

ANTINATALISM'S RESPONSE TO THE
ARTICLE "ON RISK-BASED
ARGUMENTS FOR ANTI-NATALISM"

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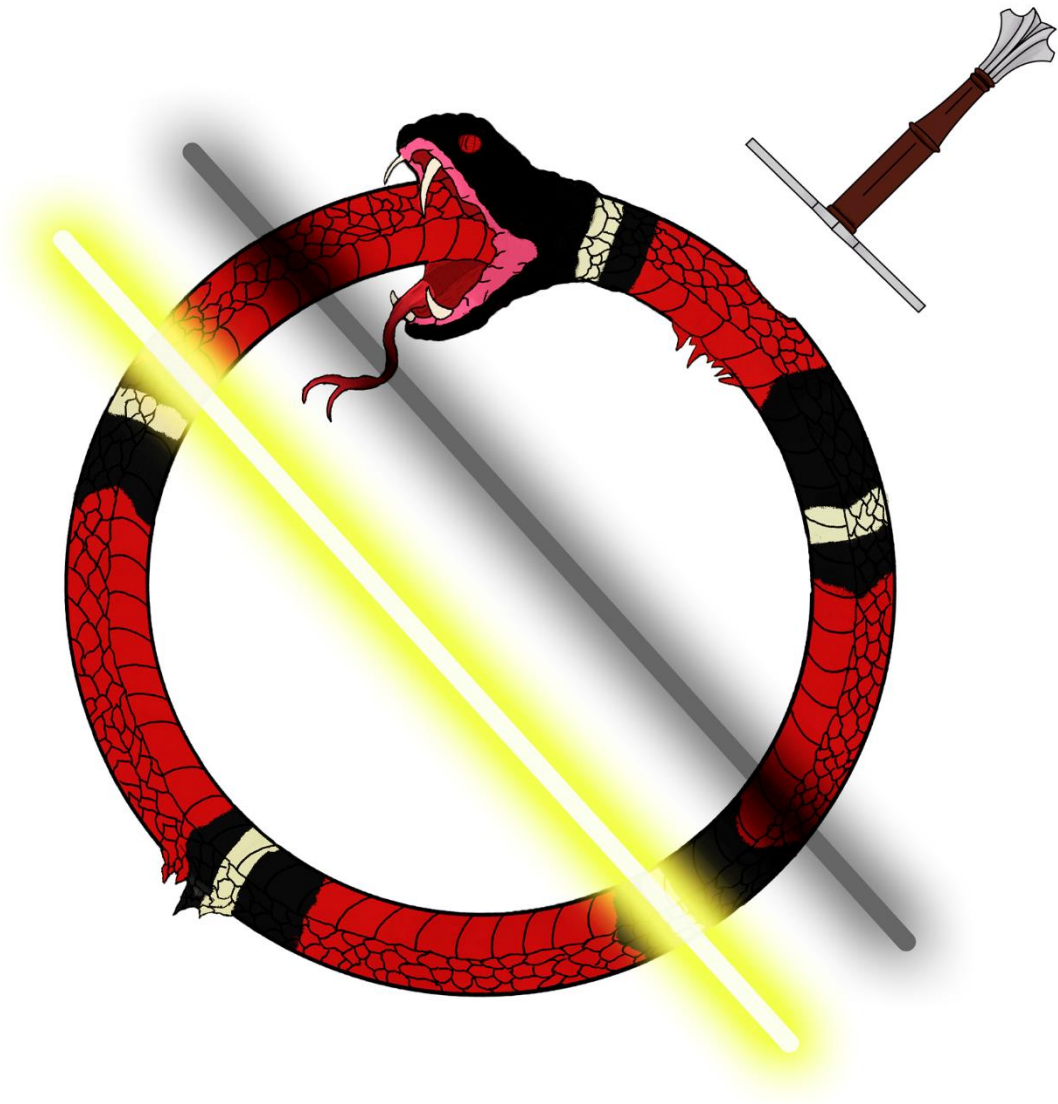


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&1 Introduction

In this article, I intend to critique Erik Magnusson's ideas, which he outlined in his article "On Risk-Based Arguments for Antinatalism." This article is popular, having been downloaded 1,400 times and cited nine times on the PhilPapers website. Most of these downloads occurred in 2025 and 2026. This indicates its high quality and the growing debate around antinatal and pronatal ideas.

