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“Would You Change Things?”:
Natal Choices in *Arrival* and *What
Happened to Monday*

We all exist. That may seem like a tautology, but when one considers the conspiracy of chance and choice that contributed to our existence, one may marvel at such a statement. Not least of all in the chain of events that led to our existence is the fact that at least one person, at some time before we existed, made a choice that ensured our existence, despite several factors that could have precluded that choice.

The reasons for choosing to have a child are multifaceted, from the financial, to the religious, to the societal (e.g. children can assist in the family business, fulfill religious injunctions—such as to “be fruitful and multiply”¹—and meet familial and societal expectations). The reasons for not having a child are also complex and are often a different response to the same factors (e.g. raising children is expensive, many people choose to reject religious directives, and some pursue a desire for independence in decision making²). However, in Western culture, as Christine Overall points out, “it ironically appears that one needs to have reasons not to have children, but no reasons are required to have them”.³ In other words, the default position for choosing whether or not to have a child, in Western culture and arguably for much of the entire world, seems to be resoundingly in favor of procreation. Gender reveal videos abound on social media, the January 2012 Monthly Labor Review from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that between 2010 and 2020 child day care services would be one of the fastest growing industries in the United States⁴, and Article 16 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that “Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the

right to marry and to found a family.”⁵ For many of us, having a child is a ‘blessed event’ that seems to be as natural as breathing.

Regardless of the reasons for choosing to have a child or to avoid procreating, the impact of having a child—on the parents, the community, and ultimately the world—can often be far greater than initially presumed, both positively and negatively. This is perhaps why, for many people able to debate whether to have a child, various states of political turmoil, environmental threat, or anxieties over disease and potential injury may factor into that debate. For instance, a *New York Times* article from 2018 considers the ethics of having children in an era of global climate change and ponders on both the effect that more humans would have on an already overloaded environmental system and the effect that overloaded system would have on more humans.⁶ In June 2018, *The Guardian* featured an article entitled “Would You Give Up Having Children to Save the Planet? Meet the Couples Who Have”, which offered profiles of a number of young adults who had chosen to be sterilized or go childless to prevent the environmental impact having a child creates.⁷ After the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, demand for intrauterine devices (IUDs) rose significantly in the US. According to AthenaHealth, a company that provides electronic records services to health providers, office visits requesting either management or insertion of IUDs rose by about 19% in 2016 between October and December⁸, while Planned Parenthood reported a staggering 900% increase in requests for IUDs after the election.⁹ While those numbers most likely reflect the concerns held by many women that a Trump-led Republican administration would threaten the availability of birth control and abortion, leading them to seek an option that would outlast his tenure as President, it is not outside the realm of possibility that many of those women felt an aversion to the idea of bringing a child into a world with Trump as President of the US.¹⁰

While some of the non-parents profiled in *The Guardian* article are avowed antinatalists, those who believe that bringing sentient life into existence is a negative—even harmful—act, not all of those featured in the article are against all procreation, just their own. These non-parents aim to reduce the population of the Earth, not eliminate it, in order to slow down the terrible environmental impact humans have on the planet. Science fiction has long imagined the nightmare scenarios of antinatalists: dystopic futures of an Earth ravaged by war, climate disaster, disease, or any number of devastating events. Certainly, one does not need to adopt an antinatal-

ist position to seek solutions to any of these scenarios. Organizations such as Population Connection have been advocating for zero or reduced population growth for years and making efforts to encourage better education about and access to family planning services. More radical and immoral choices were made in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, as sterilizations without the victim's consent were performed in thirty-two states with funds from the federal government, thus inspiring Adolf Hitler to feel eugenic envy.¹¹

However, science fiction, like most literature, seems to be invested in a pronatalist position. In other words, if science fiction is the literature of the future, as it is so often identified in the popular imagination, and recognized, if not sanctioned, by critics such as John Huntington, who in his 1975 essay, "Science Fiction and the Future", acknowledges that enthusiasts often claim that "SF prepares us for the future"¹², then there must be someone to continue in the future in order for there to be a future.¹³ Certainly, science fiction has imagined non-human and post-human subjects, although it is safe to say that the vast majority of science fiction focuses on a future in which humanity continues to procreate. Novels such as H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, Michael Moorcock's *Dancers at the End of Time* trilogy, Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men*, and Liu Cixin's *Remembrance of Earth's Past* trilogy, envision a universe in which humans, in one form or another, exist hundreds of thousands if not billions of years into the future. While some writers do envision a world in which procreation is threatened, such as P. D. James' *The Children of Men* or Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, thus putting the future at risk, ancillary to the conflict of the plot of these tales is the ideology that humanity losing the ability to procreate would be tragic. Therefore, science fiction seems to privilege some form of pronatalism, at the very least by contemplating the ethics and impact of bringing more and more humans into the universe.¹⁴

