductio* of pro-natalism. The arguments of Himma, Marsh, Hasker, and Flint, while putting different pressure on different groups, point to potential conflicts in one's *religious/anti-religious* beliefs on the one hand, and one's beliefs about *procreation* on the other.

As a confident universalist and anti-natalist, I am unbothered by Himma's argument. But I still have hang-ups on the apparent conflict between my principled anti-natalism and my adamant commitment to deontological views about autonomy, particularly procreative autonomy. The most significant challenge to anti-natalism is procreative autonomy, understood as the moral right to reproduce or refrain from reproducing. It has been said that anti-natalists cannot accept a moral right to reproduce (Robertson 1994: 24). Call this the *Autonomy Objection* to anti-natalism. In my view, anti-natalists can successfully rebuff the *Autonomy Objection*. For instance, anti-natalists maintain only that procreation is impermissible, but that is consistent with a view on which it's possible to have a moral right to act impermissibly (Herstein 2012).<sup>2</sup>

What I propose to accomplish in this essay is to motivate a *theistic* response to the *Autonomy Objection* that adds to the replies available to anti-natalists, albeit ones who are also theists. My argument runs as follows. The theistic doctrine of universalism says that all persons will, postmortem, be eternally housed in Heaven, a superbly good place wherein harm is fully absent. If we further suppose that there will be endless opportunities to procreate in Heaven, then reproductive autonomy is largely maintained for all persons. Assuming Heaven is a harm-free place, there are no risks to children born in Heaven, unlike Earth (or Hell). Under these assumptions, the *Autonomy Objection* lacks teeth or at least has more gaps. In Section 2, I explore variants of the *Autonomy Objection* and conclude that the strongest interpretation is an objection to *loss of opportunity*. In Section 3, I consider arguments for the possibility of heavenly procreation and conclude that our best evidence supports its possibility. In Section 4, I demonstrate how this possibility undermines the *Autonomy Objection*. Let's call the resultant potent combination of anti-natalism and theistic universalism *Anti-Natal Universalism*, or 'ANU'.

## 2. The Autonomy Objection

Autonomy is central to procreative ethics, with most supporting a strong *pro tanto* right to reproduction (Meijers 2020; Silvers & Francis 2019; Robertson 1994). A right to procreative autonomy is typically derived from a more general right to control one's body (Overall 2012: 21) or a right to pursue one's life projects (Brake 2016; Quigley 2010), both of which are weighty.

However, this right is not unmitigated. Most pro-natalists admit that procreation is sometimes impermissible (Conly 2005).<sup>3</sup> Allen Buchanan *et al* (2002: 249) say procreation

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<sup>2</sup> Recent challenges (e.g., Bolinger 2017) to this move have lessened my confidence, however.

<sup>3</sup> I shall interpret claims of the form "S isn't morally permitted to procreate at time *t*" to imply "S lacks a right to procreate at *t*." That is, I shall interpret deontic restrictions as rights restrictions. Those who reject

is impermissible when and because the child will experience “serious suffering or limited opportunity or serious loss of happiness or good.” Julian Savulescu and Guy Kahane (2009: 274) defend an obligation to create the child “whose life can be expected, in light of the relevant available evidence, to go best.” David Wasserman (2015: 229) says procreation is permissible only if parents create children they couldn’t reasonably expect to “meet a minimum standard of well-being.” Rivka Weinberg (2016: 176, 179) claims procreation is permissible only if motivated by “the desire and intention to raise, love, and nurture one’s child once it is born” and when “the risk you impose as a procreator on your children would not be irrational for you to accept as a condition of your own birth.” And Tommie Shelby (2016: 132) endorses a principle prohibiting procreation in cases where the parent will “very likely be unable to fulfill responsibilities she would incur through procreating.”

