Quality of Human Life and Non-existence

(Some criticisms of David Benatar's formal and material positions)

La calidad de la vida humana y la no-existencia

(Algunas críticas a las posiciones materiales y formales de David Benatar)

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Abstract:

In his book, Better Never to Have Been (Oxford, 2006), David Benatar attempts to show that coming into existence is always a serious harm. In order to prove his point, he develops two lines of argument, one formal, another material. In this paper I intend to show that: (1) There is a logical problem in the formal argumentation that affects the soundness of the supposed "asymmetry" between the absence of pleasure and the absence of pain, which constitutes the core of this line of argumentation. (2) Although the material argument is basically correct, I maintain that it suffers from the limitations of the theoretical approach adopted, of empiricist and Utilitarian type. (3) I discuss briefly the alleged "independence" of the two lines of argument trying to show that the formal line depends on the material one.

Key words: existence, pleasure, pain, non-existence, ethics

Resumo:

Em seu livro Better never to Have Been (Oxford, 2006), David Benatar tenta mostrar que vir à existência constitui sempre um sério prejuízo. Com o objetivo de provar sua tese ele desenvolve duas linhas de argumento, uma formal, outra material. No presente trabalho tento mostrar que: (1) Existe um problema lógico na argumentação formal que afeta a correção da suposta "assimetria" entre ausência de prazer e ausência de dor, que constitui o cerne desta linha de argumentação; (2) Embora o argumento material seja basicamente correto, o mesmo se ressente das limitações da abordagem teórica adotada, de caráter empirista e utilitarista; (3) Discuto brevemente a alegada independência entre as linhas formal e material, tentando mostrar que a linha formal depende da material.

Palavras-chaves: existência, prazer, dor, nao- existência, etica

Resumen:

En su libro Better Never to Have Been (Oxford, 2006), David Benatar trata de demostrar que venir a la existencia constituye siempre un serio perjuicio. Para probar esta tesis, él desarrolla dos líneas de argumento, una formal y otra material. En el presente artículo, trato de mostrar que: (1) Existe un problema lógico en la argumentación formal, que afecta la corrección de la supuesta "asimetría" entre la ausencia de placer y la ausencia de dolor, que constituye el núcleo de esta línea de argumentación; (2) Aunque la línea material de argumento es básicamente correcta, trato de mostrar que la misma resulta perjudicada por el abordaje adoptado, de tipo empirista y utilitarista; (3) Finalmente, discuto brevemente la pretendida independencia de las dos líneas de argumento, mostrando que la línea formal depende de la material.

Palabras clave: existencia, placer, dolor, no-existencia, ética

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Introduction

In his book *Better never to have been* (2006), David Benatar claims that coming into existence is always a serious harm and that procreation is ethically problematic. He presents his basic arguments on Chapters 2 and 3. The line of argument of Chapter 2 can be considered as formal, while that of Chapter 3 develops a material-type line[1]. In this work, I present logical and methodological objections for both lines of argument. Furthermore, I discuss Benatar's assumption on the alleged independence between the two lines.

1. Two notions of "possible being"

In his introduction, Benatar formulates an asymmetry which he considers to be crucial to the formal argumentation; the asymmetry goes this way:

"*Both good and bad things happen to those who exist. However, there is a crucial asymmetry between the good and the bad things. The absence of bad things, such as pain, is good even if there is nobody to enjoy that good, whereas the absence of good things, such as pleasure, is bad only if there is somebody who is deprived of these good things. The implication of this is that the avoidance of the bad by never existing is a real advantage over existence, whereas the loss of certain goods by not existing is not a real disadvantage over never existing*". (p. 14).

He starts his argumentation from two axioms: "*(1) The presence of pain is bad*" and: (2) "*The presence of pleasure is good*" (p. 30), two statements apparently well-established. At the level of *presence* of these things, there seems to be total draw. The differences appear in the level of *absences*. The relevant assertions are the following: "*(3) the absence of pain is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone*" and: "*(4) the absence of pleasure is not bad unless there is somebody for whom this absence is a deprivation*" (p. 30)[2]

According to the author, to understand this asymmetry between absences one should adopt the perspective of potential interests of a "possible being" within a counterfactual account. Given the crucial importance of this text for my purposes, I quote it in full:

"... (3) *can say something about the counterfactual case in which a person who does actually exist never did exist. Of the pain of an existing person, (3) says that the absence of this pain would have been good even if this could be achieved only by the absence of the person who now suffers it "*. (p. 31).

