CHAPTER SIX

On Doing the Best for Our Children

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The ethics of population really are, as Narveson says, "extraordinarily difficult."[1] All that I shall do here is sketch some of the difficulties still facing Narveson and Peter Singer.[2]

I start with a general remark. Such difficulties may seem to face only utilitarians. This is not so. They face most of those who give any weight to a utilitarian principle.

Narveson's main claim is about the form of this principle. He believes that it should not be "impersonal"—for example, it should not run: "We ought to increase happiness." It should rather be "person-affecting"—for example, it might run: "It is better to do what affects people for the better."

Why does Narveson claim this? Partly because the "impersonal" form leads to some version of the "Total View"—which he finds repugnant.[3] The "person-affecting" form seems to provide an alternative.

The first problem is that it only does so on the assumption that conceiving a person cannot affect him for the better. Without this assumption, the "person-affecting" form may itself lead to the Total View. The assumption can be challenged;[4] but for the purposes of argument I shall take it for granted throughout this paper.

A second problem can be presented in a pair of cases. The first involves a woman who intends to become pregnant as soon as possible. She learns that she has an illness which would give to any child she conceives now a certain

handicap. If she waits for two months, the illness would have passed, and she would then conceive a normal child.

Suppose she decides not to wait—suppose that she knowingly conceives a handicapped rather than a normal child. Has she thereby harmed her child, or affected him for the worse?

We must first ask: "When her child grows up, could he truly say, 'If my mother had waited, I would have been born later, and been a normal child'?" The answer is "No." If she had waited, he would not have been born at all; she would have had a different child. (What I have just claimed would be judged true on either of the main views about the subject. According to one view, the particular pair of cells from which a child sprang are essential to his identity—and a child conceived two months later would in fact have sprung from different cells. According to the rival view, the handicapped child *could* have sprung from different cells—or even different parents—provided that the child who (it is claimed) *would* have been him would have been sufficiently *like* him. The handicapped child and a child conceived two months later would in fact *not* have been sufficiently similar; they would have been as unlike as ordinary siblings. So it is also true on this other view that if the child's mother had waited, she would have had a different child.[5])

It seems, then, that the handicapped child is not worse off than he would otherwise have been—for he *wouldn't* otherwise have been. Might we still claim that, in knowingly conceiving a handicapped child, the woman harms this child? We might perhaps claim this if the child's life would be worse than nothing—would be worth *not* living.[6] But we can assume that the handicap is not so severe—that the child's life, though impaired, is still worth living. And, in his case, being handicapped is the only way in which he can receive life. When a person's leg is removed to save his life, it is not true, at least in any morally relevant sense, that this harms the person. We seem bound to say the same about our case. The handicapped child is not affected for the worse. So—as far as the child is concerned—we are not told by any "person-affecting" principle that his mother acted wrongly.

Now in this first case there will presumably be worse effects on other people—on her husband, or her other children. So there are some "person-affecting" grounds for condemning what she does. But we cannot *rely* on "side-effects." They can point the other way.[7]

Suppose we have a choice between two social policies. These will alter the standard of living—or, more broadly, the quality of life. The effects of one policy would, in the short term, be slightly better, but, in the long term, be much worse. Since there clearly could be such a difference between two

policies, we need not specify details. It is enough to assume that, on the "Short Term Policy," the quality of life would be slightly higher for (say) the next three generations, but be lower for the fourth generation, and be *much* lower for several later generations.

We can next note a second fact about the difference between the policies. The particular members of the fourth and later generations, on the Short Term Policy, would not have been born at all if instead we had pursued the Long Term Policy. Given the effects of the policies on the details of people's lives, different marriages would increasingly be made. More simply, even in the same marriages, the children would increasingly be conceived at different times.[8] As we argued, this would be enough to make them different children.

We can now apply a "person-affecting" principle. The members of the later generations would be different on the different policies. So if we pursue the Short Term Policy there will never be anyone who is worse off than he would otherwise have been. The Short Term Policy harms no one. Since it benefits certain people (those who exist now), it is the policy chosen by our principle.