Erik Magnusson criticizes antinatalist arguments based on the risk of harm to the created human being. Magnusson believes that Benatar and Matti Häyry's arguments are untenable and supports his opinion by pointing out that they are widely recognized as false in academic circles: "Both of these arguments have been debated extensively in the secondary literature, where the majority of critics have found them wanting." I intend to defend them and demonstrate that it is wrong to dismiss them as false. Criticism of risk arguments is misguided. As usual, I will not comment on the entire work, but only on the parts that are most interesting and important to me and to antinatalism.

&2 Symbolism of antinatalism

The cover of this book depicts the symbolism of the antinatalist doctrine. I do not copyright it; you are free to use it as you wish. Below is the transcript.

The Ouroboros symbolizes life as a self-looping mechanism for the endless reproduction of all evil and harm. At the same time, the serpent embodies the vicious circle of pronatal argumentation. Creating life is useful for the sake of pleasures and values. But usefulness, like everything else, is only necessary if life exists.

A sword with an invisible blade piercing the serpent symbolizes an abstract idea, the theorist's main weapon.

Two parallel rays, black and gold. A symbol of orthogonality, the ubiquitous causal disconnection of harm and benefit in life.

&3 The Basic Structure of Risk-Based Arguments

At the beginning of the article, Magnusson describes one of the risk arguments:

- (1) It is impermissible to impose a risk of harm on others under x conditions;
- (2) Bringing a child into existence involves imposing a risk of harm on the child in a way that satisfies x conditions; therefore,
- (3) It is impermissible to bring children into existence.

I generally agree with this version of the argument. Some of my anti-natal views can be summarized this way. However, the argument suffers greatly from excessive simplicity. For example, the formulation doesn't include the magnitude of the risk. For example, some harm is likely to occur. If you create a man today, he will likely be an incel, because sexual selection filters out men who are unattractive or insufficiently attractive. This circumstance poses enormous psychological and physical harm to human health.

Magnusson goes on to criticize this argument. Quote from page: "There are two main ways in which this type of argument can be challenged. First, we can challenge the plausibility of the principle of risk imposition proposed in premise (1) by showing that it does not accord with our everyday judgments surrounding risk". The inconsistency of the risk argument with our "everyday judgments surrounding risk" doesn't render it false. Essentially, to paraphrase, Magnusson is saying the following: incompetence in knowledge about the harm to life justifies any harm to a created person. You may disagree with me and think this is a "straw man." However, this is not the case. Firstly, the words "everyday judgments surrounding risk" are too vague. What kind of risk is this? In what situation does it arise? What human actions does it affect? Who is harmed? Magnusson's article lacks any specifics, so I'll try to guess what he means. I've heard the following argument: "The risk argument is absurd because it could prohibit you from going outside because you could be killed there, albeit with a small probability." Firstly, going outside objectively doesn't entail as many risks as creating a life. For example, if you go outside, there's no chance of a war breaking out, no chance of becoming an incel or a woman who can't have a normal romantic life due to sexual selection, no chance of contracting a genetic disease or establishing a dictatorship. The number of risks varies dramatically. Furthermore, if you accidentally cause a risk to another person who also goes outside, they at least consented to leaving the premises. In the case of life creation, there's no consent at all. However, there is a simulated situation that shows that most lives don't deserve to be chosen under conditions of freedom. I'm talking about my "Free Evaluator" thought experiment, but let's return to the article.

The argument about our normal judgments about risks is also flawed because the correct moral rule is: "Before engaging in dangerous activity, you must have some qualifications." You wouldn't accept as a justification for a man-made disaster if the chief engineer said, "We simply didn't know anything and didn't want to know about the nature of the experiment we conducted at the nuclear power plant." I'm being deliberately vague because Magnusson doesn't quite understand what he means by this idea. To summarize: incompetence in knowledge about the dangers does not justify the immoral status of an objectively dangerous act.