And:

"Claim (3) says that this absence is good when judged in terms of the interests of the person who would otherwise have existed. We may not know who that person would have been, but we can still say that whoever that person would have been, the avoidance of his or her pain is good when judged in terms of his or her potential interests. (...) Clearly (3) does not entail the absurd literal claim that there is some actual person for whom the absent pain is good ". (p. 31).

To show that (3) is not an "incoherent" statement, Benatar shows it as a statement "*with reference to the (potential) interests of a person who either does or does not exist*" (p. 30). As he concedes, one could make a consideration of (4) essentially identical to that made in (3):

"*One could (logically) make symmetrical claims about the absence of pleasure – that, when judged in terms of the (potential) interests of a person who does or does not exist, the absence of pleasure is bad*". (p. 31, note 23).

All this line of thought is viable if we keep the same concept of "possible being" as counterfactually represented. So, we could paraphrase, for exam-

1 This terminology of formal and material is not Benatar's; I introduce it to facilitate the numerous references that I will make here to these two lines of thought.

2 I maintain Benatar's numeration of the four main assertions to allow the reader's understanding of my argument along the text.

ple, the statement at the beginning of page 31 in the following way: "Of the *pleasure* of an existing person, (4) says that the absence of this *pleasure* would have been *bad* even if this could only have been achieved by the absence of the person who now *enjoys* it". And the paraphrase may continue this way: "Claim (4) says that this absence is *bad* when judged in terms of the interests of the person who would otherwise have existed. We may not know who that person would have been, but we can still say that whoever that person would have been, the avoidance of his or her *pleasures* is *bad* when judged in terms of his or her potential interests". Just as in the case of the absence of pain, this does not imply the absurdity of saying that *there is* really a person to whom the absence of pleasure is bad. That is, *if we use the same notion of "possible being" (the counterfactual notion) in the two cases (absence of pain, absence of pleasure), there is no asymmetry at all*.

But immediately in the same footnote (p. 31) Benatar adds: "*However, (4) suggests that this symmetrical claim, although logically possible, is actually false*". This suggests that the asymmetry cannot be obtained only by means of the formal argumentation, but it rather needs the material elements from the other line of argument, even though Benatar explicitly defends the independence between the two lines (for example, in pp. 14 and 93/4. See last section of the present text). But from the strict formal point of view, everything seems to "draw". On that footnote, Benatar concedes that the only thing his consideration showed so far is that (3) "is not incoherent". But neither it is "incoherent", from a strictly logical point of view, to say that the absence of pleasure is bad even when this damage is not suffered by anyone. This may be challenged by false or inadequate, but not by "incoherent"; so, the non incoherence is not a decisive argument in favor of (3).

If the counterfactual conception of a "possible being" is used in the same way when assessing the absence of pleasure and the absence of pain, the asymmetry would not follow. What is happening here is that in certain moments of his argumentation, Benatar uses a different notion of "possible being", a concept that could be called "empty", according to which a "possible being" would be the one that simply *is not present in the world* and *neither is counterfactually represented*. Clearly, these two concepts are incompatible: when using the counterfactual conception, it is irrelevant that the being is not present in the world, since he/she is counterfactually represented; and when using the empty conception, it is irrelevant making considerations of any kind about the possible being because, in this conception, there is no such a being at all. Benatar allows the counterfactual conception of a possible being when dealing with the absence of pain, but he imposes the empty conception when dealing with the absence of pleasure.