What is most disturbing is not this conclusion, but the way in which it has been reached. The example shows that the long-term effects of social policies, even if clearly disastrous—even if it clearly affects for the worse—won't be worse for particular people. They are thus ignored by our principle. (As Narveson writes, without "effects on certain people . . . we can do as we like.")[9] The predictable collapse in the quality of life is, moreover, *totally* ignored. We might claim that we should grant *less* weight to the further future, or that we have special duties to our children. But a "person-affecting" principle gives to the further future *no* weight.

This seems indefensible. If it is, population policies, which all have long-term effects, ought not to be chosen by appealing to such a principle.

This objection may not seem decisive. If so, we can advance others. For example: a "person-affecting" principle can have self-contradictory implications. I shall argue this elsewhere;[10] but the objection sketched here—the "Identity Objection"—seems to me sufficient. Narveson's main claim is that population policy should be determined by the rights and interests of the affected people. I conclude that this is not so.[11]

The objection may seem to have rested on a quibble. Could we not have claimed, in our first case, "The woman's child would be worse off born now than he would be if he were born later"? This claim is, in a sense, true. But in this sense it is not about the different possible states of the same particular person. It is like the claim, "Children are taller now than they were 100 years

ago." 'They', here, does not mean 'they themselves'; it merely substitutes for the word 'children'.

We might now reinterpret the "person-affecting" form of principle. We might say: "It is worse to do what makes the resulting people worse off than they—i.e. "the resulting people"—would otherwise have been." We allow that "the resulting people" can be *different* people.

When our choice involves the *same number* of resulting people, we shall now get good advice. Thus the Reinterpreted Principle implies directly—without an appeal to "side-effects"—that our woman ought to wait, so as to have a normal child. (Notice how it does this. She is told to do the best for "her child," where this covers *all* of the people who might be "her child." The principle treats a whole group of possible people as if it were a single ("honorary") actual person.)

Even in these cases, the Reinterpreted Principle seems a cheat.[13] But we are here concerned with population policy, where the choice involves *different numbers* of resulting people. There are two ways of applying the principle to such cases. We can allow the phrase "the resulting people" to cover *all* of the people in the different outcomes. This yields the "Concertina Principle," which I criticize elsewhere.[14] We can instead revise the principle so that it covers the *same* number—or "core." This is the line explored by Peter Singer.

Singer works with two "Core Principles"—which, confusingly, he fails to distinguish. Singer's principles can be reached by revising the following axioms:

> (1) It is worse to do one of two things if this makes those who exist now, or who will exist *whichever* we do, worse off than they would have been if we had done the other thing,

and

> (2) The same as (1), except that for "*whichever* we do" we substitute "*whatever* we do."

The difference between these axioms can be shown in the case of a second woman. She intends to become pregnant in a few months' time, but learns that, unless she receives treatment now, any child she then conceives would be handicapped. Her treatment would not postpone her intended pregnancy, so we can assume that it would not affect the *identity* of the child she later conceives—it would only affect whether or not this child is handicapped.[15]

According to axiom (1), it would be worse for this woman to refuse the treatment; she would be affecting her future child for the worse. What does (2) imply? Is her future child someone who will exist *whatever* she does?

No–for she could remain childless. So if instead, though intending pregnancy, she refuses treatment–if she gives her future child the handicap–(2) fails to imply that she acts for the worse.

This may seem enough ground for rejecting (2). Its defenders might appeal to "side-effects." This child, though, is made to be worse off than he *himself* would have been. This fact (2) ignores. The example shows that only (1) is a full "person-affecting" axiom; (2) is less generous. And we might say, "Surely an axiom ought at least to cover all those whom we affect for the worse?" But the subject is so difficult that I shall consider what can be achieved by revising (2).

The axioms need to be revised to meet the Identity Objection. To use an ambiguous phrase, they cover "those who will exist anyway." The objection is that on different policies different people would increasingly be born–so the axioms cover no one in the further future. They ignore long-term effects, however disastrous.

