

IS THE QUALITY OF LIFE OBJECTIVELY EVALUABLE ON NATURALISM?

WILLIAM F. VALLICELLA*

ABSTRACT This article examines one of the sources of David Benatar's anti-natalism. This is the view that 'all procreation is [morally] wrong.' (Benatar and Wasserman, 2015:12) One of its sources is the claim that each of our lives is objectively bad, hence bad whether we think so or not. The question I will pose is whether the constraints of metaphysical naturalism allow for an objective devaluation of human life sufficiently negative to justify anti-natalism. My thesis is that metaphysical naturalism does not have the resources to support such a negative evaluation. Metaphysical naturalism is the view that causal reality is exhausted by nature, the space-time system and its contents.

The gist of my argument is that the ideal standards relative to which our lives are supposed to be axiologically substandard cannot be merely subjective expressions of our desires and aversions; they must be (i) objectively binding standards that are (ii) objectively possible in the sense of concretely realizable. The realizability condition, however, cannot be satisfied on metaphysical naturalism; ergo, failure to meet these ideal standards cannot show that our lives are objectively bad.

KEYWORDS anti-natalism, procreation, naturalism, metaphysical naturalism, human life

Introduction

David Benatar (2017: 67) maintains that 'while some lives are better than others, none are (noncomparatively or objectively) good.' The claim is that each of our lives is objectively bad whether we think so or not, and no matter how good an individual's life is compared to that of others. This is a very strong thesis since it says more than that some human lives are objectively better than others. It says in addition that no human life is objectively good. Anyone who thinks otherwise is mistaken. And of course the thesis is meant to apply to all future lives. Here then is one of the sources of Benatar's (2015: 12) anti-natalism, according to which 'all procreation is wrong.' Procreation is wrong because no human life is good. What sorts of considerations could persuade us that no human life is objectively good?

* WILLIAM F. VALLICELLA is retired from teaching but not from philosophy. His publication list as well as links to his weblog and *Substack* are available at his PhilPeople page.

The Allegedly Poor Quality of Human Life

In *The Human Predicament* Benatar begins with the minor discomforts suffered by the healthy on a daily basis: thirst, hunger, distended bladders and bowels, heat and cold, weariness, and the usual run of aches and pains and annoyances. Now most of us consider these sorts of things inconsequential. But for Benatar (2017: 72) they are ‘not inconsequential’ because:

‘A blessed species that never experienced these discomforts would rightly note that if we take discomfort to be bad, then we should take the daily discomforts that humans experience more seriously than we do.’

This is a signature Benatar move: adopt some nonexistent, and seemingly impossible point of view, and then, from that point of view, issue a negative value judgment about what actually exists or some feature of what actually exists. It is this sort of move that I want to understand. It strikes me as questionable because in the example given there is no blessed species of animal relevantly similar to us that never experiences anything like the discomforts mentioned above, and it seems to me that such a species is nomologically impossible. If so, why should the fact that I can imagine a form of animal life free of everyday discomforts have any tendency to show that we should take more seriously, i.e., assess more negatively, the everyday discomforts of our actual animal lives?

This opening consideration brings me to my central question: Do the constraints of metaphysical naturalism allow for an objective devaluation of human life sufficiently negative to justify anti-natalism? One of these constraints is that all real possibility is nomological possibility. Now if the laws of nature do not allow human animals to be free of all the negatives mentioned by Benatar, then, I shall argue, there can be no objective axiological requirement that human lives be free of them. If so, failure to meet this requirement is no argument against the objective value of human lives. This sketch of a critique needs filling in. But first we need to review further features of our predicament that cast doubt on its quality.