The problem with anti-natalism is that it requires us *always*, and not merely sometimes, to refrain from procreating (Benatar 2013: 102-113). Even for positions that fall short of this, such as Sarah Conly’s (2016) view that each person is permitted only one child, procreative autonomy is severely curtailed. Why do anti-natalists claim procreation is always or often impermissible? For David Benatar (2013), it’s impermissible because it’s impersonally better never to have existed rather than to exist with some suffering. For Trevor Hedberg (2019), persons should refrain from procreating to limit their carbon footprints at least until anthropogenic climate change is no longer a threat to human life. For Seana Shiffrin (1999), the problem is that the mere benefit of a good life for future children doesn’t justify exposing them to serious harms. For Jimmy Alfonso Licon (2012), procreation is always impermissible because we need, but cannot acquire, the consent of nonexistent persons prior to creating them. Thus, under strong and mitigated anti-natalist views, there are few to no opportunities to procreate permissibly. Assuming a strong *pro tanto* right to procreate, we have the following argument against anti-natalism:

#### *The Autonomy Argument*

1. Persons have a strong *pro tanto* right to procreate.
2. If (1), then procreation is generally permissible.
3. If anti-natalism is true, then procreation is not generally permissible.
4. Therefore, anti-natalism is false.

Again, the problem isn’t that we can’t justify *some* limitations on procreation. Few disagree that procreation is impermissible if the parent has severe radiation poisoning. Rather, it’s that we can’t justify *this much* of a limitation. Almost every potential child will experience some suffering, leave a carbon footprint, be exposed to serious harms, and cannot consent prior to being created. Thus, the harms to which anti-natalists appeal to ground the general wrongness of procreation aren’t going anywhere soon.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Jesus himself warns that the poor will forever be with us (*Matthew 26:11*), a concern not unnoticed by Benatar (2020).

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this must explain how the Autonomy Objection is incompatible with anti-natalism, which typically maintains only that procreation is impermissible.

<sup>4</sup> We could instead call this the *Opportunity Argument* as it centers on opportunities to exercise one’s procreative autonomy and not the autonomy itself. However, limiting the number of reasonable opportunities to exercise one’s autonomy limits one’s autonomy.

For the duration of this paper, I shall argue as if the Autonomy Objection is the *only* serious objection to anti-natalism.<sup>5</sup> In particular, I shall assume that procreative autonomy is the only moral consideration blocking a general obligation not to procreate. Thus, I ask readers to assume that anti-natalism would be true *if* the Autonomy Objection is successfully defeated. It's to defeating it that I now turn.

### 3. The Possibility of Heavenly Procreation

Before exploring arguments *for* the possibility of procreation in Heaven, I shall consider arguments *against* it. This is something of a challenge as there are few arguments in the literature against heavenly procreation. Fortunately, we can fill the gaps with some imagination. I consider three arguments: the *No Marriage Argument*, the *No Freedom Argument*, and the *Unfairness Argument*.

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark portray Heaven as a place *without marriage*. For instance, Matthew (22:30) claims that "in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven," and Mark (12:25) makes an identical claim. For this to be an argument against the possibility of procreation, however, we must assume procreation occurs only within marriage. That gives us this:

#### *The No Marriage Argument*

1. There are no marriages in Heaven.
2. Procreation occurs only in marriages.
3. Therefore, there's no procreation in Heaven.

But this argument is bad. First, it assumes more than is indicated by the text, which claims only that there will be no *new* marriages. Pre-heavenly marriages might continue and with them procreation. Second, it's unclear why we should accept premise (2). Perhaps we are meant to assume that procreation is *normatively* bound to marriage, such that nonmarital procreation is morally impermissible, and that Heaven (being a place without sin) therefore lacks nonmarital procreation. However, this view of procreation is typically tied to *sex*, which allows for the permissibility of nonmarital *asexual* procreation. And we have good reason to reject a conservative view of sexual ethics that prohibits sex outside of marriage.<sup>6</sup>

The second argument concerns freedom in Heaven. The much-discussed problem of heavenly freedom runs thusly: Heaven is a place where sin is impossible, libertarian freedom requires the ability to do otherwise, and thus humans in Heaven lack libertarian freedom. A similar argument can be made against procreation:

#### *The No Freedom Argument*

1. Persons created in Heaven *never* have the possibility of sinning.
2. If (1), then persons created in Heaven lack libertarian freedom.

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<sup>5</sup> I am aware of the existence of other objections to anti-natalism. For a sampling, see Sullivan-Bissett & McGregor (2012), McMahan (2013), and McLean (2015).

<sup>6</sup> This argument, while scarcely mentioned in the philosophical literature, remains a staple of lay theology. For that reason, it's worth addressing.