But science fiction does not blithely ignore the pain of existence or the environmental impact of population growth. Even in science fiction's privileging of pronatalism, it still has something to say about real world struggles that impact parental choice regarding procreation. One need look no further than the aforementioned *The Handmaid's Tale* or Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* to find two examples of feminist science fiction texts that explore the intersections of individual, social, and political choice. Two recent films tackle the realities of existence and the choices made to ensure, prevent, or eliminate it. Both *Arrival* (2016) and *What*

Happened to Monday (2017—released in Europe as *Seven Sisters*), explore the ramifications of existence and the concomitant suffering that comes with it. The antinatalist and rejectionist views of David Benatar engaging in conversation with the more pronatalist views of Christine Overall can help us analyze the, at times, ambivalent positions of these films on existence and parental choices. In turn, the films help us to engage with Benatar’s and Overall’s positions. Ultimately, the films themselves may, like much of science fiction, prepare us for change—in this case, the changes that come through the choice to have or not to have children.

Arrival

Arrival, based on Ted Chiang’s 1998 novella “The Story of Your Life,” is the story of linguist Louise Banks (Amy Adams) who, working with a team of others—including physicist Ian Donnelly (Jeremy Renner)—strives to translate the language used by the Heptapods, an alien race that has appeared in twelve locations around the world. At the heart of *Arrival* is Louise’s new-found perceptions of time engendered by her internalizing the Heptapods’ language, their gift to us. We learn in one scene that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis theorizes that the languages we learn shape the ways we think, and the film illustrates that hypothesis by revealing to us that just as the Heptapod language is non-linear, so is their view of time. As Louise begins to decipher the language, her sense of time becomes more and more fractured, and through skillful editing, the film reveals to us that Louise has been unstuck in time since the beginning of the film, which is not the beginning of the story. Thus, Louise is given a unique perspective on the story of both her life and the life of her daughter, Hannah (variously played by Abigail Pniowsky, Julia Scarlett Dan, and Jadyn Malone). We linear-bound viewers understand over the course of the film that what we thought were flashbacks are in reality flash-forwards; thus, Louise is able to make informed decisions in the present narrative of the movie because of her perception of future events. She is even able to ‘read’ her future book on the Heptapod language in order to facilitate her interpretations in the timeline of the first contact story. While the first contact storyline focuses on her role in ending a possible war, the storyline around Hannah focuses on Louise’s decision to enter into a relationship with Ian and welcome their daughter Hannah into the world, even though Hannah will eventually die in her tween years (between the ages of 9-12) from a rare disease.¹⁵

Chiang's "The Story of Your Life" makes the focus of the multiple plotlines more obvious: the birth of Louise Banks' daughter (who goes unnamed in Chiang's novella) and the choices that led to her birth. For many viewers of *Arrival*, the alien first contact story eclipses the story of Hannah's birth and Louise's life, which I would argue is the heart of the film. Viewers who assume the film is primarily concerned with first contact can easily be forgiven: Louise's daughter is featured in none of the official movie posters for the film found online, and in the three most important trailers—the official, final, and international trailers—Hannah appears in brief glimpses in such a way to imply that she is simply Louise's daughter caught up in the chaos of first contact. Toward the end of the film, Ian clarifies for viewers the film's focal point as he says to Louise: "You know, I've had my head tilted up to the stars for as long as I can remember. You know what surprised me the most? It wasn't meeting them. It was meeting you."¹⁶ In other words, the aliens are not the only focus of the film. *Arrival* is also a metaphorical exploration of childbirth and the relationships and decisions that bring us there. For what is the arrival of a child but a first-contact experience with an alien being, one in which parents have to learn how to communicate with this new entity and are often forced to learn how to interpret not only vocal cries, but also the effluvia that emits from this strange organism?