Besides the minor discomforts of the healthy, a second class of negative states includes those experienced regularly though not daily or by all. These include itches, allergies, colds, fevers, infections, menstrual cramps, hot flashes, and so on. And then, beyond physical sensations there are the various frustrations and irritations of life: waiting in lines, having to put up with the bad behavior of others, traffic jams, boring work, loneliness, unrequited love, betrayals, jealousies, the list goes on. But even these things are not *that* bad. If we stop here we do not have much of an argument for the claim that the quality of *all* our lives, even the lives of the luckiest, is objectively bad. If the only bads were the ones so far mentioned, then most of us well-placed individuals would say, with justification, that they are outweighed by the goods.

When we get to the really horrific events and setbacks, however, Benatar's case gains in credibility. Cancer and the miseries attendant upon its treatment, clinical depression, rape and murder and the tortures of the gulag, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, and so much else bespeak the poor quality of human life. And do not think only of the present; consider also the horrors of the long past of humanity. Anyone who without blinkers surveys these miseries must admit that the quality of human life for many or most is very bad indeed. People who gush over how wonderful life is, what a gift it is, etc., should be made to visit insane asylums, prisons, torture chambers, and battlefields. And even if my life is good, how good can it be given that I am aware of the horrific fates of others and that it is possible that I end up where they are? But surely many are fortunate and escape the evils just enumerated and their like. So we still do not have a good argument from the quality of life for the extreme thesis that *every* human life, past, present, and future is such that the objectively bad outweighs the objectively good, and that therefore *all* procreation is morally wrong.

Is There More Bad Than Good for All?

Benatar (2017: 77) nevertheless insists that 'There is much more bad than good even for the luckiest humans.' So no matter how well-situated you are, your life is objectively more bad than good, and if you think otherwise, then your assessment of the quality of your life is biased and inaccurate. The first consideration Benatar (77) adduces is the empirical fact that 'the most intense pleasures are short-lived, whereas the worst pains can be much more enduring.' There is chronic pain but no chronic pleasure. In addition, the worst pains are worse than the best pleasures are good. (77) No one would trade an hour of the worst torture for an hour of the best pleasure. A third fact is that in a split second one can be severely injured, 'but the resultant suffering can last a lifetime.' (78) And then there is the long physical decline of the mortal coil, the frustration of desires and aspirations, and the constant striving and struggling that life involves to keep the whole thing going. We are effortlessly ignorant, 'but knowledge usually requires hard work.' (80) We value knowledge and longevity, but can realize these values only to a tiny extent. We are far closer to nescience than to omniscience. And of course we must all die. *Pace* Epicurus, it is not only the dying that is bad, but the being dead. (Ch. 5)

Why Do We Fail to Notice the Preponderance of the Bad?

In short, the bad preponderates and for all. Why do we fail to notice the heavy preponderance of the bad in human life? Because we have accommodated to the human condition. (82) 'Longevity, for example, is judged relative to the longest ac-

tual human lifespans and not relative to an ideal standard.’ (82) The point is that the brevity of human life, when measured against ‘an ideal standard’ is an objective reason for a negative evaluation of the quality of our lives. And similarly with respect to knowledge, understanding, and moral goodness. We measure ourselves against the human baseline and not against an ideal standard. Now some ideals are realizable: there is no nomological necessity that people starve to death in the numbers they do, for example, or that there be as much human suffering as there is. But my concern is not with realizable ideals, but with those whose realization is not nomologically possible. For example, it is not possible given the laws of nature and basic facts about the physical universe that human animals live indefinitely, suffer not at all, become omniscient, or achieve moral perfection.

Towards a Critique

At this juncture we need to ask again: How can anything be objectively devalued relative to an ideal standard that is not only unrealized but also impossible? Such an impossible standard is an axiological analog of an unperformable action. If I cannot do action A, then I cannot be morally obliged to do A and morally censured if I fail to do A. An agent cannot fairly be judged morally defective for failing to perform actions that it is impossible for him to perform. Analogously, if a thing fails to meet a standard that it is impossible for it to meet, then its failure to meet it is no ground for its objective devaluation. Or so I shall argue. Merely subjective complaints about such limitations as the brevity of life are understandable enough, but given the nomological impossibility of achieving extremely long lifespans, they remain merely subjective: it is no argument against the objective value of our short lives that they are short. Let me see if I can make this clear. I will be proposing some principles that are plausible but not self-evident. But I think that they are plausible enough to neutralize Benatar’s quality of life argument with its highly implausible conclusion that no human life is objectively good, and that therefore procreation is morally wrong. I play for a draw, not for a win. I aim to show only that Benatar’s case is not rationally compelling.

