

## What Is Birth Affirmation?

### The Meaning of Saying “Yes” to Having Been Born

Masahiro Morioka\*

#### Abstract

In this paper, the concept of birth affirmation is clarified in both the psychological dimension and the philosophical dimension. In the psychological dimension, we propose two interpretations: 1) Possible world interpretation: Even if I could imagine a possible world in which my ideal was realized or my grave sufferings were resolved, I would never think, at the bottom of my heart, that it would have been better to have been born to that possible world. 2) Anti-antinatalistic interpretation: I would never think, at the bottom of my heart, that it would have been better not to have been born. In the philosophical dimension, we propose the following interpretation: The comparison of betterness or worseness between the actual world and a possible world and between my having been born and my not having been born should be impossible. In the final part of this paper, the differences from other related concepts and frequently asked questions are discussed.

#### 1. Introduction

In this paper, I conduct a philosophical analysis on the concept of “birth affirmation.” Birth affirmation means the state of mind in which I can say from the bottom of my heart that I am truly glad that I have been born. In short, it means to be able to say “Yes” to my having been born. I believe that birth affirmation is one of the most promising ideas that can contribute to contemporary philosophical discussions on meaning in life. In my 2019 paper, I called this approach “an affirmation-based approach to meaning in life.”<sup>1</sup>

The concept of birth affirmation was first proposed in my Japanese paper “What is Life Studies?” published in 2007, and since then this concept has been deepened in my Japanese papers and books. In the following chapters, I illustrate a basic framework of my birth affirmation-based approach.

It was Friedrich Nietzsche who first introduced an affirmation-based approach to the philosophy of life in Western philosophy. Nietzsche writes in the Drunken Song of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that, “Did you ever say yes to one joy? O my friend, then you said yes to all woe too. All things are entangled, ensnared,

---

\* Professor, Human Sciences, Waseda University, 2-579-15 Mikajima, Tokorozawa, Saitama, 359-1192 Japan. Email: <http://www.lifestudies.org/feedback.html>

<sup>1</sup> Morioka (2019).

enamored, —.”<sup>2</sup> This “saying yes” (*Ja-sagen* in German) to one’s life is considered a primordial concept that helped grow our idea of birth affirmation. (However, as we will see in the final part of this paper, Nietzsche’s *Ja-sagen* has a significant problem we should never overlook.) We can also find a similar concept in the philosophy of Viktor Frankl. The original title of his masterpiece *Man’s Search for Meaning* is “...trozdem Ja zum Leben sagen,” which can be translated as “*Nevertheless Say(ing) Yes to One’s Life.*” We can see Nietzsche’s *Ja-sagen* in Frankl’s book title. According to Frankl, we are being questioned by life, daily and hourly, about the meaning of our own life. We have a responsibility to answer that question, and “saying yes to one’s life” can be the most simple and fundamental answer to that question.<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche and Frankl are two pioneers of affirmation-based approaches to meaning in life. In current academic discussions on philosophical approaches to meaning in life, we rarely encounter this type of thinking, but I believe it is time to reevaluate the importance of affirmation-based approaches in this field.

Another philosophical thought we must pay special attention to is “antinatalism,” which argues that it is better never to have been born, and hence that we should not give birth to children. Antinatalistic thoughts can be found in ancient Greek literature, ancient Buddhism, and modern thinkers such as Schopenhauer and Cioran. Today’s most enthusiastic advocator of antinatalism is David Benatar. He argues that the proposition “coming into existence is always a harm” is correct, and hence his argument is superior to any other rival theories.<sup>4</sup> I believe that his argument in Chapter Two of his book *Better Never to Have Been* is incorrect, but I do not discuss it here, leaving it to my future discussions.

As I have noted, antinatalism consists of two negations. The first is “birth negation,” which argues that it is better never to have been born. The second is “procreation negation,” which argues that we should not give birth to children. The logical consequence of the second thesis is the extinction of the human race. Birth affirmation is roughly considered the opposite concept of the first thesis of antinatalism, “birth negation.” Please note that birth affirmation does not necessarily lead to the affirmation of procreation. Birth affirmation is saying “Yes” to my own coming into existence, but procreation affirmation is saying “Yes” to

---

<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche (2005), p.278.