Singer's answer runs: "Phrases like 'those who will exist anyway' need not be used to imply a relation of personal identity between those who [would] exist if one policy is adopted, and those who [would] exist if the other policy is adopted. Instead, we should take the phrase to refer to the number of lives that will be in the course of being lived . . . whatever policy is adopted."[16]

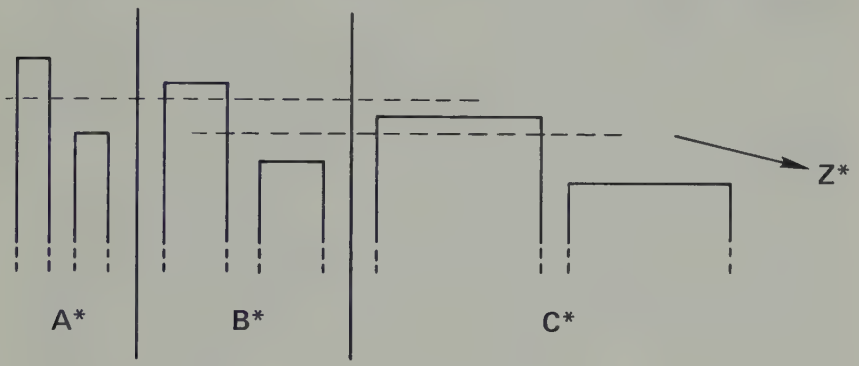
This suggestion needs to be filled out. A phrase like "the resulting people" *can* be used without implying personal identity; it can instead be taken to refer to the different people who, on different policies, would *be* "the resulting people." This cannot be done with the phrase "those who will exist anyway." This phrase cannot be taken to refer to the different people who would *be* "those who would have existed anyway"–for if the people would, on the different policies, be *different,* there will be no such people. Nor can the phrase be simply taken to refer to the *number* of people that will exist anyway–for, if we call this number 'P', how do we know, when policies produce more than P people, to *which* P people our phrase refers? We can only answer this–we can only select our "core"–if we choose some further phrase. Singer selects the *best-off* P people. Tediously, other choices yield principles with different implications.[17] But we can afford to follow Singer's choice, for our remarks could be re-directed.

We can start with the revised form of (1)–the "person-affecting" axiom. This is

> (3) It is worse to adopt one of two policies if this makes the best-off P people -where P is the number that will exist *whichever* we adopt -worse off than they would have been on the other policy.[18]

Though he never states (3), this is the principle first applied by Singer to the Case of Mere Addition, and of which he writes, "Our principle . . . has yielded intransitive preferences":[19] We can avoid complications by using a different case.[20]

We assume a society where there is no social injustice. Even here, people's lives will not be all equally worth living. Some people will be luckier; their lives will simply go better. For convenience, we divide the society into its more and less fortunate halves. If we next assume that population growth lowers the quality of life, different possible futures can be represented thus:



As in Singer's diagrams, the width of the blocks represents the number of people, the height their quality of life. We are shown, for example, that B* consists of twice as many people as A*, on average worse off—but that its more fortunate half contains as many people as the whole of A*, on average better off. This case does not essentially involve any assumption which is at all far-fetched;[21] so it provides a decisive test.

What are we told about this case by (3)—by Singer's Core Principle? Different policies would in time lead to the three states shown in the diagram. We are told by (3) that it would be worse to create A* than B*, worse to create B* than C*, and worse to create C* than A*. We are told, that is, that it would be *worse* to create C* than A*, though *better* to create C* than to create something—B*—which it would be *better* to create than A*.

Singer flirts with the boldest response: "Our judgments are . . . intransitive, but this is because what we take into account . . . differs in each comparison. We ought not to demand transitivity of preferences in these circumstances."[22] The diagnosis here is correct. Transitivity fails because the "core" we take into account differs in the different comparisons. Given this,

we should not expect transitivity; but we surely must *demand* it. The "most elementary requirement" on any moral principle *is* that it not yield such intransitive judgments.[23]

In effect, Singer grants this. He only thinks "we need not worry too much" because he hopes that "the problems of intransitive judgments . . . do not arise in the real-world situation."[24] Singer's Core Principle cannot be defended in this way, for our case *is* realistic. But the words that I have quoted come from the paragraph where Singer turns from (3) to his second principle.