The Generalized Ought-Implies-Can Principle: What Ought to Be Must be Possible

Pain is far worse than pleasure is good. That this is so strikes us as a very bad natural arrangement. It would be better if this were not the case. One way to express this is by saying that animals ought to feel only as much pain as is necessary to warn them of bodily damage. Or humans ought to be wired up in such a way that ‘aversive

behavior [is] mediated by a rational faculty rather than a capacity to feel pain.' (Benatar 2105: 56) These are examples of an *ought-to-be* as opposed to an *ought-to-do*. [One finds the distinction in Hartmann (1967:247 ff.) and Scheler (1973:185). Every *ought-to-do* implies an *ought-to-be*, but not conversely. If we ought to treat people as ends and not as means, then our so treating them is a state of affairs that *ought-to-be*. But some *oughts-to-be* make no reference to free agents. For example, evolution ought to have brought forth only herbivores but no carnivores.] For they make no reference to any (finite) agent who is morally obliged to bring about the state of affairs and has the ability to do so. But what ought to be must be really possible. Or so I maintain. The principle may be expressed as follows:

GOC: Necessarily, if state of affairs S ought to be, then S is really possible and not merely imaginable or conceivable.

The principle covers both the *ought-to-do* and the non-agential *ought-to-be*. (The non-agential *ought-to-be* is a state of affairs that ought to be, but is not in the power of any finite agent to bring about.) If I ought to do A, then it must be really possible for A to be done in general and for me in particular to do it. And if there ought to be less animal pain in the world than there is, then it must be really possible that there be less animal pain than there is. By contraposition, if it is nomologically impossible that there be less animal pain than there is, then it is not the case that there ought to be less animal pain than there is. If so, then it cannot be *objectively* bad that there is as much as there is. In this case it is really possible that there be less animal pain than there is. But is it really possible that animals, including human animals, feel no pain whatsoever, and be so constituted that their aversive behavior is mediated rationally rather than via pain qualia, as Benatar suggests in the passage lately quoted? I return a negative answer: it is not nomologically possible given nature as she is with the (logically contingent) laws that govern her.

If what I desire is impossible, then it cannot be objectively bad that what I desire is not the case. For example, it cannot be that I eat and drink without ever producing waste products that need elimination by normal defecation and urination or in some artificial way. It is therefore not objectively bad that humans cannot eat without defecation, and anyone's desire that this be the case is merely subjective. GOC is not self-evident and requires argument. But first a bit about real possibility.

Real Possibility

By 'conceivable,' I mean thinkable without logical contradiction. By 'really possible,' I mean possible in reality and not merely conceivable by a finite mind, or imag-

inable by a finite mind, or logically possible, or epistemically possible (possible for all we know/believe). That which is possible for all we know/believe might be impossible in reality. And the logically possible merely satisfies a necessary condition for being really possible, namely, the law of non-contradiction. But satisfaction of this law is not itself a type of real possibility. If a state of affairs is *merely* logically possible, then it is not (really) possible at all: 'logical' in 'logical possibility' is an *alienans* adjective. One must not assume that for each different sense of 'possible' there is a corresponding mode of real possibility. That would be to conflate semantics with ontology. One principle governing real possibility is as follows:

CNP: Conceivability or imaginability by finite minds does not entail real possibility.

A second principle governing real possibility is this:

RPR: The really possible that is not actual is realizable.

What this implies is that if talking donkeys are really possible then it must be possible for them to become actual. A third principle to be discussed in greater detail in a moment is:

PGA: The being-possible of the really possible is grounded in the actual causal powers of actual agents.