Here's a quote from Magnusson on the same page: "Normally, our views about the permissibility of risk-imposing activities depend on three main variables: (a) the seriousness or magnitude of the harm that is risked by a particular activity." Again, it's not entirely clear what this means, as there are no specifics. However, something can be said, and this isn't a pronatal argument: life includes harm of any magnitude, since only life creates it. Where inanimate matter dominates, the concept of "harm" doesn't exist at all, since it concerns objects that have "interests." Of course, one could say that there are more or less safe countries and antinatalism is equally irrelevant everywhere, but this leads to two problems. First, some types of harm are of an incomprehensible scale. For example, very few people thought the First World War would be so massive. Or that the incest epidemic among young men would strike so suddenly and be so widespread. However, this again is no justification for natalism, since natalists are forced to have children by no one but themselves. Antinatalism literally provides 100% protection and eliminates all risk. Ignorance cannot be used as an excuse for a proven harmful act when there is a completely moral and reliable alternative.

Continuation of the previous quote: "and (c) the justification that can be offered for engaging in that activity in the first place." The only justification for natalism is the usefulness of life, which is unnecessary if children are not produced. Moreover, this is not the motivation of natalists, since there is no definition of what constitutes a "good life," with the exception of my "Free Evaluator" experiment. The lack of a definition of what constitutes a "good life" raises the question of how a person is motivated by something whose definition is unclear. Besides the previous idea, experience shows that people produce children under any circumstances, provided they can reproduce. It's just that sometimes life turns out to be less terrible. And this isn't the parents' fault, since they aren't truly interested in it. No criminal commits a crime so that criminologists can develop new investigative methods. They do so out of purely selfish motives. Continuation of the previous quote: "and (c) the justification that can be offered for engaging in that activity in the first place".

The following is a quote from page 4: "For example, we might object to the type of harm¹ that a particular principle deems impermissible to risk; we might object to the level of probability that a particular principle deems impermissible to risk; or we might object to the class of reasons that a particular principle accepts as appropriate justification for imposing risk. Second, we can also challenge the account of procreative risk proposed in premise (2) by showing that bringing a child into existence does not always or even typically involve imposing the type of risk that premise (1) deems to be impermissible". Natalism can justify any type of harm and fuel debates about whether great harm and suffering are acceptable or not. In practice, natalism justifies any harm, as I've heard repeatedly. Raped? Well, there are positives in life. Killed himself because of depression? Well, there were positives in his life. Millions of people died in concentration camps? There were positives in their lives. Burned alive? There were positives in their lives of friendship and love, and these two facts quantitatively outweigh the tragedy. Slaved all his life in a low-paying job? There are positives in life. Were you an incel, like most men today? Well, the positives outweigh the negatives. Lived in an extremely toxic work culture? There are always positives in life. This state of affairs is unsurprising, since the natalists' methods for assessing the quality of life are

trivial and flawed. In my monograph, "Free Evaluator," I write that there are only four most common methods for assessing whether a life worth living:

Indication: a life is worth living if it contains positive facts.

Recalculation: a life is worth living if positive facts outweigh negative ones.

Scaling: life is worth living if the good outweighs the bad in units of measurement.

Orthogonality: a life is worth living if it does not contain\contain minimum possible number of certain² orthogonal bad facts.

The problem with natalism is that its proponents use the first method of indication in practice. The problem with this method is that it's trivial and justifies any harm. You need to point to something good in a person's life, and even death during genocide can be justified. The antinatalist position in such cases is very simple. Exposing a person to a dangerous environment that results in harm is a crime against human health. Creating a person who suffers in this way is an immoral act. Why? After all, there are benefits in life that outweigh these benefits. The answer is this: death during genocide is orthogonal to other benefits, and they can exist without this harm, so it's not a justification. Furthermore, the benefits of life are unnecessary if life isn't created. It's impossible to establish the limits of what harm devalues unless you use a method with sufficient power for this—namely, the "Free Evaluator" thought experiment.