Ideally, someone could say (using the empty conception) that for the absence of pain to be good, there has to be someone for whom this absence is enjoyable, and (using the counterfactual notion) that the absence of pleasure is bad even when there is nobody to suffer from it. If the "possible being" is conceived in (3) in the empty conception, the absence of pain would not be good (or bad), and if the "possible being" is conceived in (4) in the counterfactual conception, the absence of pleasure would not be not bad, but bad. This would be establishing the asymmetry of the way around of Benatar, and with the same drawbacks. In fact, to stay within the logical requirements, it would be right using both for the absence of pleasure and the absence of pain, the same conception of "possible being" whatever it is (counterfactual or empty). What is illegitimate is to mix them within the same line of reasoning.

Therefore, the argumentation in favor of asymmetry is imperfect because it applies unilaterally a procedure that is based on a fallacy of equivocation[3] in the meaning of the term "possible being". The equivocation is best viewed if we put the words "for a possible person" after "the absence of pain is good" in (3) and after "the absence of pleasure is not bad" in (4) (p. 30). I maintain that the expression "for a possible person" does not mean the same in the two sentences.

3 About this fallacy, see Kahane (1998), pp. 69/70; Fogelin and Sinnott-Armstrong (2001), pp. 367/369.

2. Weakness of the "support asymmetries"

To strengthen his position, Benatar tries to provide indirect evidence or "supports" in favor of the alleged asymmetry between (3) and (4): for example, that it has significant "explanatory power" in the explanation of other asymmetries usually endorsed, such as that there is a duty to avoid bringing into existence people who suffer, but there is no duty to bring into existence people who enjoy (p. 32-33), that procreating is not a moral duty (people without children are not considered immoral); that while it is strange to declare that giving rise to someone to benefit him/her, it is not strange to declare that one does not give rise to someone to free him/her from suffering (34); that by adopting the point of view of the possible being, we can only regret for having brought somebody into existence and not for not bringing him/her (34-35) and, finally, that on uninhabited land, we do not regret that no one lives happily on them, while we regret of land inhabited by unhappy people (p. 35).

Regarding the first support asymmetry, one can argue, first, that the symmetry in this case can be restored just by the same procedure applied in the first case[4]. Secondly, it seems wrong to claim that there is not, in our societies, a duty to procreate, if understood as a *moral* duty. Indeed, the moral character of an obligation is seen in the actual attitudes and behaviors of a group, rather than in effective punishment mechanisms (with which the obligation would cease to be moral to become legal). In the case of procreation, the moral character of its obligation is clearly seen in the following evidence: (1) There is social pressure for people to have children, pressure that can become intense, embarrassing and even threatening (e.g., generating suspicion of homosexuality, perversion, bad character, etc. on those who do not procreate), (2) There are incentives and social benefits for those with children, which shows that, in the impossibility of having a law enforcing reproduction, mechanisms are established for non reproductive people not to enjoy these benefits, (3) Within the prevailing view, life is regarded as something very valuable, and therefore, it is ethically correct to have children, and the contrary position is considered "selfish", especially if the person enjoys "a good quality of life". This leads to the idea that *there is* a *moral* obligation to procreate, and if a certain tolerance *exists* this is something typical of a requirement of *moral* type, since there are no effective constraints to force people to reproduce.

For all this, it does not seem that this new "asymmetry" is in good condition to provide plausible "support" for the first one. And the others are even weaker: the notion of "stranger" is dubious, subjective and socially relative, but even considering the term as it usually works, it is false that it is "strange" that people justify having children in terms of the benefits they cause them, and many people accept that this should lead to try to have as many children as possible. Only when we refer to children who will be born very sick, it is not "strange" to say that we avoid having them for their own sake. On the contrary, it would sound very "strange" in our society to say that we will not have children to avoid them from the hardships of life, when there is not a specific disease or impairment.