<sup>3</sup> I borrowed this sentence from Morioka (2019), p.90.

<sup>4</sup> Benatar (2006). See also Coates (2014), Lochmanová ed. (2020), and Morioka (2021) for the history of antinatalistic thought.

the coming into existence of my baby or someone else's baby. These two are completely different things. In this paper, I use the term "antinatalism," paying special attention to its first aspect, "birth negation," and leave the discussion of its second aspect, "procreation negation," to another paper of mine.<sup>5</sup>

Honestly speaking, I have the thought of "birth negation" on a deep layer of my mind. However, I want to create a philosophy of birth affirmation and overcome my own birth negation, because I have already been born, and hence it is impossible for me to go back to the world where I had not been born. Therefore, the attempt of creating a philosophy of birth affirmation is aimed, first of all, at the resolution of my own personal existential problem. In this sense, birth affirmation should be, basically, the affirmation of "my" having been born.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, I strongly believe that my philosophical struggle over this subject will be helpful to other people who have suffered from similar inner philosophical problems to mine.

## **2. The Psychological Dimension of Birth Affirmation**

It is hard to clarify what exactly the affirmation of my having been born means. The sentence "I am truly glad that I have been born" sounds clear at first sight, but once scrutinizing it, we soon realize that the exact meaning of the sentence is unclear. The same can be said about the phrase "saying yes to my having been born." What does it mean to "say yes" to my birth in the situation that I have already been born to this world? You might think that birth affirmation is the claim that having been born is better than not having been born, but this is wrong. In my view, birth affirmation is not a claim that is justified by a comparison between two situations. I want to take a close look at this point.

Birth affirmation has two dimensions: the psychological dimension and the philosophical dimension. The psychological dimension of birth affirmation is the dimension in which psychologically affirmative reactions to my having been born arise. The philosophical dimension of birth affirmation is the dimension in which a psychological affirmation or negation of my having been born is examined in terms of philosophy and metaphysics.

---

<sup>5</sup> I presented this discussion in Morioka (2021).

<sup>6</sup> In this paper, I use the word "my"; however, strictly speaking, "my" does not mean the author Morioka. I should use the words "the solipsistic being" and say that "the affirmation of the solipsistic being's having been born." As for the concept of solipsistic being, see Morioka (2019).

I want to discuss the psychological dimension firstly in this chapter and leave the discussion of the philosophical dimension to the next chapter. The psychological dimension of birth affirmation can be illustrated as two types of interpretations described below:

1) *Possible world interpretation*

Even if I could imagine a possible world in which my ideal was realized or my grave sufferings were resolved, I would never think, at the bottom of my heart, that it would have been better to have been born to that possible world.

2) *Anti-antinatalistic interpretation*

I would never think, at the bottom of my heart, that it would have been better not to have been born.

Let us examine the possible world interpretation first. This interpretation argues that birth affirmation means I would never wish, at the bottom of my heart, to have been born to a possible world where my problems have been resolved, even if I could vividly imagine such a possible world. For example, imagine the situation in which I had a severe physical disability, but being supported by sincere caregivers, supporters, and friends, I felt I was truly happy. In such a case, even if I could imagine a possible world where my physical disability was completely cured, it would be possible that I did not wish, from the bottom of my heart, to have been born to that possible world. This should be called birth affirmation, because in this case I can believe that the fact that I have been born to this actual world does not need to be negated at all, and as a result, my birth to this actual world is strongly affirmed. Of course, this is no more than a rough sketch of the possible world interpretation of birth affirmation. There are a lot of things to be discussed even in this single case.