Here's a quote from Magnusson: "First, risk-based arguments must by definition focus on atypical harms". This statement is flawed, as it contains a pronatalist definition of what risk is considered unacceptable. Note: not all natalists agree with this definition, as they lack a method for determining what level of harm is unacceptable. Let's return to the quote. Again, Magnusson doesn't specifically explain why it needs to cite atypical examples of harm. He also doesn't specify what specific probability he considers "atypical." Let me give a simple example that demonstrates the vulnerability of such counterarguments. There is a very harmful disease called autism. The chance of it being violently inflicted on a newborn is approximately 1 in 31 or 1 in 36. That is, this is a significant number of people. Is such a risk and such harm considered atypical? There is no answer in Magnusson's article. Here's an example. The chance of violently inflicting the dangerous disease Down syndrome depends on the mother's age and at 25 years old is 1 in 1250. Is this an atypical case or not? According to the World Bank Group, 8.5% of the planet's population lives on less than \$2.15 a day³. Is 8.5% an atypical case or not? Let's move on. During World War II, direct losses amounted to 70-85 million people. These are only direct losses, not counting the disabled or people who lost loved ones. Do these figures constitute atypical harm or not? The Pew Research Center further determined that by 2023, 63% of US men aged 18-30 will not be in a romantic relationship, living with a partner, or married. Given the current dismal dynamics of the dating market, all these guys are likely incels, people who have not undergone sexual selection and are considered undeserving of sex due to their "bad" genetics. Is 63% of the young male population an atypical case or not? If not, why is such widespread harm justified? The article doesn't answer this. I've already encountered this objection to risk arguments in Richard Carrier's article, so I'll

² Reverse meanings of life.

³ [Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024](#)

simply quote my article, “Part 1. Antinatalism's Response to the Article 'Antinatalism is Counterfactual & Incoherent”.

Note. Previously I wrote “violently inflicted”. These aren't just empty words. I meant that a person is created with a dangerous disease against their will, since the unborn has no say in the matter. In other words, the disease is inflicted, and the status is inflicted. And such an act is grossly contrary to the newborn's interests in “not having an incurable genetic disease”.

Quote: “The argument that there are exceptional historical circumstances is untrue for several reasons. First, it would require proving why 10 happy people⁴ justify one severely affected person, which Richard's article fails to do. However, antinatalism provides evidence to the contrary: if no one is willing to voluntarily suffer greatly for the sake of others' happiness, which doesn't significantly affect you, then it is immoral to risk someone in the hope of a good outcome. And second, human suffering isn't cherry-picking. Evil affects vast numbers of people who don't represent the "exceptional/rare cases" group. The author commits a grave factual error. Here are examples of widespread and powerful harm. Dictatorships and underdeveloped countries with literally millions of people are not exceptions. Two world wars affected millions of people. Epidemics affect millions/billions of people. The untouchable caste in India is numerically larger than the populations of Germany, France, and Poland combined. Someone commits a fatal suicide every 40 seconds, not to mention suicide attempts, which are many times higher. The Russo-Ukrainian War has already claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people and shows no sign of stopping; a major war in Europe is possible. Furthermore, the war has led to ⁵torture, disabilities, and PTSD, all indirectly endorsed by the natalist position. Just recently, a new American-Israeli-Iranian war began. One in eight women worldwide is subjected to pedophilic sexual violence, not to mention men ⁶. There are countless examples. However, natalists simply don't want to know the truth about the harmfulness of human life”.

