



Anti-Natalism and (The Right Kinds of) Environmental Attitudes

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Abstract

This paper explores anti-natalism and attitudes towards environmental preservation. Anti-natalisms of a certain kind, what I call “compassion-based anti-natalisms”, adhere to the principle of minimising suffering, and this goes hand-in-hand with the common belief that protecting the environment from destruction is the right thing to do. However, I argue that environmental preservation is, in fact, antithetical to the anti-natalist’s aims. This is because environmental preservation is, as I argue, primarily for future generations and has, therefore, pro-natalist attachments: environmental preservation promotes and enables future generations. As a result, environmental preservation conflicts with three of the anti-natalist’s fundamental values: the goal of extinction, an overall reduction in suffering, and adherence to a duty of non-procreation. Because of this, I discuss two possible attitudes the anti-natalist might take towards environmental preservation: *Destruction* and *Apathy*. *Destruction* involves the active degradation and destruction of the environment to bring about extinction as soon as possible. *Apathy* is to be “hands-off” towards preservation and degrade the environment more slowly. I state that *Apathy* is the most suitable attitude for the anti-natalist to take towards the environment because it ascertains a sensible balance within the anti-natalist’s values and does not introduce new, morally objectionable outcomes. Finally, I discuss some practical limitations to *Apathy* and how the anti-natalist might best act in the context of the real world. I conclude that anti-natalists might have to compromise on their values and, paradoxically, support environmental preservation.

Keywords Anti-natalism · Environmental attitudes · Future generations · Extinction

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Introduction

To be concerned about the natural environment and the effects of climate change is a widespread and intuitive principle that rarely goes challenged. That is, most people do not ask themselves why they care about the environment or, a fortiori, if they should. This is also true for (some) anti-natalists¹—those who, generally speaking, believe we should not procreate—who demonstrate proenvironmental values within their anti-natalist theories. For example, David Benatar, a prominent anti-natalist philosopher, has argued for a presumptive duty of non-procreation, partly due to the damage humans cause to non-human animals and the natural environment (Benatar and Wasserman 2015, pp. 93–100). Moreover, an emerging variant of anti-natalism, *ahumanism*, advocates the extinction of humanity so that a “more harmonious kinship between nonhuman animals and environments will emerge” (Häyry and Sukenick 2024a, pp. 40–41). This gives one the impression that anti-natalism and proenvironmental attitudes go hand-in-hand, aiming to minimise the damage caused to the natural environment.²

However, in this paper, I demonstrate the inconsistencies of being an anti-natalist and holding a proenvironmental attitude. This is because environmental preservation is mainly determined by concern and desire for future generations, as I shall argue, and is thus, in practice, pro-natalist. Thus, if the anti-natalist advocates extinction and, at the same time, wishes to protect the environment, then it shall generate three conflicts concerning their values: the pursuit of extinction, achieving an overall reduction in suffering, and adhering to a duty of non-procreation.

The paper proceeds as follows. In Sect. “[Compassion-Based Anti-Natalism](#)”, I detail the variant of anti-natalism that is the focus of this paper—compassion-based anti-natalism—and the corresponding values relevant to the discussion. In Sect. “[Environmental Preservation](#)”, I argue that environmental preservation is *for* future generations. In Sect. “[Value Conflict](#)”, I discuss how this generates a conflict for anti-natalists who support environmental preservation. In Sect. “[Overcoming the Conflict](#)”, to solve the conflict, I analyse two attitudes an anti-natalist might take towards the environment—*Destruction* and *Apathy*—and state that *Apathy* is right. However, in Sect. “[The Myth of Apathy](#)”, I discuss practical constraints to *Apathy*, which implies that the anti-natalist must compromise to best adhere to their values. This compromise, somewhat paradoxically, might be to support environmental preservation. But, in all, if one thing is for sure, it is that the anti-natalist’s attitudes towards the environment shall not be left unchecked, something that has been, surprisingly, hitherto neglected. The final section concludes.

¹ I say “some” because efilism—a form of anti-natalism—places a negative intrinsic value on *all* life, including non-sentient life; as such, the ideal for efilists is the elimination of all life, which, applied, might involve the elimination of all *potential for* life, including the natural environment (Häyry and Sukenick 2024a, pp. 31–32).