Just as we reached (3) by revising (1), Singer's second principle can be reached by revising (2). The result is

> (4) It is worse to adopt one of two policies if this makes the best-off P people—where P is the number that will exist *whatever* policy we adopt—worse off than they would have been on the other policy.

This can be called "the Hard Core Principle." It amounts to

> (5) If the smallest possible future population would consist of a certain number at a certain average level, it is worse to create larger populations which do not contain as many people on average as well off, and better to create larger populations which contain as many people on average better off—the better off, the better.

Principle (5), though not quite the final axiom that Singer states, is what most of his arguments assume.[25]

Can (5) avoid the fate of (3)? To apply (5) to our case, we must know the size of the minimum. Let us first assume, with Singer, that "a stable population is the result of the most restrictive feasible population policy."[26] And let our starting-point—the first generation—be A*. The smallest possible second generation will thus be the size of A*. Applying (5), we are told that it would be better if we make it B*. We are told that we should all have four children. (The result contains a group the size of the minimum, and on average better off.)

Strictly, once we have had four children, the smallest possible second generation *rises* to the size of B*. So if we reapply (5), we shall be told that it would be better to make it C*. We shall be told, alarmingly, to have eight children. Singer might say that each generation is to apply (5) only *once*. For the purposes of argument, we can accept this reply.

It achieves little. If we do what (5) recommends, the second generation will be B*. The smallest third generation will then be the size of B*; so (5) will recommend that it should be C*. And if it is, the fourth should be D*. If

each generation follows (5), the population will continuously grow, and the quality of life continuously decline.

This conclusion is embarrassing, for it is close to the one which drove Singer to reject the Total View.[27] There is worse to come. Singer reminds us to look ahead.[28] From our starting-point, the future course with the smallest possible population would be produced by repeating A* indefinitely. So what (5) *now* recommends as the best future course is B* repeated indefinitely. What it *will* recommend, if obeyed and reapplied, is the downward slide to Z*. We are now told to go to B* and to stay there, but we shall be told to move ever on. The Rule is "Jam Tomorrow" (To Be Reapplied Every Day).

Have we reached an intransitivity? Not inescapably. In the move from (3) to (5)—from the Core to the Hard Core Principle—we gain some room for manoeuvre. Since we are told by (3) to use different "cores" in different comparisons, (3) yields intransitive judgments from a single standpoint. (5) at least ensures that from any single standpoint we use the same "hard" core. The problem, for (5), is that the "hard core" changes. This means that over time (5) yields judgments which in some sense "conflict." But the fact that these are made from different standpoints makes it possible to claim that they are not intransitive.

We might, for instance, say that we are only told by (5) what we ought to do. We should then have to admit that we are told the following. From our starting-point, A*, we ought *not* to move directly to C*, but we *ought* to move there *indirectly,* via B*. This result is at least coherent. We can say: "Doing something directly is different from doing it indirectly; that is why one can be wrong and the other right. Given A*, we ought *not* to produce C*, but we ought to produce B*. Doing so changes the situation; that is why we ought then to produce C*."

There are cases where such claims are defended. (They are implied, for instance, by the Principle of Double Effect.) But in our example, and as applied to principle (5), they are hardly plausible. Singer, certainly, would reject this line of escape. He would agree that (5) is not just about what we ought to do, but is also about the desirability of states of affairs. He would say that, if we are told by (5) to create one of two states of affairs, we can infer that it is a better state, and if we are told *not* to do so, we can infer that it is a worse state.[29]

Given this, we again reach intransitivity. We are told by (5)—just as we were by (3)—that C* is worse than A*, though better than a state (B*) which is better than A*.

The only hope for Singer's two principles is to find some way of avoiding

one of these three intransitive judgments. In the case of the Core Principle, this looks impossible;[30] but in the case of the Hard Core Principle Singer makes two suggestions.