I would like to add one thing here. The possible world interpretation resembles Nietzsche's concept of *amor fati*. Nietzsche talks about the concept of *amor fati* in *Ecce Homo* as follows: "My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity."<sup>7</sup> This means that people who live in the state of *amor fati*

---

<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche (1967, 2000), p.714. The original German is "Meine Formel für die Größe am Menschen ist *amor fati*: dass man Nichts anders haben will, vorwärts nicht, rückwärts nicht, in alle Ewigkeit nicht."

never wish this world be replaced by any other possible worlds. The possible world interpretation is an articulated version of Nietzsche's *amor fati*. The possible world interpretation claims that even if I could imagine *better* possible worlds than the actual one, I would never wish, from the bottom of my heart, to have been born to those *better* worlds. In the psychological dimension, we sometimes imagine *better* possible worlds and compare them with this actual world. Even in such a case, a person living in the state of birth affirmation never thinks that this world should have been one of such *better* worlds.<sup>8</sup> (In the philosophical dimension, the situation becomes totally different. I will discuss it later.)

Let us consider, next, the anti-antinatalistic interpretation. Antinatalists, such as Schopenhauer and David Benatar, argue that if we compare one's having been born and one's not having been born, one's not having been born should be better than one's having been born. They argue that this proposition is universally applied to any people's any births. It is true that there are many people who have this kind of worldview and lament their own coming into this world. Looking back on myself, sometimes I, too, am inclined to think that my not having been born would have been better, especially when thinking about what I have done to my loved ones and friends. This shows that this kind of antinatalism (birth negation) is nestled even inside me.

However, since it is impossible to go back to my birth and erase it from this world, what I should do is, I believe, not cling to an unrealizable alternative and lament it, but try to find a way of dismantling the thought of "better never to have been" that has been inscribed on a deep layer of my mind. This dismantling of inner birth negation should open up the possibility to say "Yes" to my having been born. This is the anti-antinatalistic interpretation of birth affirmation.

When I reach either of the above two psychological states, or the combination of them, I can say I am in a state of birth affirmation in the psychological dimension. It should be noted that in order to reach a state of birth affirmation, I do not need to affirm every event that occurred in my life. I can affirm my life *as a whole*, even if there were events that cannot be affirmed in my life.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Please note that there is no inconsistency in the situation that this person, who is in a state of birth affirmation, tries to improve her current life conditions in the future.

<sup>9</sup> Since there is not enough space to discuss this topic here, I would advise those who are interested in this topic to see Morioka (2019).

### 3. The Philosophical Dimension of Birth Affirmation

Let us move on to the philosophical dimension of birth affirmation.

The philosophical dimension of birth affirmation can be illustrated as follows:

1) *Possible world interpretation*

The comparison of betterness or worseness between a possible world and the actual world should be impossible.

2) *Anti-antinatalistic interpretation*

The comparison of betterness or worseness between my having been born and my not having been born should be impossible.

In the psychological dimension, I can imagine other possible worlds and compare them with this actual world, and I can wish I had been born to another world, or I can wish I had never been born to any possible worlds at all. In the psychological dimension, this way of thinking makes sense, but in the philosophical dimension, it causes serious problems.

Let us take a close look at the possible world interpretation. At first sight, it seems possible to compare this actual world and another possible world and to judge which world is better than the other. However, I believe that the comparison of betterness or worseness between the actual world and a possible world cannot be made correctly.

Imagine the pilots of the Enola Gay, who were about to drop the atomic bomb onto Hiroshima. In this moment, they could imagine two possible worlds. One was the world in which about 100,000 residents were to be killed instantly. The other was the world in which the pilots did not press the button and a mass killing was avoided. We can correctly compare the betterness or worseness between these two possible worlds, because these two possible worlds are on the same level in their modality. We can say the latter possible world is better than the former, or vice versa.

Next, imagine a civilian of Hiroshima who was actually watching the burning town and a pile of charred bodies in every corner of the city just after the dropping of the atomic bomb. In this case, it is impossible to correctly compare the betterness or worseness between the two worlds: the actual world that was unfolding before this person's eyes and the possible world in which such devastation never occurred, the peaceful world of Hiroshima at 8:15 a.m., August

6, 1945.