² Somewhat related to environmental care, Joonas Räsänen states that there is a strong link between animal ethics, veganism, and anti-natalism (Räsänen 2023a, b).

Compassion-Based Anti-Natalism

In this section, I will discuss two corollaries of compassion-based anti-natalism.³ Anti-natalism comes in many different forms. In analytical philosophy, compassion-based anti-natalisms are concerned with the potential child and what is good, or at least not bad, for them.⁴ Such anti-natalist arguments state that we should not procreate because of the harm it shall cause the child, whether this be, for example, the general and unavoidable harms of life, for which there is a duty not to induce them (Belshaw 2012; Harrison 2012), an axiological asymmetry between existence and non-existence and a highly probable awful quality of life (Benatar 2006), or the imposition of a lifestyle that is nearly impossible for the procreated to abandon (Häyry and Sukenick 2024b).⁵ (Talk of anti-natalism hereon refers to the compassion-based sort unless described otherwise.) I will now describe the corollaries of anti-natalism that are key to the discussion.

The first corollary is that if procreation is morally impermissible, there is a duty not to procreate. This may be more nuanced in certain variations, where procreation might be permissible. For example, *some* acts of procreation *might* be permissible in the anti-natalisms of Belshaw (2012, 2024), Häyry (2024), and Benatar and Wasserman (2015), where the misanthropic argument's presumptive duty is defeated. However, such permissibility is an exception to the non-procreation rule. Moreover, the duty implies that one should not procreate, but the duty should not be forced on others. (This is an important point to return to later.)

Second, extinction is a desired corollary of non-procreation, and it is, quite plausibly, the end goal.⁶ However, understanding how best to achieve extinction is a trickier issue. For example, should everybody stop procreating around the same time, then we would reach a final generation that would find itself with a lack of support, no suitable younger workforce, and deteriorating infrastructure (Benatar and Wasserman 2015, p. 128). In turn, this would likely generate more suffering for the final generation. Though such a scenario is undesirable, this final generation would be performing the supererogatory task of bringing humanity to a close, which, according to the compassion-based outlook, is plausibly a necessary harm to prevent a greater amount of suffering that would come from an indefinite number of future genera-

³ “Compassion-based” anti-natalism is a term I am using to connect anti-natalisms that primarily refer to and derive their principles from the well-being of the potential child. Thus, they are compassionate in that they advocate non-procreation to prevent harm to the potential child.

⁴ For some influential “non-analytical” anti-natalist works, see Emil Cioran and Howard (2020), Ligotti (2018), Schopenhauer (2017), and Peter Wessel Zapffe (1993).

⁵ The authors stated here are not all necessarily anti-natalists themselves, and, further, there are varying degrees of belief in anti-natalist values. However, the arguments outlined in the cited texts explicitly put forth anti-natalist arguments that can be grouped into compassion-based anti-natalism.

⁶ Some anti-natalisms, such as those advocating temporary anti-natalism due to, for example, overpopulation and climate change, do not advocate extinction. See Hedberg (2020); Vance (2024); Young (2001). Moreover, Torres (2020) describes a “no extinction anti-natalism”. The argument pertains to speculative technologies, such as radical human enhancement through mind-uploading or brain emulation, which would, in turn, modify the arguments for anti-natalism (and extinction) in the first place. As a result, Torres's argument is beyond the remit of this paper and does not affect the arguments I make.

tions. (I will return to this corollary later when discussing anti-natalist reasons for and against environmental preservation.)

Environmental Preservation

This section shall explore the reasons why we preserve the environment. Here, talk of environmental preservation is broadly construed to refer to the practices of maintaining natural ecosystems and the conditions necessary for life. Thus, such practices include climate change reversal and the preservation of natural habitats, amongst other things, on both an individual and collective scale. In this section, I shall argue that the environment is primarily preserved for future generations; more specifically, future generations of humans. Thus, should we be deprived of future generations (of humans) through, for example, an impending extinction, then the majority of people's reasons and ipso facto motivations for environmental preservation would be significantly reduced.

It is important to note that I am establishing a descriptive claim about environmental preservation and future generations. That is, I shall argue that future generations are part of *why* most people act on environmental preservation, which is distinct from the reasons people *ought* to act. In other words, I am not arguing if or why we ought to preserve the environment; I am arguing only why most people, in fact, do. With this, the argument shall stand even if the reader's or anyone else's, including anti-natalists', reasons for preserving the environment are absent concerns for future generations. It is enough that, as I shall argue, most people preserve the environment for future generations, and should we lose the possibility of future generations, "we"—humanity on a collective scale—would lose interest in environmental preservation as we know it.