3. Therefore, persons created in Heaven lack libertarian freedom.

The literature has plenty of responses to the problem of heavenly freedom *for persons who existed prior to entering Heaven*. For example, Timpe & Pawl (2009) argue that heavenly persons can do otherwise because they can choose *which* permissible actions they perform, and thus no particular right action is metaphysically necessary for them. More recently, Hartman (Forthcoming) explores two models of character perfection in Heaven: a *unilateral* model where God alone completes the perfection and a *cooperative* model where God and the person perfect their character. Hartman argues that while both models are compatible with libertarian freedom, the cooperative model allows for *more* freedom. We can adapt Hartman's argument to persons created in Heaven who, being incapable of sinning from the start, never have a chance to perfect their characters. Rather, they arrive perfected. If enhanced freedom equips God with good reason to choose the cooperative model over the unilateral one, it also does so with respect to allowing the creation of new persons in Heaven.

Despite being superior to the first argument, the *No Freedom Argument* fails. First, it cuts equally well against humans who died in utero, in infancy, or at any time prior to the development of their moral agency. Thus, if the argument provides good reason to exclude heavenly procreation, it also provides reason to exclude fetuses, infants, and others who died. Second, it assumes the impossibility of heavenly escape. But if libertarian freedom is sufficiently valuable, then allowing for the possibility of reincarnation (Goldschmidt & Seacord 2013; Di Muzio 2013) or sinning in Heaven (Matheson 2018; Kent 2017) seems appropriate. Third, it assumes that coming into existence *without* agency is less preferable than coming into existence *with* agency. It's one thing to assume it's preferable to avoid *removing* someone's freedom, but quite another to assume a preference for avoid *creating* beings without freedom (or, more narrowly, *humans* without freedom). The former disallows for the presence of nonhuman animals in Heaven (Graves, Hereth, & John 2017) and the latter excludes cognitively disabled humans (Timpe 2020; Cobb & Timpe 2017).

A third and final argument concerns the *unfairness* of procreation in Heaven. Humans who led extensive premortem lives experienced suffering, death, struggle, and loss. But for those whose existence begins in Heaven, their lives are free from suffering, death, struggle, and loss. They are, in short, *lucky*, and that luckiness is unfair.<sup>7</sup> We can call this, predictably, the *Unfairness Argument* and construct it as follows:

#### *The Unfairness Argument*

1. It's *pro tanto* unfair for some persons to have the opportunity to escape suffering, death, struggle, and loss while others don't have that opportunity through no fault of their own.
2. If heavenly procreation is possible, those whose existences begin in Heaven would never experience suffering, death, struggle, and loss and would exist alongside other persons who lacked that opportunity through no fault of their own.
3. Therefore, if heavenly procreation is possible, there is *pro tanto* unfairness.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Murray (1999) argues that universalism undermines the importance of earthly life, making the evils of earthly life harder to justify. It's not hard to see how heavenly procreation might do the same: If exclusively heavenly lives are worth living, why force anyone to endure hellish earthly lives?

Constructed this way, the argument mentions only a *pro tanto* unfairness. But let's grant for argument's sake that there's no justification for the disparity, and thus that the resulting inequality is *all-things-considered* unfair. Even granting this, the argument fails. First, if successful, the argument works not just as an argument against heavenly procreation, but also the admission of human fetuses and infants who, owing to nonidentity worries, did not die 'prematurely' since their time of death was essential to them (Weinberg 2014). Second, the argument implies that *God's existence* is all-things-considered unfair since God possessed opportunities to avoid suffering whereas humans didn't. Third, the argument ignores the fact that God is *pro tanto* obligated to grant opportunities to persons to escape suffering, death, and the like. If true, it's not God's *allowing heavenly procreation* that requires justification, but rather *allowing earthly suffering*.

Having rejected these arguments, we can now consider several arguments for the possibility of heavenly procreation. The first is the *Be Fruitful Argument*. Like the *No Marriage Argument*, it's a biblical argument. In *Genesis* (1:28), God commands Eve and Adam to "be fruitful and multiply." Notably, that command was issued *prior to* the Fall of humankind when all was perfect in Eden. The most natural interpretation of this passage is that God, as Creator, desired for humankind to procreate in (though perhaps not *only* in) ideal conditions. Thus, we have our first argument:

#### *The Be Fruitful Argument*

1. God commands that humankind procreate under 'Edenic' conditions.
2. Procreating in Heaven would occur under 'Edenic' conditions.
3. Therefore, God commands that humankind procreate in Heaven.