The former world is the actual world that the person actually experiences. The latter world is a possible world that the person can only imagine amid the actual devastation surrounding her. These two worlds are situated on completely different levels in their modality. Hence, it is impossible to correctly compare the betterness or worseness between them. The reason why I think so is that while the actual world that I live in is a world of constant and dynamic change, in other words, a world of becoming (*Werden*), possible worlds are worlds that I just have imagined or posited, which are not under the influence of becoming and dynamic change. The world of actual becoming cannot be compared with any other imagined world in its betterness or worseness. This kind of understanding of modality strongly contradicts the modal realism of David Lewis, which insists that every possible world has its own actuality as an indexical. I do not go deeper into the discussion of modal theories here, but we must pay attention to the fact that the discussion of birth affirmation needs more clarification from the perspective of possible world semantics.<sup>10</sup>

Let us move on to the anti-antinatalistic interpretation.

This interpretation argues that the comparison of betterness or worseness between my having been born and my not having been born is impossible. There are two reasons for that. One is the same reason as I examined in the possible world interpretation, which argues that it is impossible to compare the betterness or worseness between the actual world and a possible world. If the world in which I have never been born can be considered an example of possible worlds, the same logic we have just examined above should also be applied to this case.

The second reason is unique to the anti-antinatalistic interpretation, which argues that a comparison between them is impossible because the state of my not having been born cannot be correctly posited. Please note that my point is not that the state of my non-existence cannot be correctly posited. By using counterfactual conditionals, I can talk about the world in which I do not exist, and I can also talk about the betterness or worseness of that counterfactual world. My point is that “my non-existence” and “my not having been born” mean completely different states of affairs. The former means the situation in which I do not exist in the universe. This is a proposition concerning my *existence*. On the contrary, the latter means the situation in which I have not come into being in the universe.

---

<sup>10</sup> I have done some of the discussions in Morioka (2020).

This is a proposition concerning my *becoming*. These two are completely different. It is very important to keep this in mind when discussing this topic.

In the case of my non-existence, I can talk about what the world would be like if I did not exist at all. However, in the case of my not having been born, I cannot correctly posit the world in which I have not been born. The reason is that if I try to imagine the world in which I have not been born, I have to imagine the world in which the “I” that is now trying to imagine that world does not exist, because that “I” should not have been born here. In the case of my non-existence, I can stand in a safe zone located outside of the question “Is my non-existence better than my existence?” and think about the question as a bystander.

However, in the case of my not having been born, I cannot remain standing in such a bystander’s position. Positing the situation of “my not having been born” forces me to actually go back to my birth and annihilate my coming into this world. That is because the negation of the static “my existence” does not affect the “I” that is thinking about this negation; however, the negation of the dynamic “my becoming” reaches the “I” that is thinking about this negation, because this actual “I” is a direct outcome of that becoming.

In other words, my existence can be counter-factualized, but my becoming cannot be counter-factualized. Positing the situation of “my not having been born” forces me to actually go back to my birth and annihilate my coming into this world, but this is impossible. Hence, I cannot successfully posit the situation of “my not having been born,” and therefore, it is impossible to compare the betterness or worseness between my having been born and my not having been born. As I mentioned before, this is a corollary of the traditional philosophical problem of “being” and “becoming,” which has been discussed from Plato to Nietzsche and Heidegger. I would like to call this problem — namely, the problem that my non-existence can be posited but my not having been born cannot be posited — “the problem of my non-existence and my non-becoming.”

We can also illustrate the difference between the impossibility of comparison in the possible world interpretation and the impossibility of comparison in the anti-antinatalistic interpretation as follows. In the possible world interpretation, the subject “I” exists in both worlds: actually in the actual world and hypothetically in a possible world. On the other hand, in the anti-antinatalistic interpretation, while the subject “I” exists in the actual world, the hypothetical world where I have not been born cannot be posited, so we never know whether the subject “I” exists there. Hence, we can say that the natures of the two



interpretations are completely different in their impossibility of comparison.