Following with the other "support asymmetries" considered plausible, of course one can regret for the children's sake the fact that they were not born, under the very common argument that if

4 For the sake of brevity, I leave to the reader the exercise of these paraphrases, which can easily be deduced from the aforesaid. Only as a clue, one can paraphrase, for example, the statement on the beginning of page. 32 by saying, "...the reason why we think that *there is a duty to bring* happy people into existence is that the presence of this pleasure would be good (for the enjoyers) and the absence of pleasure is bad (even though there is nobody to suffer the absence of pleasure)". Here, we simply allow that the absence of pleasure is assessed according to the potential concerns of the person (the counterfactual conception): if counterfactually represented, *there is someone* who is harmed by the absence of pleasure. On the other hand, we could say in strict symmetry: "In contrast to this, we think that *there is not a duty not to bring* suffering people into existence because while their pain would be bad for them, its absence would not be good for them (given that there would be nobody who would be benefited from it)". Here, we allow that the absence of pain is assessed according to a non-represented being (the empty conception): if there is no real being, no one can be "benefited".

they could give their opinion, the children that will be born healthy would like to live and wish that their mothers would not abort them. In the current situation, the parents think they are benefiting their children by having them, and later the vast majority of children think that they were actually benefited. Finally, it is perfectly plausible that someone knows an uninhabited island and think of how much pleasurable this place would be if it had, for example, an amusement park; there is nothing "strange" in the fact that someone with this project in mind who could not achieve it for some reason, feels sorry for the many people who could enjoy it and will be without this pleasure.

I think, then, that none of these other presumed asymmetries, even though they may be widely endorsed by the multitude (p. 36), is stronger than the initial one, so that they cannot work as its "support". Nevertheless, Benatar attempts to extract the result that coming into existence is always a serious harm from this supposed asymmetry, which appears to him to be well established. To do this, he analyzes "scenarios" in several figures. In figure 2.1 (p. 38), there is a scenario A, where X already exists, and a scenario B, where X never existed. In scenario A, there is pleasure and pain and in scenario B, there is lack of both things. The point is that, according to Benatar, in scenario A, the presence of pain is bad (assertion 1) and the presence of pleasure is good (assertion 2) *for the existing being*, but in scenario B, while the absence of pain is good (assertion 3), the absence of pleasure is neither good nor bad (assertion 4) *for the possible being*, and, in particular, it is not bad[5].

The obvious reply would be saying that, symmetrically, in scenario B, since X does not exist, the absence of pain is good and the absence of pleasure *is bad*, but this is precisely what Benatar rejects. Because, according to him, when someone does not exist, the fact of not having pleasure is not bad, but we can say that it is good for this possible being not to suffer from pain (p. 38). When considering the attempts to restore symmetry, Benatar says that the one who held that the absence of pleasure of the possible being in scenario B is bad (as reflected in the figure 2.2, p. 39), would be supporting a "too strong" thesis (p. 38), while he considers "too weak" (p. 39) to attempt to restore symmetry saying that, in scenario B of the non-existent being, nor the absence of pain nor the presence of pleasure would be good or bad (as reflected in the figure 2.3. , p. 40).

According to my previous argumentation, I believe that both alternatives are perfectly correct: in figure 2.2, in both cases the possible being is considered in the counterfactual conception; and in figure 2.3., in both cases the possible being is considered in the empty conception. These two possibilities do not make the mix of "possible being" conceptions, and that is why the symmetry is properly preserved in these figures. In 2.2, the absence of pain is good and the absence of pleasure is bad, for a possible being that if he could choose, he would choose this way (i.e., for a possible being counterfactually conceived); in 2.3, both the absence of pain and absence of pleasure is neither good nor bad, since, in the empty conception, there is simply no one who suffer or enjoy, and there is no representation of their preferences. This is a total draw.

Benatar coherently believes that 2.2. is "*too strong*" because if the absence of pleasure is considered bad *"... we should have to regret, for X's sake, that X did not come into existence. But it is not regrettable* "(38-39). But I have already shown that it may well be regretted, which shows that 2.2. is not "*too strong*" at all. Examining the other case, Benatar correctly says that in 2.3., "*not bad*" means "*not bad, but not good either*." "*Interpreted in this way, however, it is too weak. Avoiding the pains of existence is more than merely 'not bad'. It is good*" (p. 39). But this may be the case for existing people; for non-existing ones, saying that neither the absence of pain or pleasure are neither

5 I repeat here the numerations of the original in order to help following the exposition; readers who have Benatar's book in hands can observe the figures directly and dispense with this didactical procedure.

good nor bad it is perfectly appropriate, and not "weak"[6].

