

Yujin Nagasawa's Review: The case of the missing arguments

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Mind, the journal in which Yujin Nagasawa's review of *Better Never to Have Been* appears¹, has the practice of showing book reviews to the books' authors before the reviews are published. Book authors are offered the opportunity to provide their comments, which the reviewer is then invited to take into account in preparing his or her final review. The aim of this practice is "to reduce the possibility of misinterpretation and make the reviewer aware of features of the book that he or she might have missed which are relevant to the review".

Readers of Dr Nagasawa's review may be interested to know how his final review differs from the first version – that is, how he responded to my initial critique of his review. The differences are very revealing.

Dr Nagasawa believes that my arguments contain a "fatal flaw". Of his entire review, only a *single* paragraph is devoted to justifying that claim. He says that my argument "does not take into account the *balance* of pleasure and pain in a life". He acknowledges that I discuss the very sort of criticism he raises, but he says that my "discussion fails to address such consideration adequately" and that in "failing to formulate such criticisms in the strongest possible way" I spend "too much time knocking over straw figures". That is all he says. He offers no justification for his claims. This, of course, makes it very difficult for those of his readers who have not read my book to assess his claim.

Now it might be suggested that a book review, unlike a review essay, provides a reviewer with insufficient space to flesh out his criticisms. However, Dr Nagasawa's original review *did* provide justifications for his claims. In my comments that *Mind* sent to him, I provided a thoroughgoing refutation of his arguments. Dr Nagasawa's response was to excise, from the published version of the review, his reasons for claiming that I failed to respond adequately to the objections. It is highly unlikely that Dr Nagasawa would have done this if he were unmoved by my responses to his arguments. Yet, instead of engaging my responses or reformulating his position, he eliminated from his review the justification for his criticism, preferring instead simply to assert that I fail to consider the objections adequately.

Since Dr Nagasawa's published review contains no arguments for his claims, it is impossible to know what those arguments (currently) are and thus impossible to respond to them. However, it also means that his opinion about the book need not be taken seriously. Anybody can say that my arguments are "fatally flawed". The challenge is to defend that claim, and Dr Nagasawa has not risen to the challenge.

One addition to the published version of Dr Nagasawa's review is in its final paragraph. Here he notes that despite my defence of anti-natalism, I argue that it "would be inappropriate to strip people of a legal right to reproductive freedom" because I could be wrong. This leads him to wonder why I could not have presented my "thesis as a philosophical *puzzle* rather than as an argument".

The answer is simple. The matters I discuss are very serious. They concern the presence or absence of vast quantities of suffering. In discussing these matters, I am not playing philosophical games. I am not engaging in idle intellectual exercises. I have *arguments* why we should avoid creating new people and I presented them as such. At the same time, I recognize that at least until my arguments are tested, and survive that testing, it would be inappropriate to forcibly prevent all people from procreating. Regrettably the process of testing my arguments is not advanced at all by Dr Nagasawa's review.

¹ Yujin Nagasawa, Review of *Better Never to Have Been*, in *Mind*, Vol. 117, July 2008, pp. 674-7.