This argument also needs further elaboration and clarification, but I believe that I have succeeded in showing the basic framework of the concept of “birth affirmation” by our discussions so far. Putting together the discussions of the psychological dimension of birth affirmation and the philosophical dimension of birth affirmation, we can conclude the following:

#### The psychological dimension of birth affirmation

1) *Possible world interpretation*: Even if I could imagine a possible world in which my ideal was realized or my grave sufferings were resolved, I would never think, at the bottom of my heart, that it would have been better to have been born to that possible world.

2) *Anti-antinatalistic interpretation*: I would never think, at the bottom of my heart, that it would have been better not to have been born.

#### The philosophical dimension of birth affirmation

The comparison of betterness or worseness between the actual world and a possible world and between my having been born and my not having been born should be impossible.

Before our discussion in this paper, it was difficult to give a clear answer to the question “What does it mean to say ‘yes’ to my having been born?” Now, I believe, we can show a plausible answer to it.

Let us turn our attention to the relationship between the above two dimensions. In the philosophical dimension, it is impossible to compare betterness or worseness between “the actual world and a possible world” and between “my having been born and my not having been born.” However, sometimes I am inclined to compare them in the psychological dimension and negate the worth of my having been born to a life I am actually living. When falling into such a thought, what I should do first is go to the philosophical dimension and make sure that such a comparison does not make sense philosophically, and then come back again to the psychological dimension.

What I should do next is to pursue the possibility of thinking that “Even if I am inclined to think that it was better to have been born to another possible world, or better never to have been born, I should never cling to such an unrealizable alternative and lament it but try to find a way of dismantling that idea.” If this

kind of positive and mutually supportive combination occurs between two dimensions, it will certainly serve as a solid foundation for our pursuit of birth affirmation.

Considering all the above, we can say the following. In the psychological dimension, the first step of birth affirmation is to *become free from* the idea that I wish I had been born to a certain possible world, or that I wish I had never been born. In the philosophical dimension, the first step of birth affirmation is to *know* that the comparison of betterness or worseness between the actual world and a possible world and between my having been born and my not having been born is impossible.

What we have further to consider is whether this first step is sufficient to fully establish the concept of birth affirmation, or whether something more affirmative should be added for it to be the true basis of birth affirmation. This is a question we will have to tackle in a future discussion.

Camil Golub discusses an important issue concerning our affirmative attitudes to our actual lives in his 2019 paper “Personal Value, Biographical Identity, and Retrospective Attitudes.” He writes, “Sometimes, however, we judge that certain lives would have been better for us, all things considered, and yet do not regret having missed out on those lives. Indeed, we affirm our actual lives when comparing them to those better alternatives.”<sup>11</sup> This is similar to what we have called the “possible world interpretation in the psychological dimension of birth affirmation.” Golub calls it the “conservative bias” and argues that such an affirmation is rationally explicable.

Golub proposes two concepts: “personal value” and “biographical identity.” Personal value means “our attachments to certain relationships, projects, and other valuable things in our past.”<sup>12</sup> Golub argues that such attachments can lead us to a state of affirmation of our actual lives. Biographical identity means an identity that includes certain valuable things in our past that have become “part of who we are” as essential ingredients of our current self.<sup>13</sup> He argues that affirming our biological identity can also lead us to reasonably affirm our actual lives even if they are not better than imagined, preferable hypothetical lives.

Golub’s argument successfully demonstrates how the affirmation of one’s actual life can become a reasonable judgement even if it is not considered a better

---

<sup>11</sup> Golub (2019), p.72.

<sup>12</sup> Golub (2019), p.79.

<sup>13</sup> Golub (2019), p.82.

choice. His argument may also be applied to our possible world interpretation in the psychological dimension of birth affirmation. However, there are two things that concern me. The first is that he does not clearly define the concepts of “affirmation” and “regret” in his argument. The second is that he does not fully discuss the importance of the philosophical dimension of birth affirmation, which I have extensively conducted in this chapter.<sup>14</sup> I think a lot of things remain undiscussed surrounding this topic despite Golub’s valuable achievement.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. Comparison with Other Related Concepts

There are some concepts similar to birth affirmation. Here I want to take up three concepts — namely, “self-affirmation,” “the affirmation of existence,” and “the affirmation of life” — and further clarify what exactly birth affirmation means in contrast with them.