This implies that if talking donkeys or philosophizing cats are really possible, then there must actually exist some agents or agents having the power, either individually or collectively, to cause them to exist.

So if we ought to live longer than we do, then it must be really possible that we do. If we ought to be more knowledgeable than we are, then it must be really possible for us to be. If we ought to be morally better than we are, or even morally perfect, these states of affairs must be really possible. If we ought to have the capacity 'to breathe not only in air but also in water,' (Benatar 2015: 57) then this too must be really possible.

Like Benatar I find it horrifying that some animals are eaten alive by other animals. Those of us who are sensitive are regularly struck by the horror and heartlessness of predation and the vast extent of unpalliated animal pain. Some of us who are theists feel our theism totter when we wonder how a loving and omniscient and all-powerful God could create such a charnel house of a world red in tooth and claw. We feel that such a world is evil and ought not be! It ought to be that all animals are herbivores, or zombies as philosophers use this term, or machines, which is what Descartes thought they were. But these oughts-to-be are normatively vacuous unless they are nomologically possible, unless the (logically contingent) laws of nature permit them. In the case of the usual run of aches, pains, maladies, and miseries to

which our mortal flesh is heir, I should think that many if not most of them are nomologically necessary if we are to have animal bodies at all. If this right, then it is no good argument in devaluation of the quality of our lives that we suffer in the ways Benatar reports in those cases where the sufferings are unavoidable given our animal constitutions.

A Putative Counterexample to GOC

Suppose a shipwrecked child washes up, all alone, on a deserted island with no provisions and there is no real possibility of rescue. Novak insists that the child's survival is a state of affairs that ought to be, a state of affairs that is objectively desirable, despite the survival's being really impossible. He concludes that my GOC principle is false. If a state of affairs ought to be, then it ought to be whether or not it is really possible. [I thank Dr. Lukáš Novák for the objection and for discussing an earlier draft with me. I am also indebted to Dr. Vlastimil Vohánka for comments and discussion and to David Benatar and the other participants in and organizers of the 2018 Prague Benatar conference, in particular, Dr. David Černý.]

The objection appears to prove too much. Every ought-to-do is an ought-to-be. For example, if I ought to feed my kids, then it ought to be the case that I feed my kids. But it is easy to imagine circumstances in which, through no fault of my own, I am unable to feed my kids. So it is not the case in those circumstances that I ought to feed my kids. Hence it is not the case, in those circumstances, that it ought to be that my kids be fed by me.

And similarly with the castaway child. If it is really impossible that the child survive, then it cannot be the case that it ought to be that the child survive. It cannot be the case that it is objectively desire-worthy that the child survive. This may sound counterintuitive. On the other hand, how could something impossible be objectively desire-worthy? It strikes me as incoherent that what is objectively worth wanting could be impossible. No state of affairs is such that it is both impossible and objectively desirable. Here is an argument.

Why Accept the Generalized Ought-Implies-Can Principle?

Suppose you deny the principle. Let S be a 'mere ought,' a state of affairs that is not, but ought to be. Then you are maintaining both that S ought to be, and that it is not the case that S is really possible. You are saying that S ought to be but cannot be. This is incoherent since it severs the link between oughtness and being (existence). What *ought* to be, ought *to be*.

OB. Necessarily, every ought is an ought *to be*.

But if the ought in question is a ‘mere ought,’ one that as a matter of contingent fact is not, then the only possible link between oughtness and existence is forged by real possibility. Therefore, GOC. Nothing ought to be unless it can be. It is incoherent to suppose that a state of affairs is both objectively desire-worthy and really impossible. Failure to appreciate this may be due to a confusion of subjective desirability with objective desire-worthiness.

Would it be Better if We were Amphibious?

As far as I know, Benatar does not speak of the ought-to-be. Instead he says things like the following: ‘it would certainly be better for humans if they could not drown – that is, if they had the capacity to breathe not only in air but also in water.’ (Benatar 2015: 57) Of course, he means objectively better, not just subjectively desirable. So clarity bids us supply a connecting principle: what is better than what is, ought to be instead of what is.