That childbirth is central to the film is highlighted by the shape of the Heptapod ship, which looks like the profile of a pregnant woman's belly. At the climax of the film, as the world seems headed toward war and humanity appears doomed, the ships begin to recline, as if they were a pregnant woman in the throes of labor. Once Louise can convince the Chinese General Shang (Tzi Ma) to share his team's information and stand down from a state of military readiness by calling him on his cell phone to tell him his wife's last words, information Louise finds out later in the film, then humanity appears to be at the cusp of a new unification that will ultimately benefit the Heptapods in three thousand years when they will need humanity's help. Having given birth to the new unified humanity with Louise as midwife, the Heptapod ships move upright again, then disappear, presumably returning home to await the eventual arrival of the help humanity will then be able to offer.

Arrival and David Benatar

Louise's choice to give birth to Hannah will be explored in more detail later, but it would be wise to turn now to David Benatar's work in order to

better understand the antinatalist repercussions of Louise's choices and, in turn, to better engage with Benatar's ideas found in his book *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence*. Benatar's central premise is that "...coming into existence is always a serious harm".¹⁷ In his book, Benatar challenges positions that argue that bringing someone into existence has the potential for good—perhaps by giving birth to someone who could improve the world or even by simply giving birth to someone who has a 'good' life—instead arguing that "...coming into existence, far from ever constituting a net benefit, always constitutes a net harm".¹⁸ For Benatar, the presence of pain, discomfort, boredom, grief, death, and other harms far outweigh what we might optimistically perceive to be the good in our lives. In other words, Benatar argues that bringing children into the world inevitably causes pain, which should be considered immoral.

While Benatar's ideas can seemingly be boiled down to some simple aphorisms, his arguments are far more complex, largely because he understands humans' biological drives to procreate and cultural pressure to do so. Yet he simultaneously presents simple ideas as the starting point for his more complex arguments. With no time to fully explore Benatar's arguments, a simplification must suffice. Benatar argues simply that "(1) the presence of pain is bad" and "(2) the presence of pleasure is good",¹⁹ and then proceeds to point out that while such statements might seem to be a "symmetrical evaluation", they do not account for the absence of pain and pleasure, "for it strikes [him] as true that (3) the absence of pain is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone, whereas (4) the absence of pleasure is not bad unless there is somebody for whom this absence is a deprivation".²⁰ For this last point, Benatar argues that someone who does not exist cannot be somebody for whom the absence of pleasure is a deprivation. He calls these concepts the asymmetry of pleasure and pain and presents an example of pleasure and pain's asymmetry through a table that explores two scenarios in which a person, X, either exists or never exists. Benatar's example can best be summarized by a simple equation. He aligns the existence of X with both the presence of pain (which he calls 'bad') and the presence of pleasure (which he calls 'good', since if one exists, one will experience both, one presumes). Thus, if we identify the 'bad' presence of pain as negative and the 'good' presence of pleasure as positive, our equation for existence produces a sum of zero in which the positive 'good' and the negative 'bad' cancel each other out. However, Benatar then aligns nonexistence with the absence of pain (which he identifies as "good") and the absence of pleasure (which he identi-

fies as “not bad”), since if one does not exist, one will not experience either. Thus, if we identify the “good” absence of pain as positive and the “not bad” absence as neutral (which could also be the value for “not good”), then the equation for nonexistence produces a result that is ultimately positive, in that the positive ‘good’ is not negated by the neutral ‘not bad’. Benatar justifies his value judgments by saying, “If I am correct then it is uncontroversially the case that [the presence of pain] is bad and [presence of pleasure] is good. However,... [the absence of pain] is good even though there is nobody to enjoy the good, but [the absence of pleasure] is not bad because there is nobody who is deprived of the absent benefits.”²¹ As he had explained earlier in his book, any absence of pain is a positive, while if one does not exist, then one cannot miss out on any perceived good. Thus, Benatar concludes that existence is always, as he calls it, ‘a net harm’.²²