Self-affirmation means to say “Yes” to oneself. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines self-affirmation as “the act of affirming one’s own worthiness and value as an individual for beneficial effect.”<sup>16</sup> In social psychology, self-affirmation is considered a source of resilience when one’s integrity is threatened. Claude M. Steele demonstrated in his experiment that when people’s integrity was threatened, they “eliminated the effect of specific self-threats by affirming central, valued aspects of the self.”<sup>17</sup> This is one of the important aspects of the theory of self-affirmation in social psychology.

The difference between self-affirmation and birth affirmation is clear. While self-affirmation is to say “Yes” to oneself, birth affirmation is to say “Yes” to one’s having been born. The former means the affirmation of one’s worthiness, value, or integrity in cases where there are threats from the outside. The latter means the affirmation of the state of affairs that I have been born to this world. This means that birth affirmation is not necessarily the affirmation of the worthiness or value of one’s self. We can also say that birth affirmation is not necessarily equal to the concept of self-esteem.

The affirmation of existence is a term that has been used in Japanese disability

---

<sup>14</sup> He says that Velleman’s view is “far too radical,” but I do not necessarily think so. Golub (2019), p.77.

<sup>15</sup> I would like to thank Ikuro Suzuki for his discussion of Golub’s paper in a meeting of Hokkaido University’s research group on meaning in life held in February 2021.

<sup>16</sup> “Self-affirmation” in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*.

<sup>17</sup> Steele (1988), p.289.

ethics. Since the 1970s, Japanese disability activists have criticized our mainstream society as having the eugenic thought that disabled people should never exist in a society. Disability activists argued that no matter how physically disabled, weak, unproductive, and burdensome to their family, disabled people's existence should be protected, highly respected, and affirmed. They call this idea the affirmation of existence. Based on this idea, they have criticized the killing of disabled children, selective abortion, and new eugenics. I am not sure how this term has been used in the English-speaking world, but I believe that readers can easily grasp the central meaning of this term that has been used in the Japanese disabled people's movement.<sup>18</sup>

The concept of the affirmation of existence is very close to birth affirmation. Their goals are almost the same. The difference is while the former mainly functions as a concept for resisting social pressure from the majority of people in our society, the latter does not usually function as such. Birth affirmation can work as an important life question for both the minority and the majority.

The affirmation of life generally means the affirmation of our being alive itself, or the affirmation of our way of being as life, which consists of such aspects as birth, growth, giving birth, aging, and death. This is the affirmation of the fact that we are not in the realm of death and that we are not just inorganic matter. Here I would like to focus on Nietzsche's concept of affirmation. He writes in *The Will to Power* as follows:

If we affirm one single moment, we thus affirm not only ourselves but all existence. For nothing is self-sufficient, neither in us ourselves nor in things; and if our soul has trembled with happiness and sounded like a harp string just once, all eternity was needed to produce this one event—and in this single moment of affirmation all eternity was called good, redeemed, justified, and affirmed.<sup>19</sup>

This is considered one of the most extreme affirmations of life, which extends towards all existence in the universe. Nietzsche says that if we affirm one single moment of our life, it necessarily means that we are affirming our entire life. This is because in order for us to be able to have one single moment of affirmation, all the events in our life that have prepared that moment were needed for it to happen;

---

<sup>18</sup> See Morioka (2001), Chapter 6; and Morioka (2015a).

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche (1967), pp. 532-533, no.1032.

therefore, all of them should be justified and affirmed as valuable supportive factors that have prepared that single moment. This is a basic idea underlying Nietzsche's concept of *eternal recurrence*.

The Nietzschean affirmation of life looks similar to our birth affirmation, but there are fundamental differences between the two. Firstly, Nietzsche does not specifically talk about the affirmation of my having been born. What he talks about is a dynamic relationship between the affirmation of one's single life event and the affirmation of one's entire life. The affirmation of one's coming into being is not situated in the center of his philosophy of life. Secondly, in his philosophy of *eternal recurrence*, all the past events that have prepared a current affirmative moment should be wished or desired to happen again in the future time and time again eternally, but this way of thinking is absurd and considered morally wrong. We should not wish that misery and devastation, such as the droppings of atomic bombs and the terrorist attacks on the Twin Tower Buildings, will happen again in the future, even if those events have remotely prepared the moment of bliss and happiness I am experiencing here and now. Birth affirmation cannot support this kind of thinking.