In support of the argument that future generations motivate environmental preservation, consider, first, empirical data. Stylianos Syropoulos and Ezra Markowitz highlight the correlation between proenvironmental attitudes and duties or obligations towards future generations. They argue that "existing evidence supports the claim that perceived responsibility to future people... *could* motivate proenvironmental engagement" (*italics added*).⁷ They substantiate this statement with their study data, in which 13,632 U.S. adults were surveyed regarding environmental concerns, and "protecting the environment on behalf of future generations was endorsed the most compared to other reasons" (Syropoulos and Markowitz 2024, pp. 3–6).⁸ (For more supporting data, see Syropoulos and Markowitz (2021); Syropoulos et al. (2020); Watkins and Goodwin (2020).)

These data support the idea that future generations and our moral obligations towards them mainly constitute why we engage in environmental preservation. Of course, obligations towards future generations are among the *many reasons* we pre-

⁷ This claim also supports the popular philosophy of "longtermism" (MacAskill 2022), whose moral normativity is primarily future-oriented.

⁸ This was the strongest motivator across all demographic variants, such as age, education, income, political ideology, and religion (Syropoulos and Markowitz 2024, p. 7). For similar data, see Bailey (2022).

serve the environment. (Recall that future generations “*could*” motivate proenvironmental engagement.) Another reason, for example, is that we are also concerned with the effects of climate change on existing generations (Kantar 2020). However, as the data show, a concern for future generations is the most prevalent reason we engage in environmental preservation.

Perhaps, one might argue, the data establish a *correlation* between proenvironmental attitudes and future generations—that in preserving the environment, future generations are enabled—but not *causation*—that we do not preserve the environment *in order to* enable and bring about future generations. That is, we preserve the environment for something other than a concern for future generations, but, at the same time, we recognise that preserving the environment benefits future generations by enabling their existence. Indeed, plenty of other reasons could ground our moral concern for the environment, including concerns about our own welfare, the welfare of non-human animals, and the intrinsic value of the natural environment.⁹ However, the problem with this argument is that the data do not reflect these reasons to the same extent as concerns for future generations.

Nevertheless, let us provide the benefit of the doubt to the counterargument and strengthen the original argument by discussing a hypothetical extinction. Most people take extinction to be bad. Suppose extinction was imminent, where extant generations would be unaffected, but there would be no more future generations. How would this scenario affect our proenvironmental attitudes? The empirical data show that we would lose the most-cited reason for addressing climate change: concerns towards future generations—since their existence would be ruled out, we would lose the most empirically cited reason why we act on environmental preservation.¹⁰

With the loss of a key motivator, our attitudes would undoubtedly be affected. The question, then, is how our attitudes towards environmental preservation would change. On the one hand, we might still be as strongly motivated to protect the environment for other reasons. On the other hand, we might drastically lose such motivation because of losing a key motivator.¹¹

Consider, first, the former. It is difficult to perceive a realistic scenario where most people would maintain the same motivation to preserve the environment despite los-

⁹ The intrinsic value of the environment would, I believe, reach the same conclusion—that future generations are integral to our motivation for preservation. For example, biodiversity, the good of mere existence, the unique complexity of species, and the theory of “deep ecology” all value the environment because of life (Brennan and Lo 2022, p. 15; Cline 2020, pp. 48–50). Therefore, if we preserve the environment because of its intrinsic value, we are doing so to maintain the enablement of future life. (Also, see Cafaro (2023).)

¹⁰ Consider a second hypothetical: suppose we could harmlessly harvest energy from the sun exponentially, which would benefit present generations. However, increased energy harvesting means that the sun will explode (and all life will end) much sooner, around 2180 (Page 1977, p. 250; Wolf 2012, p. 398). Such energy harvesting would likely be rejected on the grounds that future generations should come into being, and we should not do anything to jeopardise this.