In *Arrival*, Louise Banks is given an opportunity that none of us have: to see the future. This is an opportunity that provides Louise with information that will inform her choices to have Hannah. Through her flash-forwards, she can see the results of her choosing to begin a relationship with Ian and to reply affirmatively to his question near the end of the film, “Wanna make a baby?”²³ Having witnessed her future and the future of her daughter, Louise is able to say, “Despite knowing the journey and where it leads, I embrace it, and I welcome every moment of it.”²⁴ Her opportunity to embrace pain that she knows is coming, somehow balancing pain and pleasure, is different from the experience that most of us have in which, as Benatar puts it, “[One] cannot tell in advance whether a life one starts will turn out to be one that was worth starting.”²⁵ However, Louise *can* tell in advance; she knows the future and sees the immense pain that will come her and Hannah’s way, yet she still chooses to make Hannah with Ian. Louise can make a choice that encompasses the totality of Hannah’s life, and presumably her own, although viewers never see Louise’s death. Despite the painful impact of Hannah’s death and Louise’s ultimate divorce from Ian, Louise chooses to ensure that Hannah exists. Indeed, the final, life-affirming words of the film are Louise’s response to Ian’s question, “Wanna make a baby?”: “Yes. Yeah.”²⁶

Despite Louise’s knowledge regarding the relationship of pleasure and pain in Hannah’s life, Benatar offers critical questions in our exploration of the film’s ultimately pro-natalist message. Benatar’s first question would be for whom is Louise choosing? Is Louise’s choice to have Hannah for Hannah’s benefit, or for Louise’s? This question is difficult to answer from simply viewing the film. Considering the amount of screen time that Hannah

receives, she only makes up about 6.52% of the film.²⁷ Viewers receive mere hints of Hannah's interiority, her thoughts, feelings, and desires. None of those hints indicate Hannah's position on her own existence. Yet the film is framed as a sort of conversation with Hannah, starting with Louise's ambiguous first line, "I used to think this was the beginning of your story."²⁸ That conversation of Hannah's origin ends about four minutes before the end of the film, with Louise as narrator clearly addressing Hannah for the first time: "So, Hannah. This is where your story begins. The day they departed."²⁹ Thus, the film can be read as an apology for Hannah's life in which Louise is allowed to present her case for bringing Hannah into existence. Still, we have no clear indication of whether Louise makes the choice for herself or for Hannah.

Benatar would undoubtedly argue that Louise makes the choice for herself. In his view, "One can never have a child for that child's sake",³⁰ largely because being brought to existence is not a choice that anyone can make for her or himself, and therefore being brought into existence robs each of us of a crucial moment of agency. Of course, Benatar recognizes that someone who does not exist does not have agency: "Those who never exist cannot be deprived."³¹ Thus, the ethical consequences for existence fall directly upon the parents, not the child. Viewers are left with the impression that Louise is not choosing to bestow a great gift on Hannah by bringing her into the world. Rather, the impression is that Louise chooses to bring Hannah into the world for the moments of joy that Hannah brings to Louise herself, despite the accompanying pain. Hannah herself experiences moments of pleasure and joy, but again Benatar claims that we cannot "have a child for that child's sake".

Examining Chiang's novella as source material provides some further insight into our dilemma, first by more clearly indicating than the film that the story's focus is on the unnamed daughter—the title is "The Story of Your Life," after all—second, by providing only a few textual pieces of evidence regarding Louise's perspective on her daughter's pain, such as: "I'll pick you up and carry you under my arm to your bed, you wailing piteously all the while, but my sole concern will be my own distress."³² Later, Louise will observe about her daughter's life: "The word 'infant' is derived from the Latin word for 'unable to speak,' but you'll be perfectly capable of saying one thing: 'I suffer,' and you'll do it tirelessly and without hesitation."³³ Certainly, Louise describes moments of joy in her daughter's life, but passages such as these indicate that Louise's choice to have her daughter was largely

selfish, not altruistic.

Louise's choice provides us with more opportunities to better understand Benatar's position, one being the observation that permeates Benatar's book that any suffering is too much suffering. He presents a hypothetical person who lives "a life of utter bliss adulterated only by the pain of a single pin-prick",³⁴ yet still insists that someone who never existed is better off than that hypothetical person because a non-existent person cannot miss either pleasure or pain, but that blissful life marred by a pin-prick has to endure that pin-prick, which is more than someone who does not exist has to endure. As he observes in his conclusion: "Not creating a person absolutely guarantees that the potential person will not suffer—because that person will not exist."³⁵ By Benatar's calculations, even if the good and neutral outweigh the bad in Hannah's life, then Hannah still has too much pain in her life. In other words, any pain at all in Hannah's life—even if she never became terminally ill and lived to a ripe old age, even if her parents never divorced, even if the only pain she ever experienced was a simple stubbed toe—would not make Hannah's life worth starting. For Benatar, the presence of any pain negates the presence of any good, in that Benatar's goal seems to be to eliminate the potential for all pain in all of existence. Had Louise answered "No" to Ian's "Wanna make a baby?" there would be no Hannah to experience pain and thus a (slight) reduction of suffering in the world.