The problem, for (5), is that after the move to B*–the move which changes the "hard core"–the next generation *reapplies* the principle. So we might claim that the principle is to be applied only once, to determine once and for all what is best for the rest of history. This amounts to revising (5) so that it refers to "the smallest population which *might have existed at the time,* if other policies had been adopted earlier." This revision makes the great majority of existing people "second-class citizens" whose welfare is entirely subordinate to that of an elite. Singer rejects this line of escape;[31] surely rightly.[32]

If we cannot in this way forbid the second move, can we forbid the first? After rejecting the elitist revision, Singer writes: "The alternative would be to say . . . that since the original move . . . forces us to choose between [the unacceptable revision] or violating our principle by the third generation, this original move is itself prohibited."[33] This amounts to the following: "Since it would violate our principle to make both moves, but our principle will recommend the second, we forbid the first." This is surely unacceptable. Why not argue, "Since our principle recommends the first move (for it *does*), we forbid the second"? Or, "Since the principle recommends both moves, making both does not violate the principle."? The point is a general one. When some principle yields intransitive judgments, it is no *solution* to reject one of these, giving as our only ground that it conflicts with the others. We must find some *other* ground.

In the example that troubled Singer, there are in fact two other grounds to which we might appeal. His "original move" introduces inequality; and it is only allowed by his principle, not recommended.[34] In our example, there is neither ground. The two moves are each recommended, and in the simplest way. If we can only forbid the second move by claiming that the principle should not be applied twice, we can only forbid the first by claiming that it should not be applied even once.

One hope remains. We assumed, with Singer, that a population could never decline. If we changed our view about what is "feasible," could we avoid our problem?

We could not. Take our judgments about some third generation made from the standpoints of the first and second. If these judgments are not to conflict, their basis–the minimum size of the third–must be the same.[35] So the move to the second generation must not change the minimum size of the third. This

requirement would be satisfied if we make the second generation *its* minimum size. But we are told by (5) to make it larger than it could have been. So we shall only escape intransitivity if the minimum size of the third generation, starting from the first, does not depend upon the size of the second. In other words, the "most restrictive feasible population policy" must yield the same end-result whether applied in two successive generations, or only in the second. Reflection shows that only one policy satisfies this requirement. The "most restrictive feasible . . . policy" must be that of having no children at all.[36] If it is, the "hard core" disappears. So the only assumption which can save (5) from intransitivity condemns it to silence.[37]

At the end of this paper, Singer writes: "This principle is not without its . . . problems; but they are, I think, capable of solution."[38] I myself cannot see how.

NOTES TO THE CHAPTER

1. "Moral Problems of Population," reprinted in this volume, p. 73.

2. Though my remarks here are critical, I owe a great deal to Narveson's first article, ["Utilitarianism and New Generations," *Mind* 76 (1967): 62–72], and to conversations both with Narveson and with Peter Singer. I have also been helped by Christopher Peacocke, Judith De Witt, and Robert Nozick.

(Milton Goldinger takes Narveson to say that we should "limit our moral concerns to existing people" ["Is Population Control a Difficulty for the Utilitarian?" *Personalist* 54 (1973): 357]. If this were Narveson's view, there would be no need to add my criticism. And Narveson does write, " . . . all moral reasons for doing anything must be grounded upon the *existence* of persons who would be benefited or injured by the effects of our actions" (p. 68, my italics). But 'existence' here need not mean '*present* existence' (compare "whether or not Jones *lives* in the future, it is still true, whenever he may live . . . " (p. 64, my italics)). Narveson could say: "Provided that certain people *will* exist whether or not we do some act, our act can benefit or injure these future people. All that is presupposed is that their future existence not depend upon our act." (Though this reply is consistent with Narveson's first article, it is only in the second that he claims explicitly that future people have rights ("Moral Problems," p. 162)).)

3. "Moral Problems," p. 73.

4. As it is by Sprigge, "Professor Narveson's Utilitarianism," *Inquiry* 11 (1968): 337–41. I shall add one comment. Narveson writes: "The question we must ask . . . is . . . whether he is happier as a result of being born. . . . We have a piece of nonsense . . . if we suppose that the answer is either yes or no.