Magnusson then modulates the antinatal argument, but does so with error.: “It is impermissible to non-consensually impose a risk of catastrophic harm on others when there is a high probability of occurrence”. How did Magnusson determine that the harm had to be catastrophic? What harm constitutes catastrophic harm? What method was used to establish this threshold? Magnusson's article fails to answer these questions. What harm is catastrophic? Let's move on to why the risk should include catastrophic harm, rather than major or moderate harm that's significant to quality of life? Isn't a beating that doesn't result in harm to health immoral if the harm isn't catastrophic? It's unclear why there should be a different criterion for birth. I'll give an example of my criterion. In my monograph "Free Evaluator," I put people in a situation where they have to choose the life they want to live before it begins, and the person has information about its quality. Under these conditions, it turns out that the harm doesn't necessarily have to be catastrophic; it simply has to significantly negatively impact the individual's vital interests. For example, most people would refuse to be a wage slave for most of their lives. Most people don't like their jobs, and if they had the money, they would refuse a grueling eight-hour day. Let's take IQ, for example. What's the

⁴Who, moreover, do not ask to be born and suffer from their non-birth, because in a state of non-existence there are no needs to obtain needs, for example, love and money.

⁵Risk.

⁶[UNICEF: One in eight women worldwide experienced sexual violence in childhood | UN News](#). The article is in Russian, just use the translator. It contains UN statistics.

point of not being smart? Intelligence is constantly being used, and without a high IQ, the chances of achieving anything diminish, if not vanish in many areas. Furthermore, why live in a dictatorship rather than a democracy? Most countries today are dictatorial, autocratic, or simulate democracy. Furthermore, why be less than a model, meaning not very handsome? Simply put, if you're below an 8 out of 10, you're an incel; you'll either never have a relationship or be dumped within 1-3 months. The next question: why not be born into a wealthy family or rich? Why live a significantly worse life? Why are these losses necessary? Why live under a system of suppressed personal freedom? For example, being a woman in some Islamic states? Why live during a particularly unfavorable period, like the Great Depression in the US? It's unclear why Magnusson doesn't provide criteria and why the harm must necessarily be catastrophic, rather than simply significant and significantly reducing a person's standard of living. The following quote suffers from the same flaw: "This is, in one sense, an advantage for risk-based arguments, as it opens the possibility that procreation can be wrong even in cases where the resulting child does not succumb to 'unspeakable suffering.' Why is it right to inflict greater suffering rather than unspeakable suffering? How is this established? There is no answer.

Next quote: "However, this apparent advantage also comes with a challenge, for in cases where the risks of procreation do not ripen into actual harms, proponents have the burden of demonstrating why these instances of "pure risking" are nevertheless impermissible". The answer is this: there's no challenge to antinatalists here. This is demonstrated by the following examples, based on the following moral rule: risky and reckless behavior that doesn't cause harm doesn't become good or neutral just by luck. A simple example: in the US, on certain holidays, people fire rifles into the air; a dropped bullet can easily pierce another person's skull, which happens every year. So, this form of inappropriate behavior is morally bad even if no one dies. Magnusson went on to say that antinatalists have the burden of proof that the risk is unjustified even if there is no harm. In fact, the greater burden of proof lies with natalists, since they are the ones who are engaged in the dangerous act of creating. They are the ones who must prove that their actions are morally right. Antinatalists should not do this, since they refrain from such actions and therefore do not harm anyone.

&4 The argument for the correct risk of catastrophic harm

Magnusson argues that the risk-imposition argument can be challenged by arguing that there are legitimate exceptions to the rule: "It is wrong to impose the risk of catastrophic harm on another person". Magnusson then draws an analogy and makes a mistake, rendering the analogy false and uninformative. The following quote: "Is this argument sound? Let us consider each of its premises in turn. Premise (1) initially seems plausible as a sufficient condition for the impermissibility of risk imposition, though one might attempt to challenge it by noting there are sometimes cases in which we are justified in imposing a highly probable risk of catastrophic harm on others. Imagine, for example, that an unconscious patient has sustained a serious head injury and requires a hazardous craniectomy in order to relieve swelling in their brain. Even if performing this operation will impose a significant risk of catastrophic harm on the patient—including death, brain death, or permanent paralysis, for example—doing so still seems justified insofar as it is necessary to save that patient's life. If this is correct, then there are sometimes valid exceptions to the principle expressed in premise (1), providing a possible line of objection to Benatar's argument".