The major worry with this argument is that it proves too much, entailing that heavenly procreation *must* happen because it's *obligatory*. Despite some defenses of the view that procreation is obligatory (Gheaus 2016), we should reject this view. Minimally, those who accept the Autonomy Objection should reject it as an obligation *to* procreate is as much a threat to procreative autonomy as an obligation *not to* procreate. So, we should reject this argument in the current context since it's useless both to anti-natalists and those endorsing the Autonomy Objection. Next is David Worsley's (2019) argument for the possibility of procreation in Limbo.<sup>8</sup> He writes,

How might God become incarnate in limbo? Well, if part of the rationale for Christ's birth includes his exemplary growth in wisdom and stature, and his assuming all aspects of human life, plausibly, this same rationale will also apply in limbo. That is to say, if Christ's birth was an essential aspect of his earthly incarnation, if the second person of the Trinity is to become incarnate in limbo, procreation must be possible in limbo, too. (Worsley 2019: 355)

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<sup>8</sup> Notably, this is not yet an argument for the possibility of procreation *in Heaven*, but I will say more about that later.

Furthermore, Worsley claims this entails the possibility of “unending iterations of limbo, with the inhabitants of each iteration of limbo department for either Heaven” or another afterlife locale (2019: 355). Moreover, he also makes the following claim:

If my participation in the life of heaven extensively increases the joy of those who died generations before I was born, I see no reason why those joining the heavenly cohort from some later iteration of limbo might not also have the same effect on my extensive enjoyment in heaven. Plausibly, then, if unending iterations of limbo lead to an unending growth in the number of saints in heaven, the joy of each saint will likewise unendingly grow in extent in a way not possible if the number of saints in heaven was fixed. (Worsley 2019: 357)

Worsley, following Thomas Aquinas (Brown 2009: 240), is clear that while the *intensity* of any heavenly person’s joy remains constant, their joy can nevertheless grow *extensively* as more saints experience the Beatific Vision (Worsley 2019: 357). In my view, Worsley has *two* arguments, so it’s best to treat them separately. Here’s the first:

#### *The Fittingness Argument*

1. Christ’s incarnation-by-birth was fitting for human redemption on Earth.
2. If (1), then Christ’s incarnation-by-birth would be fitting for human redemption in Limbo.
3. If Christ’s incarnation-by-birth would be fitting for human redemption in Limbo, then procreation would be fitting in Limbo.
4. Therefore, procreation would be fitting in Limbo.

Much depends on how we understand the relationship between human moral *redemption* and moral *perfection*. One plausible view is that redemption is *eliminative*: It removes our sin, shame, and guilt and rescues us from their consequences. Perfection, by contrast, is *enhancing*: It transforms us from good to great, from better to best. And perfection continues well into heavenly life as God transforms us into saints of the highest calling. Some of us might become especially patient whereas others might become especially generous.<sup>9</sup> If Christ’s incarnation-by-birth was fitting to move us from sinner to saint, it seems fitting for another incarnation-by-birth to move us from one saintly stage to the next. Still, this argument doesn’t get us to the possibility of humans procreating *with each other*, so I’ll move on to Worsley’s second argument:

#### *The Extensive Joy Argument*

1. The joy of each heavenly saint will grow extensively as more persons come to enjoy the Beatific Vision.
2. If (1), then God has reason to permit heavenly procreation.
3. Therefore, God has reason to permit heavenly procreation.

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<sup>9</sup> Here I assume heavenly virtue needn’t entail *maximal* virtue. That is, I assume some might be more virtuous than others relative to certain virtues even if everyone lacks vices.



According to Worsley, more is merrier for Heaven's saints. So, God has reason to allow for the possibility of more saints. So, God has reason to allow for the possibility of heavenly procreation. While having a reason doesn't entail acting on it, a perfectly rational being like God would presumably be responsive to reasons. So, in the absence of countervailing or competing reasons, God *will* allow for the possibility of heavenly procreation.