For if it is, then with *whom*, or with *what*, are we comparing his new state of bliss?" ("Utilitarianism," p. 67, my italics). It is essential to separate the two arguments suggested here. Narveson's question "with *what*?" suggests that we cannot compare life with non-existence. His argument would then imply that we cannot benefit people by *saving* their lives, for they too are not made happier than they would otherwise have been. And if we cannot benefit those we save, a "person-affecting" principle seems inadequate. Narveson's other question, "with *whom*"?, suggests a different argument. He might say, "While there would have been people whose lives we did not save, there would not have been a person whom we did not conceive." This however could at most show that non-conception cannot be a harm. The crucial premise, that there is no candidate for the person harmed, has no analogue in the case of conception. In short: If we cannot compare life with non-existence, a "person-affecting" principle seems doubtfully able to handle death, and so cannot be relied upon. But if we *can* make this comparison, we do not need a *further* comparison in order to claim that conceiving is a case of affecting. We only need someone to *refer* to—someone who can be said to be the person affected. And in the cases where we do conceive, "there is," as Narveson concedes, "no failure of reference" ("Moral Problems," p. 164).

5. For an account of the two views, see, for instance, S. Kripke, "Naming and Necessity," in *Semantics of Natural Language*, eds. D. Davidson and G. Harman (Dordrecht, Reidel, 1972). (There is a complication here. On one version of the second view, *certain single* properties—such as "being the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey"—can secure identity. Those who accept this version of the second view would be unlikely to claim this about the property "being this woman's first child." But if they did, the consequence would only be as follows. I later criticise what I call "Core Principles," claiming these to be *revised* forms of a "person-affecting" principle. The people just described would merely claim that these are *literal* forms of that principle. This would not affect my grounds for rejecting them.)

6. It would of course be fatal to Narveson and Singer to allow this claim—for it allows that conceiving a person is a case of affecting him.

7. Singer relies on "side-effects" to explain the wrongness of conceiving his "miserable" child. (This child would be so diseased that his life would be worse than nothing—in Singer's words, he "would be better off dead" ("A Utilitarian Population Principle," in this volume, p. 93).) Singer claims that if we conceive such a child we shall later be obliged (for its sake) to commit infanticide, which "tends" to have worse effects on other people. But we might know that such a child would be kept in hospital, and kept alive. By conceiving the child, we should (on Singer's view) be increasing the future incidence of wrongdoing—for the hospital authorities will fail to do what they ought. But this cannot count, for Singer, as a bad effect. And if we suppose

that the child's existence would (say) slightly advance medical research, the predictable "side-effects"—the effects on *other* people—might be slightly for the better. Singer would have to claim that, in the decision whether we ought to conceive this child, *his* predictable misery counts for nothing. If so—if the child is not made worse off by being conceived (though he would later be "better off dead")—a "person-affecting" principle could give the wrong answer.

8. A mere fuel crisis alters the timing of numerous conceptions.

9. "Utilitarialism," p. 13.

10. In "Overpopulation: (1)," which I hope will appear before too long in the journal *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (Princeton University Press).

11. Narveson's minor claim is that, if we reject the "person-affecting" form of principle, we can adopt a "compromise" between the Average and Total Views. This is prompted by the Case of Mere Addition. Narveson's "compromise" is to allow that the mere addition of happy people—who affect no one else—cannot make the world worse ("Moral Problems," p. 175). In terms of the diagram used by Singer (his "Case 3," p. 94), Narveson claims that A Plus is not worse than A. This compromise seems untenable, for we cannot "confine ourselves" to comparing A Plus with *A*. *B* must be, on the compromise view, better than A Plus. So if A Plus is as good as A, B must be better than A. We are back with the Total View.

12. (There is now no note 12.)

13. Its advice may be good, but it supports this advice in what seems a grossly deceptive way. Suppose that our woman refused to wait, and that her handicapped child is now alive. The Reinterpreted Principle tells us that she affected her child for the worse, though it is not true *of* her child that she affected him for the worse.

14. The Concertina Principle is (I think) the one most commonly appealed to by non-philosophers when discussing population policy. I discuss the principle very briefly in "Rights, Interests, and Possible People," in *Moral Problems in Medicine,* ed. S. Gorovitz (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice–Hall, forthcoming). I expect to do so more thoroughly in "Overpopulation: (1)," *op. cit.* (or perhaps in "Overpopulation: (2)").