3. Crossing argumentation between absence/presence and existing/not-existing dualisms

If symmetry can always be restored in the indicated manner, the pessimistic results of Benatar about that not existing is always preferable to existing (even in a life with pleasures) do not follow. He states (p. 41) that it is clear that the absence of pain in scenario B (where X never existed) is better than the presence of pain in scenario A (where X exists). But this, if I am right, has not been proven. If it is allowed to the possible being simply not being anything (without counterfactual representation), it makes no sense to say that the absence of pain in scenario B is better than the presence of pain in scenario A, because one possible being in this empty sense cannot be "benefited" from the absence of pain. On the other hand, Benatar argues that the absence of pleasure in scenario B is better than the presence of pleasure in scenario A, because nobody is deprived of anything in B. But I have already shown that restoring symmetry, i.e., allowing the possible being to be counterfactually represented, makes perfect sense to say that the absence of pleasure in scenario B is worse than the presence of pleasure in scenario A, because a possible being in this sense may be harmed by the absence of pleasure, in a counterfactual consideration.

All these problems arise in the application of the terms "absence of pain" and "absence of pleasure" *to existing and to non-existing beings*. It seems partial to put the comparison between scenarios A and B only en terms of a confrontation between presences on one side and absences on another, *since scenario A also shows absences*; scenario A is in fact a combination of presences and absences (both of pain and pleasure), while in scenario B, obviously, we have only absences. Benatar admits that these possibilities are not reflected in his matrix (p. 41), although they are implicit. But this point is too important as to keep it in the background, because it will have decisive influence at the time of the comparisons between scenarios A and B.

When comparing the presence of pain in existing people and the absence of pain in non-existing people, Benatar says: "*In the first comparison we see that non-existence is preferable to existence. Non-existence has an advantage over existence* "(pp. 40/41). But this is much less uncontroversial than it seems if we look at the difference between "absence of pain or pleasure *existing*" and "absence of pain or pleasure *by not existing*." Benatar attempts to support his assertion on the apparently indisputable fact that the absence of pain is better than the presence of pain, *but it is not clear that the absence of pain by not existing is better than the presence of pain existing*, due to the high price we should pay for not existing. If Benatar argues that it is not a high price because existing is always a serious harm, *it is precisely this point that the asymmetry would have to demonstrate, and not to presume*. It seems that we must already have the (material) proof that non-existing is better than existing to accept the absence of pain by not existing is always better than the presence of pain existing. Here, we move in a circle.

In the case of absence of pleasure, he states:

"*In the second comparison...the pleasures of the existent, although good, are not an advantage*

6 There is not a unique way to formulate the equivocation problem in Benatar's formal argumentation. In her critical study of Benatar's book, Elisabeth Harman understands this equivocation as occurring between "impersonal goodness" and "goodness for a person" (Harman (2009), p. 780), although her line of argumentation is different from mine. The equivocation could also be presented in a more sophisticated logical bias as occurring in the very notion of "existing" considered as a logical quantifier (in expressions such as "there is no one who ...", " ... unless there is someone who ...", etc.). Indeed, in (3) the expression "by anyone" would be understood as a quantifier whose scope would be possible objects, whereas in (4), "there is somebody" would be understood as a quantifier on real objects. When considering the absence of pain, the verb to exist refers to possible objects, whereas when considering the absence of pleasure, the verb to exist refers to real objects. I cannot develop these topics here.

over non-existence, because the absence of pleasures is not bad. For the good to be an advantage over non-existence, it would have to have been the case that its absence was bad". (p. 41).

I have already shown to be perfectly plausible to accept this as being precisely the case if we use "possible person" in the counterfactual way. Benatar's statement intends to rely on the apparently undisputed fact that the absence of not depriving pleasure is better than the absence of depriving pleasure, but it is not so obvious that the absence of not depriving pleasure *due to the fact that the person does not exist* is better than the absence of depriving pleasure *when the person exists*, and as before, he presupposes that it had already been shown that non-existence is always better than existence, which is precisely what is in question.