Finally, we can consider a recent argument by Blake Hereth, who defends the possibility of procreation for trans persons in Heaven. Hereth begins with a defense of trans *embodiment* in the afterlife and identifies interests their afterlife embodiments will allow them to satisfy. Among these is an opportunity to procreate as their identity-corresponding embodied selves:

Some trans persons, due to their pre-transitional embodiment, were unable to do various things they may have desire to do. For example, some trans women desire to carry children but are unable to do so. Others desire to pursue romantic relationships with persons *in* the body of their choice but were not afforded a reasonable opportunity to transition. Still other trans persons were in romantic relationships during their earthly lives, but their partnerships ended as a result of their trans identities being revealed. These are harms. Because [God] permits them, they are *pro tanto* injustices. (Hereth 2020: 199)

For Hereth, the opportunity for trans women to procreate *as* embodied women is an issue of justice. Thus, it's an opportunity that God ought to provide trans women. A similar arguments can be applied to trans men, so I'll reconstruct Hereth's argument like so:

#### *The Trans Embodiment Argument*

1. Justice requires that trans persons have opportunities to procreate in Heaven.
2. If (1), then trans persons will have opportunities to procreate in Heaven.
3. Therefore, trans persons will have opportunities to procreate in Heaven.

Hereth's argument provides grounds for accepting the possibility of heavenly procreation for *some* persons, but not *all* of them. So, Hereth's argument must be modified to show the *general* possibility of heavenly procreation. Fortunately, it's easy to see how a revised argument would run.

To start, notice Hereth's description of trans persons not receiving a 'reasonable opportunity' to transition in their earthly lives. It's uncontroversial to cry foul when trans persons are *denied* a reasonable opportunity to transition, but what about merely *not receiving* one (Murphy 2015)? Hereth's language suggests we should view even the latter as injustices since they are harms permitted by God. It does seem unjust when some persons have fewer opportunities than others through no fault of their own (Kollar & Loi 2015; Casal & Williams 1995). For instance, it seems unjust that some persons are infertile while others can reproduce with ease or that some are born with cancer and others healthy (Maung 2019; Kukla 2019; Padela & Clayville 2018), and it seems unjust that many women and other gestators feel forced to blame themselves for infertility (McLeod & Ponesse 2008). Plausibly, we can also say that persons with a moral obligation *M* to refrain from procreating at time *t* lack a reasonable opportunity to procreate at *t* given *M*, as 'opportunities' that require violating one's moral obligations are not reasonable ones. If we grant the anti-natalist a

general moral obligation not to procreate, then everyday ‘opportunities’ to procreate are not *reasonable* opportunities. So, all human persons lack reasonable opportunities to procreate. Further granting the first premise of the *Autonomy Argument*—i.e., that persons have a strong *pro tanto* right to procreate—it follows that persons should be afforded reasonable opportunities to exercise their right. That gives us a modified argument for the possibility of heavenly procreation, which I shall call the *Undercutting Argument* because moral obligations undercut reasonable opportunities:

*The Undercutting Argument*

1. Human persons are morally obligated not to procreate premortem.
2. If *S* is morally obligated not to *Y* at time *t*, then *S* lacks a reasonable opportunity to *Y* at *t*.
3. Therefore, human persons lack a reasonable opportunity to procreate premortem.
4. Human persons have a strong *pro tanto* right to procreate.
5. If (4), then human persons should have a reasonable opportunity to procreate.
6. If (3) and (5), then human persons should have a reasonable opportunity to procreate *postmortem*.
7. Therefore, human persons should have a reasonable opportunity to procreate postmortem.

One additional convenience about the *Undercutting Argument* for the anti-natalist is that, given (1), its motivation is largely *internal to* anti-natalism. Of course, some anti-natalists reject (4), but the next section shows why they needn’t do so. Minimally, we can conclude that the cumulative power of Worsley’s *Extensive Joy Argument* and the *Undercutting Argument* is sufficiently strong to presume both the possibility and actuality of heavenly procreation.

#### **4. The Practicality of Heavenly Procreation**

Having reviewed arguments for the possibility of heavenly procreation and concluded that our best evidence supports the possibility, I shall now defend its *practicality* for the anti-natalist in combatting the Autonomy Objection. However, I first need to stipulate some background assumptions beginning with:

UNIVERSALISM:

All human persons will, postmortem, enter Heaven and remain there eternally.