15. This assumption surely *could* be true, though we could hardly know that it was. (The assumption plays no part in the main argument.)

16. Singer, p. 88.

17. If we wished to minimize conflict with a "person-affecting" principle, we should choose "the earliest-born P people." See "Overpopulation: (1)" (henceforth "0: (1)").

18. 'They', here, does not mean 'they themselves'; it refers to the best-off P people on the other policy. (Singer's choice, to do the best we can for the

best-off P people, may seem grossly inegalitarian. We might say, "Why not do the best we can for the *worst-off* P people?" He could answer: "Principles about equality should not be directly extended to population policy. If our principle referred to the worst-off P people, it could imply that people whose lives are worth living, and who affect no one else, should never have been born." (We assume throughout that everyone's life will be worth living.))

19. Singer, pp. 94–95.

20. The complications are discussed in footnote 34.

21. The assumption that there is no social injustice is merely for convenience. We could instead assume that the injustice in the society is unaffected by the two variables with which we are concerned (the quality of life, the quantity of people), and can therefore be ignored. (This second assumption may seem to conflict with Rawls's Theory of Justice; but I believe that it does not. The reason why is hinted at in footnote 18.)

22. Singer, p. 95.

23. If a principle yields intransitive judgments of the particular ("cyclical") kind that we have reached, it simply fails to tell us what to do. Moreover, given certain plausible assumptions, the principle is self-contradictory. (I am aware that it can be argued that intransitivity is not a fatal flaw. But the arguments for this, though plausible in certain cases (e.g. the rule of majority voting), cannot I think be plausibly applied to "Core Principles"—or to a "person-affecting" principle. I discuss this in "0: (1).")

24. Singer, p. 95.

25. There are two main differences between (5) and Singer's own (4) (p. 89). His (4) does not say when it is *better* to create larger populations; but it is clear from the surrounding text that he intends it to do so. (He says, for instance, that his principle "favors" Policy B in his Case 2 (p. 91).) More important, Singer's (4) does not mention the smallest possible population. This is surprising, for in his introduction to his (4) Singer writes: "There will be a certain minimum number of lives being lived . . . whatever policy we adopt, and it is by its effect on the happiness of that number of lives that a population policy should be judged" (p. 88). (He later writes that his principle "directs us to look for the outcome that has the happiest [P] lives (that being the number . . . that will be lived in any case)" (p. 91).) My (5) seems then to be more faithful than Singer's (4) to his own line of thought. (Anyway, if they are sensibly applied, their implications are much the same.)

26. Singer, p. 95.

27. Singer, p. 83.

28. Singer, p. 96.

29. Thus Singer writes: ". . . by two acceptable steps we have ended up with a situation which is worse than the situation from which we started" (p. 96).

On the line of escape just sketched, we would not claim that the end-result was worse. And even if we agreed that it was, we should deny that this posed a problem. We should say: "We are not utilitarians. Why be surprised if what we ought to do has worse results?" Singer thinks there *is* a problem here.

30. For example, (3) yields intransitive judgments even if we insist that it is only about what we ought to do. It will then say that (in the *same* situation) we ought to produce B* rather than A*, C* rather than B*, and A* rather than C*. (I return to "Core Principles" in "0: (1).")

31. Singer, p. 96.

32. It is both repugnant, and unworkable. It conflicts with the joint claims of utility and justice. And there seems no rationale for preventing the word "earlier" from referring back indefinitely far. So the relevant "core" must be both ludicrously small, and hopelessly indeterminate (as must be the "level" which, by itself, it would have enjoyed).