Benatar would also argue that Louise suffers from a severe case of optimism, as do many of us, borrowing the term 'Pollyanna Principle' from psychologists Margaret Matlin and David Stang. Essentially, Benatar argues that Pollyannaism means that "there is an inclination to recall positive rather than negative experiences".³⁶ For any of us who think we have a fairly decent or even a 'good' life, we have been blinded by our tendency to overlook pain and to unfairly focus on our more positive experiences. Thus, Louise's assessment of the story of Hannah's life is suspect, and viewers who are swept away by Louise's readiness to embrace the journey of joy and pain are themselves manipulated to join in the conspiracy of existence.

In fact, Denis Villeneuve and Eric Heisserer made a number of changes from the novella that arguably heighten the amount of suffering for Louise. First, in Chiang's novella, although Louise does separate from her daughter's father, named Gary in the story, she does eventually begin another relationship with a man named Nelson. By all indications, in the film Louise is alone after Ian leaves her. Whether entering a second relationship is more or

less painful can be debated by those who have experienced second relationships, but there can be little doubt that in *Arrival* Louise seems to derive some amount of pleasure from not being alone.

The second major choice that Villeneuve and Heisserer made to deviate from the novella is that in “Story of Your Life,” Louise’s daughter dies in a rock-climbing accident at the age of twenty-five, whereas in *Arrival*, Hannah dies in her teens from some terrible rare disease. While a rock-climbing accident is not a pleasant way to go, and Louise suffers tremendous grief, viewers are most likely to see a terminal disease that involves some extended time of suffering as more painful than a quick death from a fall.³⁷ Benatar is aware of the impulse for those of us who exist to attempt to quantify the amount of suffering in a life in order to justify maintaining that life. From Benatar’s viewpoint any amount of suffering is an unconscionable amount of suffering, so from that perspective the suffering that comes from dying in a fall or losing a loved one in a fall is no different from the suffering that accompanies a long-term illness. From a Benatarian perspective, then, the responsibility for the death of the daughter in both the film and the novella falls squarely on Louise’s shoulders, and, by choosing to give birth to her daughter, Louise has committed an immoral act; an act that anyone who chooses to have a child has committed. Louise may be forgiven, or at least dismissed as a masochist, for choosing to allow herself to go through the pain of losing a child, but Benatar and other antinatalists would find great fault with Louise for choosing a life that ends in such pain for her daughter, who has no opportunity to express whether or not she would choose that life for herself.

Thus, both these differences from the novella potentially magnify the amount of pain that Louise endures and make her choice to embrace the journey in *Arrival* much more significant. The ultimate message of the film disagrees with Benatar. Suffering is not something that negates the value of existence, even though one cannot avoid it. Louise’s choice to embrace suffering, perhaps even celebrate it by recognizing its importance in our lives, provides the foundation for a different approach to suffering than Benatar’s.

Arrival and Overall

While Benatar and other antinatalists believe they have the moral high ground in adopting a philosophical position, which in their view ensures that no further harm will come to humans and other life forms affected

by humans, their position is often viewed as extreme by most other people. Historically, humanity has preferred to procreate, to give in to the biological drive to share our DNA with the future. For some, the choice to procreate is not a difficult one and is often entered into as a result of an almost automatic response to biological and cultural pressure, rather than as a carefully considered action the consequences of which have been exhaustively weighed and scrutinized. That equally extreme position, that we are all baby machines, reflects the apparent preference for fertility that often surrounds the choice to have children. Undoubtedly, many people will find Benatar's antinatalist views offensive. However, we in the Western world often find ourselves shocked by stories of unmitigated excess in childbirth and shake our head in disbelief (with perhaps a drop of existential horror at the thought of the implied life changes) at the media coverage of large families that keep pumping babies out or have huge multiple births, such as the Duggars or the Gosselins, the focus, respectively, of the television shows *Nineteen Kids and Counting* and *Jon and Kate Plus Eight* (later *Kate Plus Eight*).