BOB. If unactual state of affairs *a's being G* is objectively better than actual state of affairs *a's being F*, then the former state of affairs ought to be instead of the latter.

Now I can run my argument. If it were better for us to be amphibious, then it ought to be that we be amphibious. (BOB). If it ought to be that we be amphibious, then it is really possible that we be. (GOC) Real possibility, given metaphysical naturalism, is nomological possibility. But our being amphibians is not nomologically possible, and therefore not really possible. Therefore, it is not the case that it ought to be that we be amphibious. And if it is not the case that we ought to be amphibious, then it is not objectively bad that we are not amphibious.

Metaphysical Possibility

But I hear an objection coming. Granted, it is not nomologically possible that we breathe both air and water, but it is metaphysically possible. Why should nomological possibility exhaust real possibility? Metaphysical possibility satisfies the Generalized Ought-Implies-Can principle.

The answer is given by (PGA) above: what is really possible or not is grounded in the actual causal powers and causal limitations of actual agents, and on metaphysical naturalism, the only agents are those found in the space-time world. No natural agent has the power to actualize a possible world in which humans breathe both air and water. God has the power but God cannot be invoked by the naturalist.

On metaphysical naturalism, the normative, if it is to be objective, can only be grounded in natural facts independent of our subjective attitudes. For on metaphysical naturalism, there can be no existing ideal standards for a species of living thing except actual perfect specimens. But any actual perfect specimen, whether leonine, human, whatever, will fall short of Benatar's demands. Even the best human specimen will be limited in longevity, knowledge, moral goodness, and the rest.

My point is that Benatar's ideal standards, without which he cannot evaluate as bad even the most fortunate of human lives, are merely excogitated or thought up by him and others: they can have no basis in physical or metaphysical reality given his naturalism. To fall short of a standard that is nowhere realized and has never been realized is not to fall short. But the point is stronger when put modally: to fall short of a standard impossible of realization is not to fall short. A lion without claws is a defective lion; he falls short of the standard, a standard that actually exists in non-defective lions. But a lion that cannot learn to speak Italian is not a defective lion since it is nomologically impossible that lions learn human languages.

One can imagine a cat that talks, and would not the world be better if we could converse with our pets? But neither imaginability nor conceivability entail real possibility, and if a state of affairs is not really possible, then no actual state of affairs can be devalued relative to it. It is not objectively bad that cats cannot talk. And it is not objectively bad, if human beings are just a highly-evolved species of land mammal, that they cannot know everything or live to be a thousand years old. Thus it is no argument against the quality of human life that it falls short of a standard that is nowhere realized but is merely dreamed up as an empty logical or metaphysical (broadly logical) possibility. On naturalism, metaphysical 'possibility' is not real possibility.

What Benatar is doing is a bit like complaining that turkeys do not fly around ready-roasted. That is no argument in denigration of the value of turkeys because it is nomologically impossible that turkeys fly around ready-roasted. Similarly, on naturalism, it is no argument against the value of human life that human longevity maxes out at about 122 years or that our science is closer to nescience than to omniscience.

The Problem Summarized as an Aporetic Tetrad

Criticisms aside, we ought to be grateful to Benatar for having contributed to our understanding of a deep and fascinating problem. As I see it, the underlying problem of the quality/value of life is that not all of the following propositions can be true even though each has a strong claim on our acceptance:

1. The quality of life is objectively bad for all and ought to be other than it is.

2. GOC: What ought to be is really possible.
3. If naturalism is true, then it is not really possible that human life be other than it is (in the salient respects that Benatar mentions including extreme longevity, moral perfection, etc., and excepting those things over which humans have control).
4. Naturalism is true: Causal reality is exhausted by space-time and its contents.

A fairly strong case can be made for each of the limbs of our tetrad. Although each is plausible, they cannot all be true. So one or more of the propositions must be rejected.