33. Singer, pp. 96–97.

34. (Busy readers can ignore this footnote). Singer's "original move" is from A to A Plus. It might be claimed that A Plus *is* worse than A, because of its inequality. This claim could obviously be challenged. (We could for instance point out that those who "suffer" from the inequality would (if anything) be glad that it was "introduced"—i.e. that they were born.) Nonetheless, for those who take the Average View, this claim seems to provide the least implausible defence against the Argument from Mere Addition. Singer would reject the claim. (His belief that A Plus is *not* worse than A seems to be his main ground for rejecting the Average View (p. 84).) But the claim that it *is* worse seems also to provide, in this case, the least implausible defence for both of Singer's own principles. And it is worth pointing out that he is free to make this claim. Singer says that, according to his "interpretation of utilitarianism," A Plus is *not* worse than A (p. 94). But this is *not* implied by either Singer's own (4) or his own (3). Singer's (4) (p. 89) does not imply that it is *not* wrong to move from A to A Plus; it only doesn't imply that it *is* wrong. Nor does Singer's (3) (p. 87) guarantee that the move is "right," for it reads "right only if . . . ." not "*if* and only if. . . ." Similarly, my (5) doesn't *licence* the move to A Plus; it only fails to condemn this move. So we are free, on all three principles, to conclude *indirectly* that the move must be worse. The argument for this can be the one that Singer suggests. The two moves are from A to A Plus, and from there to B. We can say: "We are told by our principles that we should not make both moves. We are also told that it would not be wrong to make the second. Since we are *not* told this about the first, we should obviously conclude that the first move would be wrong." (This line of escape may seem grossly sophistical. But even a "person-affecting" principle needs to be applied in a similar way. It must only say that an act is worse *if* it affects people for the worse; it must not say "if and *only*

if . . . " This can be shown in the case of our second woman. There are three things that she can do. The first is to take the treatment, and so have a normal child. The second is to refuse the treatment, and so give her future child the handicap. (Life with this handicap is, we assume, still worth living.) The third possible act is to remain childless. On the stronger form of "person-affecting" principle—which reads "if and only if . . . "—we are told that the second act is worse than the first, though not worse than an act (the third) which is not worse than the first. This is an embarrasing result. And it is quite unnecessary. The right form for a "person-affecting" principle is the weaker form—which only reads "if . . . " On this weaker form we are still told that the second act is worse than the first, but we are not told that the second is not worse than the third (nor that the third is not worse than the first). We can now solve our problem. We can first claim, independently, that—if it affects no one for the worse—it is not wrong to remain childless. Our argument can now be this. The second act is worse than the first, and is therefore wrong. The third act is not wrong. So the second act must be worse than the third—giving one's future child an avoidable handicap must be worse than remaining childless. We are free to conclude this even though the second act does not, *compared with* the third, affect the child for the worse. (Though this approach solves this problem, there are more serious problems facing a "person-affecting" principle, which the approach cannot solve. See "0: (1)." In the same way, this approach saves Singer's principle in the case that troubles him, but is of no use in the case that I discuss.)

35. If populations could decline, the problem is reversed. Suppose that the most restrictive feasible policy halves the population by the next generation. And suppose our starting-point is C*. Judging from C*, the future course with the smallest population would be B*, A*, and so on. Applying (5), the best future course would be C*, B*, A*, and so on. But after we have repeated C* in the second generation, as (5) tells us to do, the best next step will again be to repeat C*. The difference is this. On the assumption in the text, we are now told by (5) to make a single move and then stay put, but we shall be told to keep moving. On the assumption here, we are now told to wait and then move continuously, but we shall be told to wait for ever. So we either can't (as we ought to) stop, or can't (as we ought to) get started.

36. Only this policy could not be *more* effective, if it could be applied twice. Any policy which is less restrictive—which, applied once, reduces a population to some fraction of its present size—must reduce it to a smaller fraction when applied twice.

37. Strictly, (5) will be silent only if it refers to the smallest possible number of *future* people. We might point out that *present* people will still exist. But there would now be no rationale for adopting (5) (or (4)) rather than (2).

And—as Goldinger argues (see note 2)—we ought not to judge policies solely by their effects on present people. (The implications could be even worse than the one sketched by Singer on pp. 97–98. Singer's "result" at least involves the attainment, by some group, of the highest possible quality of life. But the policy which is best for existing people might not only greatly lower the quality of life in the further future—it might also prevent a far higher quality of life from ever being reached.)

38. Singer, p. 98.