Benatar makes here a mistake that he complains against the hypothetical opponents who object that "good" should be an advantage over "not bad" because the feeling of pleasure is better than a neutral state (p. 41). He complains that this is treating "absence of pleasure" in scenario B (of never existing people) as if it were similar to the "absence of pleasure" in scenario A (of existing people); but he does the same in the case of the "absence of pain": he makes no difference between feeling pain existing (scenario A) and not feeling pain by not existing (scenario B). The presence of pain in A is worse than the absence of pain *in A*, but not necessarily worse than the absence of pain *in B obtained at the price of not existing*. In any case, it seems illegitimate and partial to compare absences (of anything) in absolute terms, instead of comparing absences *within existence* and absences paying the price of not existing.

To give more strength to his asymmetry, Benatar presents (p. 42) an analogy: we have two persons, S and H, S has a tendency to fall ill, but with ability to recover quickly; H does not have this ability, but this person never gets sick. Thus, it is bad for S to get sick and good for S to recover quickly, but while it is good for H never being sick, not having quick recovery is neither good nor bad. From this, it follows that the state of S is not better than the state of H, since a world where I can get sick and recover quickly is not better than a world where I never get sick. The analogy with the birth seems clear. But yet in this analogy, the same problem identified above is present, because one can argue that H is not better than S, because although it is better, in scenario A, not getting sick than getting sick, this may not be the case if never getting sick is paid with the price of not existing. There is one important difference between never getting sick for not being born and never getting sick because I was born and have a very good health. This suggests that it could be better to get sick *existing* than never getting sick by simply *not existing*. It appears again that the asymmetry already needs the material thesis that not existing is better than existing, which is precisely what was intended to be proven by the asymmetry.

In the last chapter of his book, Benatar states that there are many problems for those who reject the asymmetry. One of them would be to accept that we have a moral reason, and perhaps a duty, to create people for them not to be deprived of the pleasure, or that we should regret that we do not bring people to the world or the fact that they do not live in a pleasant place, etc. *But, as was shown, there is nothing wrong in these consequences from the strictly formal point of view*; on the contrary, they seem formally compelling. On the other hand, Benatar says that rejecting the asymmetry would lead us to accept that we do not have good moral reasons, based on the interests of a possible suffering person to prevent his/her birth, nor could we regret having brought him/her to existence based on these sufferings, nor we should want people who suffer miserably in some part of the world to never being born. But again, none of these consequences is wrong from the strict formal point of view; they just do not fit in Benatar's convictions about life. Benatar is convinced that this is a life of suffering and that people should not be born and we can perhaps agree with him; but only the alleged asymmetry between absence of pleasure and pain cannot establish these arguments; in fact, it has to presuppose them; this undermines the thesis of the independence between the two lines of argument (as I will show in OJO).

4. Benatar's material argumentation: limits of the empiricist approach

The formal argumentation tried to show that not being born does not harm (on the contrary, it benefits); the material argumentation will be devoted to showing how being born harms a lot. Within an empiricist and Utilitarian stance of the calculation of losses and benefits, Benatar said it would be a mistake to evaluate the quality of human life by a simple absolute summation: one evil for one good. We must understand how these goods and evils are "distributed" in existence (p. 62), the intensity of pain and pleasure, life extension, and the fact of having lived experiences so bad (such as to lose body parts) that no good can compensate. It is a fact that all people permanently suffer from fatigue, hunger, thirst, intestinal malaise, thermal differences, pain, lethargy, frustration with disabilities, headaches, allergies, chills, stomach aches, heat flows, nausea, hyperglycemia, guilt, shame, boredom, sadness, depression, loneliness, dissatisfaction with their bodies and suffering for more serious illnesses of those we love or of ourselves (p. 71). Human desires are compelling and disturbing (p. 75) and human life, in a cosmic point of view, seems to lack any sense. Chapter 3 ends in apocalypse, talking about natural disasters, hunger (89), devastating diseases (90) and violence (91). The presence of "well-known features of human psychology" may explain the positive opinion that people have, in general, of their own lives: the tendency to optimism, the incredible ability to adapt to new circumstances, however painful, and the tendency to compare our lives with other's and coming out winning in comparison (p. 64 - 69).