Without this, human persons might cease to exist or land someplace bad, like Hell, and neither option presents reasonable opportunities for procreation. Second, I assume

HARMLESS:

Nonconsensual heavenly harm is either impossible or (foreseeably) nonactual.

This allows for the possibility of *consensual* harm in Heaven, which might be useful for trans women wanting the ‘full experience’ of carrying or birthing a child. Moreover, Harmless is disjunctive: It is compatible with the view that Heaven necessarily lacks nonconsensual harm and the view that, while still possible, are foreseeably nonactual.<sup>10</sup>

Recall that the Autonomy Objection troubles anti-natalism *not* because it deprives human persons of *some* procreative opportunities, but because it deprives them of *too many*. How many is too many? There are no established moral principles for this. However, we can safely assume that when *most*, *nearly all*, or *all* of one’s reasonable opportunities are removed, that is too many. And that seems to be precisely the problem with anti-natalism, according to most versions of the Autonomy Objection. It’s here that *heavenly* procreation proves its usefulness. Recall the *Autonomy Argument*:

*The Autonomy Argument*

1. Persons have a strong *pro tanto* right to procreate.
2. If (1), then procreation is generally permissible.
3. If anti-natalism is true, then procreation is not generally permissible.
4. Therefore, anti-natalism is false.

We can now see that premise (3) is ambiguous. In particular, ‘generally’ is ambiguous. On the one hand, it might mean the following:

- 3a. If anti-natalism is true, then procreation is not permissible *for the duration of the average human person’s premortem life*.

Let’s assume anti-natalists are, in fact, committed to the truth of (3a). Even so, the average human person’s *premortem* life is mere seconds when compared to their *postmortem* heavenly life. This reveals a second possible interpretation of (3):

- 3b. If anti-natalism is true, then procreation is not permissible *for the duration of the average human person’s total lifetime (including postmortem)*.

If you endorse UNIVERSALISM and HARMLESS, you should think (3b) is *false*. Indeed, the infinite duration of heavenly life decisively swamps the duration of premortem life. As far as reasonable opportunities for procreation go, then, only a tiny fraction of those opportunities is premortem; the rest are all postmortem. To see the moral relevance of this more clearly, consider the following example:

*Hours.* Fernanda wants to make a baby with her partner, Carlos. Both are 20 years of age. However, Fernanda discovers she recently contracted the Zika virus while on holiday in São Paulo and cannot safely procreate until she receives the new mRNA vaccine. Fortunately, if she’s willing to drive an hour to Brasilia (which she can easily do), she can receive the mRNA vaccine within a few hours and safely procreate with Carlos that same day.

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<sup>10</sup> See Pelser (2017) for a defense of negative emotions in Heaven.

Fernanda and Carlos have two options for procreating today: wait a few hours to get vaccinated or don't wait a few hours. Pursuing the former will, by stipulation, cause Fernanda's fetus to develop congenital Zika syndrome, or CZS. The range of symptoms of CZS includes severe microcephaly with a collapsed skull, seizures, brainstem dysfunction, and retinal lesions (Centers for Disease Control 2020). Under all anti-natalist and nearly all pro-natalist views, Fernanda and Carlos should wait a few hours to get vaccinated before procreating to ensure *safe* procreation. But waiting doesn't come without a small burden for them, namely, waiting a few hours. What makes this burden *small*? Presumably, it's the fact that Fernanda and Carlos *have plenty of time*; a few extra hours waiting to make a baby is nothing for them. They are young (both are 20), otherwise healthy, and fertile, and will lose none of those properties soon. Thus, the hours don't impose a substantive burden *contextually*—that is, *as a percentage of their lifetime opportunities*. We can express this as follows as the *Time-Burden Principle*, or 'TBP':

**TIME-BURDEN PRINCIPLE:**

The extent to which temporal deprivations of opportunities is burdensome is determined by the number of remaining opportunities divided by the number of eliminated opportunities, or  $B = R_0/E_0$ .

For Fernanda and Carlos in the *Hours* case, B is low because  $R=[20-25 \text{ fertile years}]$  and  $E=[\text{a few hours}]$ . Let's say Fernanda and Carlos must wait 12 hours, or half a day. Over 20 fertile years, that's roughly 0.01% of their procreative opportunities. Thus, Fernanda's and Carlos' moral obligation to refrain from procreating for a few hours isn't substantively burdensome; indeed, it hardly seems burdensome at all given they can safely and permissibly procreate *the very same day*! Now consider a revised version of the *Hours* case:

*Century*. Fernanda wants to make a baby with her partner, Carlos. Both are 20 years of age. However, Fernanda discovers she recently contracted the Zika virus while on holiday in São Paulo and cannot safely procreate until they reach Heaven, as no treatments or vaccines are available. Neither will die until they're 100.