## **5. Conclusion**

In this paper, I have tried to clarify the concept of birth affirmation from the viewpoint of philosophy and metaphysics. I am now developing a philosophical framework called "the philosophy of birth affirmation" based on the concept of birth affirmation and other related ideas. I believe that this philosophy will be able to become one of the most promising approaches to difficult problems concerning meaning in life.

A former version of this paper was presented online as a keynote speech at the Third International Conference on Philosophy and Meaning in Life, held at the University of Birmingham on July 23, 2020. During and after the conference, I received valuable comments and suggestions from participants. I would like to offer brief replies to some of them here.

The first question was why I added the phrase "from the bottom of my heart" to the definition of birth affirmation. The point is what role the phrase "from the bottom of my heart" plays in the sentence "to think from the bottom of my heart that I am truly glad that I have been born." My answer is that by adding that phrase, the sentence can become a truly existential one. I want to place special emphasis

on this point because for me the question of birth affirmation is not just puzzling. I am talking about my own existential value judgment about my own having been born. This is not a question of birth affirmation of an imaginary person. The topic here is my own birth affirmation. And what is also questioned here is *your* affirmation, dear reader, the affirmation of *your* own having been born. In my 2019 paper, I called this dimension a “solipsistic layer” in the pursuit of meaning in life. The phrase “from the bottom of my heart” signifies this layer.

The second question was whether I can give affirmation to someone else’s birth. For example, is it possible for parents to give birth affirmation to their baby by saying “I am truly glad that you have been born”? Contrary to readers’ expectation, I must say that this is not birth affirmation, because birth affirmation must be, by definition, the affirmation of my own birth, not the affirmation of someone else’s birth. Of course, it is conceivable that one of the parents says to their baby, “I am truly glad that you have been born,” and I believe that this must be a moving scene; however, it is not the birth affirmation we have discussed. It might be called “procreation affirmation.” It is important to know that the situation in which you say to yourself that “I am truly glad that I have been born” and the situation in which I say to you that “I am truly glad that you have been born” are different.

The third question concerned the optimistic nature of birth affirmation; that is to say, the concept of birth affirmation looks as if it shed light solely on the positive side of one’s life. To answer this question, I would like to talk about birth affirmation in Morioka’s case. Talking of my personal case, I have never reached a state of birth affirmation. Not only that, I sometimes sink deeply into the thought that I wish I had never been born to this world. I have been in the midst of birth negation since I grew up, and I have not escaped completely from this mental state. This is why I have made philosophical investigations into birth affirmation for such a long time. The attempt to create a philosophy of birth affirmation has both positive and negative sides. The concept of birth affirmation is not necessarily colored by an optimistic view of life.

The fourth question was as follows: “Is a life of birth affirmation better than that of birth negation?” I have a solid answer to this question. A life of birth affirmation is not better or worse than that of birth negation because these two lives cannot be compared in terms of their betterness or worseness, which I argued in Chapter Three of this paper. I may live and die a life of birth affirmation, or I may live and die a life of birth negation. If I live and die a life of birth affirmation,

it is the one and only actual life of mine, and it cannot be compared with any other possible lives of birth negation in their betterness or worseness. The same is true of my life of birth negation.