In this methodology, the poor quality of life is shown through an empirical assessment of evils and benefits, where these are considered as objects susceptible of manipulation and measurement. But experience is always open to new information and pondering. Benatar's pessimism is based on the world as it currently is, but in some moments he refers to *how the world could be different*. On page 79, he imagines a world where, in the dynamics of desires, the period between deprivation and fulfillment is unnecessary, so that pleasure was immediately obtained; and on page 84, he imagines a world in which human life was much longer, devoid of pain and frustration and with much greater capacity to acquire understanding. Benatar accuses people, for not having sufficient imagination to conceive these worlds better than ours, but one could think that the opposite is happening at present: the scientific and technological imagination just escaped from all limits.

Nowadays, it is thought, for example, in a world where medicine could, in the not so distant future, discover the secrecy of aging and make people simply no longer die from aging and start to live indefinitely, or a world where the replacement of deficient organs by new ones would be very simple, or where serious illnesses were things of the past[7]. They talk about a genetic program of well-being, change of the eco-system and re-writing of the genome, seeking for a world full of unprecedented benefits, which would greatly compensate the still remaining damages. In this view, Homo Sapiens would be the only species able to free the world from suffering, so that it is vital that humans can survive on earth. Benatar could accuse the authors of these ideas of anything, but of "lack of imagination." According to them, it would be rational and ethical continuing to generate people in a world still bad, but with good perspectives for improvement even if it is the result of a mammoth task that still takes many generations. I do not see how merely empiricist and Utilitarian methodologies can deal successfully with this type of objection.

In the context of Benatar's material argumentation, we find some mixture of these Utilitarian strategies and quotes from Schopenhauer that is supposed to "illustrate" them. But this is curious because the Schopenhauer's method of inquiry has nothing to do with the Utilitarian method. Schopenhauer attempts to show the poor quality of life through a consideration of a structural nature: humans are endowed of mortality since their birth, of a tremendous anxiety of affirmation in life, and of a brain big enough to clearly see their tra-

7 Cfr. Benecke (2002).

gedy. Their suffering is therefore unavoidable, and not due to mere empirical reasons[8]. Suffering, for Schopenhauer, in the form of pain, boredom, and moral failure, is not a mere empirical fact, but a necessary feature of existence[9]. Benatar employs Utilitarian calculus to get his results, based on the mere predominance of evils on goods, but on the other, he celebrates Schopenhauer, whose pessimism is based on the problematic character of the structural origin of life, and not on the mere gains and losses.

The odd thing is that the structural elements are not absent in the book of Benatar, but mixed with the Utilitarian resources. For example, every time he alludes death and disease, or the insatiable desiring mechanisms (p. 74), he is actually pointing to structural elements of life that should not be put to the same level as allergies, headaches or injustice; there may be lives without them, but they are all decaying and terminal. But the moment where Benatar best visualizes the structure of human life is the last chapter, when trying to resolve the apparent paradox that, being birth bad, death must also be considered bad. For the philosophical common sense argues as follows: since being born was bad, to die must be good. Benatar answers to this question in an appropriate way, but in doing so, he clearly shows the mix of empirical and structural methodologies:

"*...it is because we (usually) have an interest in continuing to exist that death may be thought of as a harm, even though coming into existence is also a harm. Indeed, the harm of death may partially explain why coming into existence is a harm.* ***Coming into existence is bad in part because it invariably leads to the harm of ceasing to exist****"* (p. 213, my emphasis).

Here, Benatar finds out that being born mortally and dying punctually (some day) are just aspects of one and the same process: being born mortal is already starting to die, and that is why both issues are bad, because they are intrinsically connected. The use of structural elements by Benatar is quite curious, because, on the one hand, he openly acknowledges the "unavoidable" and "endemic" character of pain in Schopenhauer's philosophy of life (pp. 76-77), without seeing that this contradicts the idea that there is nothing "necessary" in the harm of coming into existence (p. 29).