All that 'downtime' may seem like an eternity, but it isn't if you accept UNIVERSALISM. Like in the original case with Fernanda and Carlos, we can use TBP to calculate the extent to which their morally required 'waiting time' is burdensome in *Century*. We know that both are 20 years of age and will live to 100 years of age, making  $E=[80 \text{ years}]$ .<sup>11</sup> Assuming Heaven presents temporally unlimited procreative opportunities, it follows that  $R=[\text{infinite time}]$ . Thus,  $B=[\text{infinite time}]/[80 \text{ years}]$ , which approximates 0.0%. Thus, Fernanda's and Carlos' moral obligation to refrain from procreating for 80 years isn't substantively burdensome; indeed, it equals only a *tiny* fraction of their total lifespans, a mere drop in the infinite temporal bucket. This gives the universalist anti-natalist a powerful reply to the Autonomy Objection, which I shall call the *Infinite Opportunities Argument*:

*The Infinite Opportunities Argument*

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<sup>11</sup> The math isn't actually this favorable since the average human doesn't have 80 years of fertility.

1. All human persons will have infinite opportunities to procreate in Heaven at no risk to them, their children, or others.
2. The extent to which temporal deprivations of opportunities is burdensome is determined by the number of remaining opportunities divided by the number of eliminated opportunities.
3. If anti-natalism is true, all human persons are morally obligated to refrain from procreating for the duration of their premortem lives (i.e., roughly 80 years).
4. Therefore, if anti-natalism is true, then all human persons are morally obligated to refrain from procreation for 80/infinite years, or  $\sim 0.0\%$  of one's total lifetime.
5. An obligation to refrain from procreation for  $\sim 0.0\%$  of one's total lifetime is either not burdensome or minimally burdensome.
6. Therefore, if anti-natalism is true, then all human persons' being morally obligated to refrain from procreation for their premortem lives is either not burdensome or minimally burdensome.

For charity's sake, the argument grants that 80 years of downtime might be *minimally* burdensome. However, it's no more burdensome than a requirement to wait 12 hours when you have only 100 years to live. Thus, pro-natalists must either accept my use of TBP or abandon their claim that procreation can ever be impermissible for any length of time, including in cases like *Hours*. Furthermore, it's hard to see any other way to calculate the *temporal* dimensions of burdensomeness noncomparatively: If we don't know how much time *remains*, how can we determine the significance of losing  $X$  temporal units? It seems we can't, and thus our calculations must be comparative. And if they must be comparative, then they must include the *full* time that remains, not an arbitrary portion of it. Thus, the *Autonomy Argument's* premise (3) arbitrarily limits the comparative harm by restricting opportunities to *premortem* opportunities, which even the universalist anti-natalist must concede totals at zero. But this allows the universalist anti-natalist to say that *postmortem* opportunities infinitely outnumber premortem ones, and thus a premortem ban on procreation fails to be particularly burdensome. Thus, ANU defeats the Autonomy Objection.

## 5. Conclusion

Can theistic universalists and anti-natalists help each other? Herein, I have argued that they can. The Autonomy Objection is the primary thorn in the side of anti-natalism. To reject it, one needs either to invoke a right to act impermissibly, reject a moral right to procreate, or demonstrate how the interests undergirding that right can be satisfied in other ways (e.g., by adoption). My proposal requires none of these moves, all of which require nontrivial revisions to our moral intuitions. Rather, I propose that the possibility of *heavenly procreation* solves the Autonomy Objection by maximizing the number of procreative opportunities. According to TBP, the extent to which temporal deprivations of opportunities is burdensome is determined by the number of remaining opportunities divided by the number of eliminated opportunities. As 80 years of premortem life involve only a smidgeon of the opportunities of infinite years of heavenly life, TBP implies that a moral obligation to

forego pre-mortem procreation is not a heavy burden. Thus, if ANU is true, then the Autonomy Objection fails.

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