Three Solutions

I can think of three possible solutions to the tetrad. I will call them Platonic-Theistic, Anti-Platonic or Nietzschean, and Hybrid. Benatar's solution counts as hybrid.

The Platonic-Theistic Response

On Platonism broadly construed, the ideal standards relative to which our lives are sub-standard actually exist and are therefore possible. They do not exist in their full reality in this merely apparent world of time and change, but in a true world of timeless reality. Moral perfection, for example, exists as a Platonic Form, or in Christian Platonism as God. Platonic Forms are self-exemplifying. Each such Form not only exists, but exists as the prime instance of itself. Thus Moral Perfection is morally perfect. Thus it is not only possible, but actual in that it realizes itself as an instance of itself. Moral Perfection realizes itself as the paradigm case of moral perfection thereby serving as a standard for sublunary agents who participate more or less in Moral Perfection. This Platonic scheme allows us to say, coherently, that it is *objectively* the case that we humans fall short of moral perfection, and that it is objectively bad that we do so. It is *objectively* the case that we fall short because the standard actually exists: it is not a mere posit, or merely intentional object of a subjective desire. And it is *bad* that we fall short because the existing standard is an ideal or norm. Ideality and reality, normativity and facticity, coincide in the Platonic Form. [There are mundane examples of this coincidence of the normative and the factual. The standard meter bar, like a Platonic Form, is self-exemplifying: it is the prime instance of itself. The other meter bars either measure up to it or fall short of it. It is an actually existing, not a merely possible, standard in which fact and norm coincide. The same holds for a perfect specimen of a species, a perfect lion, for example. A perfect lion is an actual

lion relative to which defective lions are judged defective. In the perfect lion fact and norm coincide.]

Morally aware people appreciate that we ought to be much better than we are and perhaps even perfect. 'Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.' (Matthew 5:48) The morally aware are sensitive to their moral failings and know that they ought, categorially, not hypothetically, to embark on a course of self-improvement. But these normative statements cannot be objectively true unless Moral Perfection exists, up yonder in a *topos ouranos*. For it certainly does not exist here below. On this Platonic-Theistic scheme one solves the tetrad by denying (4). One rejects naturalism while retaining the other propositions. One argues from the first three limbs taken together to the negation of the fourth. On this approach one can agree with Benatar that the quality of natural life is objectively bad and ought to be other than it is. If so, then, *pace* Benatar, naturalism is false.

The Anti-Platonic or Nietzschean Response

Benatar maintains that human life is objectively bad for all regardless of what a particular human feels or thinks. A Nietzschean could solve the problem by rejecting (1), by denying that life is objectively bad. It cannot be objectively bad because the quality or value of life cannot be objectively evaluated at all, either positively or negatively. As Nietzsche writes in *The Twilight of the Idols*, 'The Problem of Socrates,'

Judgments, judgments of value, concerning life, for it or against it, can, in the end, never be true: they have value only as symptoms, they are worthy of consideration only as symptoms; in themselves such judgments are stupidities. . . the value of life cannot be estimated. (*Der Wert des Lebens nicht abgeschätzt werden kann.*) Not by the living, for they are an interested party, even a bone of contention, and not judges; not by the dead, for a different reason. For a philosopher to see a problem in the value of life is thus an objection to him, a question mark concerning his wisdom, an un-wisdom. Indeed? All these great wise men -- they were not only decadents but not wise at all? (Kaufmann, 1968: 474)

As I read Nietzsche, he is telling us that life is in every case an individual's life. There is no human life in general and no fact of the matter as to whether or not human life is objectively more bad than good. Judgments of the quality of life are all essentially subjective, reflecting as they do nothing more than the quality of the particular life that is doing the judging. The negative evaluations of the weak and decadent are merely symptoms of their weakness and decadence. And similarly for the positive evaluations of the strong and healthy. The affirmations of the robust are

not objectively true; they are merely expressions of their robustness. Life is the essentially subjective standard of all evaluation; as such it cannot be objectively evaluated. One cannot sensibly pronounce it either good or bad in general. There is nothing outside of it against which to measure it and find it wanting. As a philosophizing gastroenterologist might say, ‘The quality of life depends on the liver.’ Pessimism and anti-natalism are merely symptoms of physiological-cum-cultural decadence on the part of those who advance such doctrines.