The structural point of view of Schopenhauer, I think, is better equipped to meet the objections of meliorists such as Doyal, who believes in the "brave new world": the crucial problem would not be in changing worlds, but purely and simply *in becoming one world* (any world); the mortality of emergence of a world will continue to exist in this world without disease or aging, for when the technical procedures to obtain these benefits were available, they will block the birth of new generations, not mentioning the many social, political and economic conflicts that these scientific advantages will bring. Therefore, if the material argumentation is convincing, it will be for the structural elements it contains, rather than due to the efficacy of the mere Utilitarian calculation.

5. On the alleged independence between formal and material argumentation

At various moments in his book, Benatar states that the two lines of argument, formal and material, are independent:

"*The arguments in the third chapter thus provide independent grounds even for those who are not persuaded by the arguments in the second chapter to accept the claim that coming into existence is always a (serious) harm"* (p. 14).

And:

8 Schopenhauer (2005), Part IV, sections 56 to 59.

9 Even attenuating his own pessimism, Schopenhauer states that, precisely, this inevitable and necessary feature of suffering should give relief to humans because their condition would be even worse if the pain was something contingent that could somehow have been avoided. (Schopenhauer (2005), Book IV, section 57, p. 411).

"*There is more than one way to reach this conclusion. Those who reject the arguments in Chapter 2 that coming into existence is always a harm may nonetheless be persuaded by the arguments in Chapter 3 that our lives are actually very bad"* (p. 93 / 4).

At the beginning of Chapter 3, the author insists that evidence independent from asymmetry will be provided (p. 61), as a "continuation" of the arguments of Chapter 2, where nothing was said about the magnitude of the harm imposed to those who are born. With this, it is assumed that the issue has already been well established, and in Chapter 3 we will see only how serious the situation really is. This suggests that what is really important has already been shown by the formal demonstration, and that arguments of Chapter 3 could, ultimately, be exempted (having been proven that life is bad, maybe it is just emphatic showing that it is *very* bad).

I hold the exact opposite is the case: while I agree with Benatar that the material arguments do not need the formal ones (based on the supposed asymmetry), the inverse situation is not the case: the formal arguments need the material arguments. This dependence appears for the first time when, just before asymmetry is presented, Benatar uses several lines (from page 32) on issues of material type ("*As a matter of fact, bad things happen to all of us*", "*No life is without hardship*", etc.), and to face the well-known optimistic objection that "also good things happen to those who exist," he presents the asymmetry. But my previous arguments, if correct, show that the formal line is not able to show alone that failing to procreate does not harm (and that, to the contrary, it benefits), or that not existing is always better than existing. Precisely, because in the purely formal level, symmetries are restored, the material elements are required to decide the issue in favor of the pessimistic view.

Indeed, after knowing the material evidence that human life is very bad because we are constantly disturbed by unpleasantness, devoured by insatiable desires and shaken by the meaninglessness of life, we can accept that not feeling pain *by not existing* is better than feeling pain *existing*, because we now know *that existing is very bad*: if not to feel pain we have to pay the price of not existing, *we know now that this price is not too high*. On the other hand, we can also accept that not depriving pleasure by not existing is better than depriving pleasure existing, *for now we know that existing is very bad*: if to feel pleasure, we have to pay the price of existing, *now we know this price is too high*. But this makes the material evidence much more important than it was, and especially than Benatar himself thinks it was, no longer considering it as mere "continuation" or supplement of something that would have been proven before.

I think this evidence of the dependence of formal arguments over the material ones suggests that perhaps it would have been better for Benatar's argumentative procedure, to reverse the order of the chapters, i.e., to quickly dispose of material evidence about the poor quality of human life to go better equipped to the formal line. However, given this situation, one could maintain something much stronger: not that the order of the chapters should be reversed, but that all the formal argumentation could be waived. Given the dependence of formal argumentation over the material one, the many problems of formal argumentation and the great power of the material line (especially if improved with a clear explanation of the structural elements), one could simply dismiss the arguments of Chapter 2 and support the demonstration of the main theses of the book (that coming into existence is always a serious harm and that procreation is ethically problematic) only on the material arguments, without having to use support asymmetries, indirect evidence and questionable analogies.

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