¹¹ Wienhues et al. (2023, p. 7) state that extinction might be morally problematic because of duties to future generations. Such a duty would be to ensure that they have a life. Thus, we would preserve the environment in order to maintain the conditions for life for future generations. If this were the case, then were future generations no longer possible, we would no longer have a duty (or reason, other things equal) to preserve the environment.

ing their key motivator. For it to be plausible, then, we would need to reconstruct our proenvironmental attitudes. Perhaps we could state the need to preserve the environment to maintain or improve the quality of extant lives, including humans and non-humans, as well as the natural environment. After all, these are also concerns related to climate change (Marlon et al. 2022). However, such preservation endeavours would take a drastically different form, for many long-term environmental projects would become redundant. That is, there would be no incentive to make long-term investments to benefit future generations since they would not come to exist (Scheffler 2013, pp. 24–25).

It is useful to consider some of the practical endeavours of environmental preservation to support this point. For example, in line with the argument made, it is unlikely that most people would maintain their interest in the typical acts of climate change reversal, such as activism, greener diets, and recycling¹²—“Well, what’s the point?” After all, these acts of environmental preservation and climate change reversal are fundamentally long-term endeavours. Indeed, we might reap the benefits of, say, a greener diet in the near term, but greener diets and the research and development that go into them are investments whose effects shall be realised to a greater extent in the future. Therefore, the fact that humanity was about to end would lead many people to, at the very least, dissociate from environmental preservation as we know it.

As a result, it is plausible that the environmental strategy would be one of management rather than preservation, where the aim would be to maintain the quality of life of current generations, which does not require such a future-oriented perception. The only scenario in which we would maintain the same attitude towards environmental preservation in the absence of future humans is if we made a drastic change towards a non-anthropocentric value system, perhaps caring enough about non-human animals and the natural environment to maintain our motivation and long-term projects despite the end of humanity. Yet, in considering the empirical data and humanity’s track record, a shift to a non-anthropocentric value system for motivating environmental preservation seems unlikely. Therefore, it is more likely that we would care less about environmental preservation, focusing more on the management of the environment for extant lives.

If what I have argued is correct, then future generations are integral to our motivation to preserve the environment.¹³ As such, environmental preservation is, practically speaking, a pro-natalist endeavour: preserving the environment is a means to enabling future generations and providing them with a good life. I will now discuss the consequences this has for anti-natalist values.

¹² Not that these things are the most beneficial in mitigating or reversing environmental degradation, but for the lay person, they might believe them to be important endeavours, which is what matters for these purposes.

¹³ Environmental preservation is not a *sufficient* condition for future generations, but it is a *necessary* condition.

Value Conflicts

If future generations motivate the protection and preservation of the environment, then the anti-natalist should hold a radically different attitude towards environmental preservation than supporting preservation itself. I shall now demonstrate this by relating three of the anti-natalist's core values.

Practicality of Extinction

Practically speaking, if the anti-natalist advocates for and supports environmental preservation, then it shall take them further away from the goal of extinction. In other words, given the pro-natalism that is attached to environmental preservation, then regardless of the anti-natalist's reasons for preserving the environment, environmental preservation shall, in practice, take them further away from the goal of extinction by supporting the enablement of future lives and increasing the likelihood that humanity shall continue indefinitely.¹⁴

Given this, it does not suffice for the anti-natalist to object by stating that they preserve the environment for reasons unrelated to future generations; it does not affect the practical conflict at hand.

Suffering and Harm

As I have stated, a large part of the anti-natalist's motivation for extinction comes from the desire to minimise suffering in the world, and reducing it to zero is the most efficient way. Thus, more generations equate to more suffering, and so procreation is a regretful endeavour.

Now, the anti-natalist might have good reason to preserve the environment because, as mentioned, the suffering of current lives will be alleviated. For example, if we do not preserve the environment now, existing humans and non-human animals will suffer, as will the natural environment. Therefore, it makes sense to protect the environment and mitigate the effects of climate change to improve existing lives.