The Hybrid or Mixed Response

On the third response to the problem one attempts to retain the ideal standards while rejecting their Platonic-theistic non-naturalistic foundation. This is what I see Benatar as doing. He rejects (2) and/or (3) while accepting (1) and (4). Life is objectively more bad than good even though causal reality is exhausted by the space-time system and its contents. And yet the ideal standards that we fail to satisfy and that render our lives objectively bad do so regardless of their being objectively nonexistent and impossible of realization.

Evaluating the Three Responses

The hybrid response of Benatar strikes me as incoherent. For either there is a fact of the matter concerning the value/quality of life or there is not. If there is a fact of the matter, then the standards of evaluation cannot be merely subjectively posited by us or mere expressions of what we like or dislike. There seem to be two possibilities. One is that the ideal standards objectively exist in nature. I am thinking of an approach like that of Philippa Foot (2001) according to which there are naturally existing norms. A perfect specimen of a species, a perfect lion say, serves as an objective standard relative to which defective specimens can be called imperfect. But this approach is of no use to Benatar. His standards are too stringent to exist objectively in nature. On the second possibility, the ideal standards exist beyond nature. But Benatar cannot countenance this either. On the other hand, if there is no fact of the matter as to the quality/value of life, then Benatar’s case is just a tissue of subjective complaints, expressive of world weariness, to which the appropriate response would be along the lines of Nietzsche’s ‘Become hard!’ [Cf. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Third Part, “On Old and New Tablets,” sec. 29, in Kaufmann, 326.]

I would say that if there is a genuine solution, if the tetrad is not an *aporia* in the strict sense, we must choose between the Platonic and the Nietzschean solutions, and given the untenability of Nietzsche’s doctrines, I choose the former. This allows

me to agree with Benatar that it is objectively the case that the bad preponderates, and for all, and that it does so despite our optimistic illusions and denials. Human life, viewed immanently, without recourse to God and afterlife is wretched for all and no amount of Pascalian *divertissement* can ultimately hide this fact from us. But precisely because this is *objectively* the case, naturalism is false: concrete reality is not exhausted by nature. There has to be an Unseen Order relative to which this world and we in it are objectively defective. Our lives are defective because this world is a fallen world, one in need of redemption.

How does this bear upon the question of anti-natalism? If Benatar is right and the quality of life is objectively bad for all, then anti-natalism follows. But if I am right, Benatar's view is inconsistent and does not support anti-natalism.

Conclusion

I agree with Benatar that the human condition is a predicament. We are in a state that is drastically unsatisfactory and from which there is no easy exit, and certainly no exit by individual or collective human effort. *Pace* Leon Trotsky, there is no 'progressive' solution to the human predicament. We are objectively wretched, all of us, and there is nothing we can do about it. *Pace* Nietzsche, this wretchedness is not a symptom of remediable weakness or decadence. It is an objective condition all of us are in. But precisely because it is objective, metaphysical naturalism is false. That is what I have argued. The crucial premise is GOC: what ought to be the case is really possible, where the really possible is not merely conceivable or imaginable or subjectively desirable, but possibly realized.

My central thesis, then, is that Benatar's position is logically inconsistent. One cannot maintain both that life is objectively bad for all and that naturalism is true. If nothing else, I have shown that Benatar's position is not rationally compelling and that therefore it can be rationally rejected.

I myself favor the Platonic-Theistic approach sketched above. But intellectual honesty forces me to admit that it too has its problems. So my fall-back position is that the tetrad above is simply insoluble by us, a genuine *aporia*.

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