The fifth question was about the timing of my achieving a state of birth affirmation. I am sometimes asked whether I am imagining the moment just before my death as the timing I say to myself that I am truly glad that I have been born. In the past, I was thinking like that,<sup>20</sup> but I do not think so now. I think I can reach a state of birth affirmation any time in my life. It might be the last day of my life, some day in the future, or just here and now. Then, what happens after I reach such a state? A state of birth affirmation might continue for a long period of time, but it might soon disappear. Birth affirmation is not like eternal life or *nirvana*. It is not certain whether I can keep it forever after I reach such a state. The problem of timing of birth affirmation has a close relationship with the controversy on the part-life and the whole-life in the philosophy of life's meaning.<sup>21</sup>

The sixth question was whether the philosophy of birth affirmation argues that every one of us should reach a state of birth affirmation. This is a misunderstanding frequently asked to me when I talk about birth affirmation. I never think that all of us should *reach* a state of birth affirmation, or even that all of us should *aim* to reach there. Birth affirmation is a concept that is needed for people who wish to be liberated from the thought of birth negation lurking inside them. There must be many people who do not need that concept in the pursuit of their life goals.

The last question was whether birth affirmation is a subjective concept or an objective concept. In the field of the philosophy of life's meaning, there has been a huge controversy on whether meaning in life is subjective or objective. Regarding this problem, I have proposed the concept of the "heart of meaning in life" and claimed that there is a solipsistic layer in meaning in life, which cannot be compared with anything whatsoever.<sup>22</sup> I would like to answer in the same way to the question of birth affirmation. Birth affirmation is not subjective nor objective, but solipsistic. I will clarify this point in my future papers on birth affirmation.

I have illustrated a brief outline of the concept of birth affirmation. Although

---

<sup>20</sup> For example, in my 2007 paper.

<sup>21</sup> See Metz (2013), pp.37-58.

<sup>22</sup> See Morioka (2015b) and Morioka (2019).

what I have discussed in this paper is just an incomplete summary of the whole picture and I have yet to clarify its details in my future research, I believe that the concept of birth affirmation will be able to break new ground in the field of the philosophy of life's meaning.

\* I would like to express my gratitude to those who asked me valuable questions after my presentation at the Third International Conference on Philosophy and Meaning in Life held online at the University of Birmingham on July 23, 2020.

\* This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI grant nos. 20K00042, 17H00828, and 20H01175. This work is an outcome of Waseda University's Special Research Projects 2020C-374 and the C Project of Advanced Research Center for Human Sciences, Waseda University.

## References

Benatar, David (2006). *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence*. Oxford University Press.

Coates, Ken (2014). *Anti-Natalism: Rejectionist Philosophy from Buddhism to Bentar*. First Edition Design Publishing.

Frankl, Viktor E. (2011). *Man's Search for Meaning*. Rider.

Golub, Camil (2019). "Personal Value, Biographical Identity, and Retrospective Attitudes." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 97(1):72-85.

Lochmanová, Kateřina (ed.) (2020). *History of Antinatalism: How Philosophy Has Challenged the Question of Procreation*. Amazon Services International.

Metz, Thaddeus (2013). *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study*. Oxford University Press.

Morioka, Masahiro (2001). 生命学には何ができるか (*Life Studies Approaches to Bioethics*). 勁草書房.

Morioka, Masahiro (2007). "生命学とは何か (What is Life Studies?)." 現代文明学研究 8:447-486.

Morioka, Masahiro (2015a). "Feminism, Disability, and Brain Death: Alternative Voices from Japanese Bioethics." *Journal of Philosophy of Life* 5(1): 19-41.

Morioka, Masahiro (2015b). "Is Meaning in Life Comparable?: From the Viewpoint of 'The Heart of Meaning in Life.'" *Journal of Philosophy of Life*



5(3):50-65.

Morioka, Masahiro (2019). "A Solipsistic and Affirmation-Based Approach to Meaning in Life." *Journal of Philosophy of Life* 9(1):82-97.

Morioka, Masahiro (2020). 生まれてこないほうが良かったのか? (*Is It Better Never to Have Been Born?*). 筑摩書房.

Morioka, Masahiro (2021). "What is Antinatalism?: Definition, History, and Categories." *The Review of Life Studies* Vol.12:1-39.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1967). *The Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. Vintage.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1967, 2000). *Ecce Homo*. In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. The Modern Library.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (2005). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Clancy Martin. Barnes & Noble Classics.

Steele, Claude M. (1988). "The Psychology of Self-Affirmation: Sustaining the Integrity of the Self." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 21:261-302.