However, should we preserve the environment to reduce present suffering, we can expect greater suffering in the future. Environmental preservation helps achieve future generations, and more of them, that can flourish. But future generations equate to more lives. And, through the eyes of the anti-natalist, the more life there is, the more suffering. Therefore, for the anti-natalist, making good of the practice of envi-

¹⁴ Certain scenarios might present a challenge to this. For example, a "Big Plan" to stop reproduction—thus desirable to the anti-natalist—might already be in place, but it requires continued, normal living for a few more generations before it can be properly enacted. Such a scenario would seem to suggest the importance of continued procreation *in order to* achieve extinction. However, my arguments made here concern what is probable and reasonably thought to be playing out, hence the appeal to the empirical data in Sect. [Environmental Preservation](#). As such, I do not believe theoretical possibilities like the Big Plan undermine the arguments being made. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this example.

ronmental preservation enables procreation and the vicious cycle of existence and continued suffering.¹⁵

Therefore, for the anti-natalist, with their essential goal to reduce suffering overall, it is practical to dissociate from environmental preservation to prevent a more significant amount of suffering in the long term.¹⁶

Duty of Non-Procreation

The anti-natalist takes seriously the consequences of procreation, adhering to a duty not to procreate. Given this, should the anti-natalist support environmental preservation, then, although it is not the case that the duty is *directly* violated—as in, the anti-natalist procreates—it is, quite arguably, *indirectly* violated. This is because, in supporting environmental preservation, the anti-natalist, although not engaging in procreation, is advancing the enablement of procreation, which is thus in contest with adherence to their duty.

The conflict here is nuanced, so consider the following analogy. Suppose a rather lazy prison guard monitors a prisoner notorious for escaping. The prison guard is dutiful by *directly* ensuring that the prisoner does not escape. The doors are locked, the prisoner is monitored, and contraband is thwarted. However, the guard neglects the eroding window bars in the prisoner's cell. One day, the prisoner succeeds in tactfully escaping through the eroding bars. The prison guard is partly held responsible for the prisoner's escape, for though they did not authorise the prisoner's escape *directly*, their lack of action to secure the prisoner's cell enabled the prisoner to escape. Therefore, the guard failed in their duty *indirectly*.

Similarly, the anti-natalist fails in their duty, not by procreating but by supporting an endeavour that undoubtedly contests their values. That is, environmental preservation, as described in its practical form, furthers pro-natalist values: future generations are good and desirable and constitute the main reason why, empirically speaking, we engage in environmental preservation.

Indeed, Edith Brown Weiss goes so far as to argue that we have a duty towards future generations, stating, “As members of the present generation, we hold the earth in trust *for* future generations” (italics added). To Weiss, environmental preservation is thus an act of promoting “intergenerational equity”, where the present generations are “trustees”, ensuring that planetary conditions are, if not better, no worse for future generations (Weiss 1990, pp. 199–200). Therefore, if environmental preservation is tied to a duty towards future generations, then it demonstrates an additional reason to consider the anti-natalist's duty of non-procreation incompatible with environmental preservation. And even if one is disinclined to agree with Weiss that we have a duty towards future generations, the argument still stands.

¹⁵ Some anti-natalists might deny the (negative) utilitarian nature of this claim, but it is difficult to perceive how the entire framework of advocating anti-natalism and extinction could survive if it did not apply overall utility to suffering.

¹⁶ Moreover, to do so is in line with Benatar's final generation, which will, as a supererogatory act of the greater good, potentially endure tremendous suffering so that an even greater amount of suffering does not occur in the future.

Given all of this, it is challenging to see the light in which the anti-natalist can fulfil their duty of non-procreation whilst also practising environmental preservation.

Overcoming the Conflict

For the three reasons discussed, for the anti-natalist to support or pursue environmental preservation is to create a practical challenge to their own values. As such, it is a serious problem that the anti-natalist needs to address. For the anti-natalist to solve this problem, it seems that they should practise something other than environmental preservation.

So, the anti-natalist should take up a new outlook towards environmental preservation, one that essentially recognises it as practically in conflict with their anti-natalist values. With this, I shall discuss two possible environmental outlooks for the anti-natalist.

Outlook 1: Destruction

The active degradation and destruction of the environment would bring about extinction as soon as possible, perhaps within the youngest generation. *Destruction* might involve actively eliminating habitable areas and exponentially using the planet's resources. With this outlook, the goal of extinction aligns with the practice of destruction and exploitation of the environment, so there is no (1) issue of practicality.

However, such an outlook seems troubling to the other anti-natalist ideals. First, would *Destruction* lead to an increase or reduction in (2) suffering prior to extinction? There would likely be more suffering with the active destruction of habitable zones, particularly for humans and wildlife living in vulnerable areas. On the contrary, suffering might be reduced through the intense exploitation of resources instrumental to comfort, luxury, and increased life quality. As such, whatever damage and displacement would be caused would have to be offset by using non-renewable resources, for example. Furthermore, for the anti-natalist, the suffering would likely be significantly less than the suffering of prolonged procreation and existence.