Where, in my opinion, does Magnusson make mistakes? First, the patient was already conscious before falling into a coma and would likely have consented to being cured of a dangerous illness and saved from death. This means the patient has an interest in protecting themselves from harm and illness. Therefore, the risk is justified. Furthermore, the doctor will not be liable if they performed the treatment properly, even if the patient dies. The doctor is not responsible for the death; the illness is "to blame." This is confirmed by criminal law, which exempts doctors from legal liability if they adequately treated the deceased. This is called severing the causal link in criminal law. Furthermore, the act of "treating an illness" is generally considered a beneficence. It is the elimination of harm when there is a need, a necessity, to eliminate such harm. But the creation of life is not such an act; an unborn person, for objective reasons, has no needs and cannot consent to birth. Therefore, their interests are not the cause for further enjoyment of life. The next difference is that curing disease is not the fundamental cause of absolutely all evil and harm, unlike the creation of life. This isn't just an emotion or a big mouth. Why? The answer lies in the following visual demonstration. Adolf Hitler is dozens of times less evil than life itself. Why? Answer: Hitler isn't the fundamental cause of wars and genocides—they came before him and will come after him. The Holocaust the Second World War could have been carried out by someone else. But life, after all, is such a cause. Without the creation of life, wars and genocides don't exist in the hypothesis. Life is the root of all evil, as is the act of "creating life." This creates a morally significant difference between "curing disease" and "creating life". Therefore, Magnusson's explanatory analogy is flawed.

&5 The hidden strong argument of all/almost pronatal argumentation

It's likely that almost all pronatalist arguments contain one very strong premise, which is itself a highly controversial assertion. No evidence is provided for it. Below, I'll show why this premise exists and what it looks like.

- 1) The advice to create life is general for all or almost all agents. Most often, it's general for everyone, as natalists have no criteria for what harm is unacceptable. What do I mean by general advice? Such advice is given to all people on the planet; such advice endorses the creation of life in a broad sense.
- 2) Such advice, norm, or rule involves a risk that there will be bad lives or lives with catastrophic harm.
- 3) According to the theory of probability, with large numbers, that is, with a large number of repetitions of the creation of life, bad lives will inevitably appear.
- 4) Such lives actually exist and the pronatal argumentation does not change in any way because of this.
- 5) Let's assume that such lives make up 20% of the total number.
- 6) From experience it is clear that this does not affect the pronatal argumentation, and the approval of the creation of life remains in force.
- 7) Therefore, pronatalism directly implies causing harm to one group of people in order to create a happy life for other people.

The question is, why is this considered right? It's a very powerful underlying argument that requires proof. Natalism, not natalists, but the idea itself is fundamentally immoral. It washes away

the depravity of the means with the purity of the end. And in practice, it implies serious sacrifices for pleasures and benefits that aren't necessary. It's simply a desire to engage in DNA replication.

This argument is found not only in Magnusson but also in other natalists. The burden of proof lies with the natalists, as they implicitly advance it in almost all cases and fail to prove it. How exactly is the happiness of some justified by the harm to others? I've never seen an answer to this.

&6 Conclusion

In this article, I provided a partial review of Erik Magnusson's article "On Risk-Based Arguments for Anti-natalism." I pointed out Magnusson's generally flawed ideas. He is mistaken in assuming that some risk-based arguments are flawed, as he presents a flawed counterargument. Magnusson develops his own risk argument, which he considers the most promising. I did not review it in this article, so I generally agree with him and did not consider it necessary to discuss it here. My point in this article is simply to point out that others, like Magnusson, consider the risk-based arguments to be flawed, but they are valid.

Magnusson's criticism is based, firstly, on unproven arguments, such as the claim that the harm must be catastrophic for antinatalism to be effective. Furthermore, why the risk argument must be based on atypical cases is neither proven nor substantiated. There are no criteria for what constitutes an atypical case. The underlying assumption that one group's good life justifies another group's disadvantage is not explained, and so on. Overall, the quality of Magnusson's article suffers greatly from these strong underlying assumptions and the complete lack of definitions and criteria where they are needed to criticize risk arguments. If you intend to criticize a position, you cannot do so using completely undefined terms\words.

Determining when life is not worth starting is very difficult unless you use one method, the "Free Evaluator" thought experiment.