Still, there is perhaps an incongruence in bearing compassion-based values whilst performing acts of severe destruction. That is, is it somewhat contradictory to be an anti-natalist who cares deeply about the suffering of a potential child whilst simultaneously causing environmental destruction that undoubtedly harms others? The anti-natalisms somewhat differ here, so to what extent *Destruction* leads to a contradiction depends on which anti-natalism the anti-natalist subscribes to. For example, Christopher Belshaw's anti-natalism (2012) might be less problematic since non-human animals—some victims of such destruction—are not persons and, therefore, matter less morally. Yet, Benatar's (2015, pp. 85–111) misanthropic argument—a component of his anti-natalism¹⁷—would explicitly generate an incongruence since

¹⁷ Other components include the asymmetry argument, which focuses on the asymmetry of the harms and benefits of existence (Benatar and Wasserman 2015, p. 23), and the quality-of-life argument, for which, he states, the quality “of even the best lives... is actually very poor” (Benatar 2017, p. 67). Both of these

environmental destruction and harm to non-human animals that humans cause are reasons for a presumptive duty of non-procreation.¹⁸ Thus, *Destruction* introduces a fresh moral dilemma: how to be a compassion-based anti-natalist whilst also causing severe environmental destruction. Therefore, the plausibility of *Destruction*, in this regard, depends on whether a better outlook—one that produces less suffering overall—can be provided.

Regarding (3) the duty of non-procreation, the anti-natalist would display greater adherence to it since, with *Destruction*, they are actively opposing the pro-natalism nested within environmental preservation. That is, the anti-natalist would not only not procreate but would also be *disenabling* procreation. Yet, recall that the duty not to procreate is not beset on others—the duty does not imply that the anti-natalist has moral permissibility to deny another’s purported right to procreative freedom (Benatar 2006, p. 102).¹⁹ Now, with *Destruction*, the destruction of the environment and habitable zones might be seen as an attempt at coercive anti-natalism—to force others into non-procreation by denying the necessary conditions of sustainable habitation and upbringing. As such, *Destruction* would arguably lead to a violation of the duty of non-procreation by extending it to others unjustifiably.

In conclusion, though *Destruction* supports the anti-natalist end goal of extinction, it does not solve all of the issues related to the discussed anti-natalist ideals, such that suffering might be more or less intense, severe destruction of the environment is more heartless than compassionate, and the duty of non-procreation is potentially forced on others. Thus, we must explore a second outlook to see if it is more viable than *Destruction*.

Outlook 2: Apathy

Apathy is to be “hands-off” towards preserving the environment and, given the damage we have already caused collectively, let nature run its course. In other words, let humanity do what it does and use the resources it likes, knowing that extinction is the aim, without being overbearing, coercive, or excessive. For example, where *Destruction* on the individual level might be, say, felling the village trees and destroying the local wildlife habitat, *Apathy* is not caring about leaving the lights on, taking liberties with supermarket plastic bags, and going on a Sunday drive if one feels like it.

Like *Destruction*, *Apathy* solves the issue of (1) practicality—they both move towards extinction by resisting environmental preservation and allowing degradation. Moreover, with *Apathy*, the route towards extinction would be slower as humanity would not degrade the environment at an intentionally exponential rate. As a

components are “philanthropic” arguments that lead to the conclusion that it is better not to come into existence.

¹⁸ At first glance, it might seem strange to label a “misanthropic” argument “compassion-based”. However, Benatar’s misanthropic argument does not invoke a hateful attitude towards humanity or an “anti-humanist” sentiment (Benatar 2015, p. 35); rather, it is that we should desist from propagating a species that causes an immense amount of suffering (even to itself), which is, according to Benatar, something humanity does.

¹⁹ Procreative liberty, broadly construed, refers to “the freedom to control one’s reproductive capacity” (Bognar 2019, p. 321).

result, (2) suffering might be less intense in the short term compared to *Destruction*. However, because of this, suffering would also be prolonged if there remains a relatively high chance of a limited number of future generations due to the slower rate of degradation. Still, unlike the act of environmental preservation, *Apathy* ultimately supports the anti-natalist's end goal by ensuring extinction at some time in the near future, lessening the greater amount of suffering that would come from preserving the environment for future generations indefinitely.²⁰

Regarding (3) the duty of non-procreation, the anti-natalist would be resisting environmental preservation and, therefore, its pro-natalist attachments. However, with *Apathy*, the anti-natalist would not be opposing the pro-natalist position as strongly as in *Destruction*. That is, where *Destruction* would bring about an uninhabitable environment, *Apathy* would also do so but at a much slower rate and, importantly, more passively. Would this still be enough to vindicate the anti-natalist from an indirect violation of their duty of non-procreation?

There are reasons to believe it would and would not be enough. For example, in relation to *Destruction*, *Apathy* is not as explicit with the indirect adherence to the duty as *Destruction*, which might give us reason to believe that *Apathy* is not enough to vindicate the anti-natalist from violating their duty. Yet, at the same time, *Apathy* arguably avoids the additional undesirable incongruity in *Destruction* that comes with the stronger adherence to the duty, which is that the anti-natalist would not contradict their compassion by proactively causing destruction. Therefore, *Apathy* presents a more balanced approach, even if its adherence to the duty is weaker than in *Destruction*.

Finally, is *Apathy* coercive anti-natalism? Like *Destruction*, *Apathy* also takes a negative attitude towards environmental preservation by not engaging in it. However, unlike *Destruction*, it is not forceful. This is because, unlike *Destruction*, it is implausible to suggest that, in *Apathy*, one is unjustifiably interfering with another's right to procreative freedom, with it more arguably being the case that one is simply desisting from the act—namely, environmental preservation—that supports continued procreation.

Perhaps, one might argue, *Apathy* is naturally disabling procreation, and so one is, in some sense, like *Destruction*, contriving anti-natalism. However, if this were the case, it could then be the case that the anti-natalist has no way to resist environmental preservation without it being a contrivance towards anti-natalism. Therefore, out of the two proposed outlooks, *Apathy* is the most suitable for the anti-natalist, providing an alternative to the inconsistencies that arise from being a proenvironmental anti-natalist whilst mitigating the adverse effects of the more extreme outlook of *Destruction*.

Now, it is entirely fair to suggest that there may be more outlooks the anti-natalist could take. One such possibility, which would challenge the arguments made thus far, is to suggest that the anti-natalist can support environmental preservation as the most effective way to adhere to their values. For example, recall the ambiguity regarding the best way to achieve extinction. Suppose that the best route to extinction that minimises suffering overall is to continue procreating for a while longer, perhaps another

²⁰ *Apathy* might also align with the ideal “phased extinction” (Benatar 2006, pp. 182–192).

one or two generations, thus requiring preserving the environment for a while to ensure that existing lives do not suffer. If this is possible, the anti-natalist can support environmental preservation without challenging their values.

Though this outlook has merit, it would seem to overlook the duty of non-procreation. Still, perhaps we could provide the benefit of the doubt and state that temporary non-adherence to the duty of non-procreation is necessary to achieve the strategic goal of extinction. However, regardless, the proenvironmental attitude in this outlook is on borrowed time: where we have been discussing environmental preservation as an endeavour for an *indefinite* number of future generations, in this outlook, environmental preservation is a temporary means to extinction. Indeed, such an outlook might be a variation of *Apathy*, one that simply stretches the timeline to extinction, but either way, the anti-natalist would not be practising environmental preservation indefinitely, instead only practising preservation as a short-term instrument to achieving extinction.

Finally, there is an ideal position we must discuss because, to this point, it might seem to have been overlooked: cannot the anti-natalist love the environment for reasons other than future generations and desiring and practising its preservation whilst advocating a position of anti-natalism? In other words, cannot our anti-natalist reject all of this and say, “I love the environment because of its intrinsic value; therefore, I will protect and preserve it whilst advocating a position of anti-natalism, and I am consistent in doing so!”? The anti-natalist can do so whilst being *theoretically* consistent with their values. However, the point here potentially overlooks the important connection made in Section III: the *practical* inseparability of future generations and environmental preservation. The position described here might be ideal for the anti-natalist and truly built on compassion, but it is just that: ideal. Its application in *the real world* does not produce an ideal scenario for the anti-natalist; instead, it challenges practical adherence to their own values. That is why, to restate, it does not matter the reasons why the anti-natalist cares about the environment, for their reasons have no material impact on the consequences of them supporting environmental preservation.

The Myth of *Apathy*

There is one final thing to discuss: from what I have argued, does it follow that the anti-natalist should *actually* practise *Apathy*?

There is good reason to suggest that the anti-natalist should not practise *Apathy*, despite there being a practical conflict in the anti-natalist *not* practising *Apathy*. The ambiguity is because of a further practical point: Anti-natalism is very much a minority view, and environmental preservation is what humanity practises collectively.²¹ Thus, for the relatively few anti-natalists to practise *Apathy* is to chip away at the inevitable process of environmental preservation, and chipping away shall, most likely, only cause greater suffering.

²¹ The closest we have come to anti-natalism in the real world is in cases of selective eugenics and temporary limited-procreation policies, such as China’s previous One-Child Policy.

To demonstrate this point further, consider the following: The anti-natalist is morally opposed to procreation, but to pursue its prohibition, even if pursued successfully, would be overall counter-productive to their ideals. For example, suppose an anti-natalist lawmaker, against the majority, somehow manages to pass a bill that prohibits reproduction and denies procreative liberty. The majority, still wishing to have children, would likely continue to do so. Pregnancy and birth-giving would occur without regulation, and as a result, the rate of pregnancy-related diseases, infections, and mortality would increase. Moreover, newborn children would not receive the post-natal support required to prevent further complications or death (Benatar 2006, pp. 105–106). In other words, procreation would happen even with the bill passed. As a consequence, suffering would be more tremendous than before if the bill passed.

In practising *Apathy*, the anti-natalist would likely add to the suffering in the present while not achieving their desired outcome. The anti-natalist's casual acts of degradation would likely be limited to local effects that would be heavily countered by the stronger endeavour of environmental preservation. Perhaps, one might argue, the anti-natalist should practise *Apathy* regardless—to rebel and fight against futility and adhere to their core values. There might be good times to engage in such futile defiance, particularly when pushing boulders. However, the choices made here shall fundamentally affect others, influencing whether more or less people suffer.

One final point suggests that it does not matter either way: Humans will be humans, and humans will procreate. I have argued that, theoretically and empirically, environmental preservation is driven by the desire for future generations, thus giving the anti-natalist a reason not to practise it. Yet, it could also be the case that, even if the environment was degraded beyond repair, most people would *still* try to procreate, thus implying the same outcome regardless of the anti-natalist's environmental attitude. This is a speculative point that has merit, particularly given the undeniable collective pro-natalist bias that is evident in the world. However, it also seems reasonable to speculate that, in an unliveable world, more people might see a good reason not to procreate, with those reasonable people less hostile to anti-natalist narratives that, for example, would demonstrate, *quite evidently* in such a scenario, a poor quality of life and a high amount of suffering for any future generations.

So, how might the anti-natalist act? In the context of this paper, the anti-natalist can only stick to their principles, which implies being compassionate towards minimising suffering and acting on their duty not to procreate. Thus, if environmental preservation is the consensus overall, the anti-natalist should focus on what they can change—the amount of suffering in the world and adherence to the duty of non-procreation. And this, quite ironically, might be to help create a better environment for inevitable future generations. However, should humanity have a change of heart and should support for anti-natalism grow exponentially, then the anti-natalist should raise the case for practising *Apathy*.

Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that, for most people, environmental preservation is, descriptively speaking, for future generations and is, thus, pro-natalist. This presented a challenge for the anti-natalist and their values. Therefore, I proposed a new environmental outlook for the anti-natalist: *Apathy*. And yet, given the way of the world, it was necessary to note the practical constraints of *Apathy*. This presented a further challenge for how the anti-natalist might best adhere to their values practically. The best adherence, I argued, might be to practise environmental preservation because, in focusing on doing what can be done in the real world, with extinction currently out of the question, environmental preservation might best adhere to the compassion-based anti-natalist's core value of reducing suffering.

“The anti-natalist”, so understood in this paper, is but one of many variants in a relatively young and emerging field. Each anti-natalist, with varying values, from subtle to wide-ranging, must look within to determine how best to address the practical challenge of environmental preservation and its pro-natalist attachments. Here, I hope to have brought to light the important link between environmentalism and some of the most prominent anti-natalist philosophers in analytical philosophy, and there is no doubt more to discuss.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interests The author declares no competing or conflicting interests.

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