Somewhere between the two positions that procreation should stop and the more the merrier rests what may be a more rational and compassionate choice, reflected in the works of philosophers such as Christine Overall, especially in her book, *Why Have Children?* The ambivalence of Overall's title reveals the scrutiny that the author would like all parents to apply to the choice to have children. Her ethics are driven by the welfare of all children, the rights of women, and the continuing impact that more and more humans have on the environment: "[J]ustified decision making about procreation must be based at least on a consideration of the consequences of our procreative decisions and in particular of their effects on existing children and on women."³⁸ Overall is not intending, as Benatar appears to be, to tell people what to do, what choices to make—in fact, she argues that people have "a right not to be interfered with in their procreative behavior."³⁹ Rather, she is hoping to reveal that the decision to give birth, like so many of the choices in our lives, has ethical implications that would benefit from a closer look. As she indicates, "[her] aim is simply to explore some ways in which we might think systematically and deeply about a fundamental aspect of human life."⁴⁰ Overall's book attempts to provide a system for thinking about procreation that goes beyond the Western default position that the burden for explaining why not to have children is placed on those who choose to avoid procreation. Many couples have experienced pressure

from family and friends to take the 'natural' next step in the relationship and have children. Overall would like to redirect our thinking by encouraging Western culture to accept the notion that in the twenty-first century the burden of explaining should rather be placed on those who choose to have children. In this sense, recognizing that the world is filled with suffering and that bringing more people into the world has a greater impact on the environment and other people, Overall agrees with a number of Benatar's premises.

However, Overall provides some direct critiques of a few of Benatar's views that bear a quick overview. She devotes an entire chapter to addressing Benatar's position and questioning his premises. A significant portion of the chapter critiques Benatar's asymmetrical views of pleasure and pain. Her challenges are important, and I would refer the reader to her work. However, suffice it to say in this chapter that she questions a number of Benatar's assumptions concerning pleasure and pain. For example, acknowledging that death is a terrible end to life, Overall argues that just because something ends, it doesn't necessarily mean that we should avoid it. She offers vacations as a clear example of something with an ending that we enjoy, even though an end is already in sight once we begin.⁴¹ She also challenges Benatar's position by arguing that it is difficult to determine if a life is worth starting until one has lived an entire life and can examine its content.⁴² In other words, while Benatar hangs his entire argument on preventing life, Overall encourages her readers to consider the entire narrative arc of a life. Finally, she directly questions Benatar's 'Pollyanna' theory that all of us overestimate how good our life is, by asserting individual subjectivity over Benatar's position: "There's something far-fetched about the idea that I and virtually everyone who says she or he is happy to be alive can be badly mistaken about the quality of our lives."⁴³ Unless we all experience some kind of *Matrix*-level global collective illusion, how dare Benatar, she seems to argue, make a choice for all of humanity:

It seems unlikely that the vast majority of us is guilty of false consciousness. Benatar cannot possibly know this of every single human being who is happy to have been born. It is simply unfounded to deny the experience of literally millions of people who for the most part enjoy their lives and are happy to exist. Moreover, it is presumptuous for him to suppose that he (along with the few who may agree with him) is the only person who fully understands the human situation and has the appropriate response to it.⁴⁴

Underscoring her disagreement with Benatar's conclusions, she refers to a study that demonstrates that people who self-report happiness "are less self-focused, less hostile and abusive, and less vulnerable to disease. They are also more loving, forgiving, trusting, energetic, decisive, creative, sociable, and helpful."⁴⁵ The net result of Benatar's claims of Pollyannaism, Overall observes, are positive:

If in the present I do not remember most of my negative experiences, my life now is better than it would be if I did remember them. If I think that the future will be good, even if I overestimate its goodness, that fact too makes my current life more pleasant. And if I have a positive assessment of my well-being, this surely means that in at least one important way, my subjective self-assessment, I am doing well.⁴⁶

To some extent, it appears that Overall argues that even if Benatar is correct in his claim that we are all deceived about how good life is, to the person to whom the view that life is good matters most, namely each subjective individual, deception is ultimately a benefit, and pointing it out may not help anyone.

But Overall's book is not simply a response to Benatar. It is an extensive exploration of the moral issues surrounding the choice to have a child. Overall explores a wide variety of reasons both to have and not to have children, arguing that people have a moral right to choose either position and not be interfered with. Her arguments are too extensive to outline here; I can only refer the interested reader to her book. However, I would like to note that she ultimately decides that the best reason to have a child is relational:

To become the biological parent of a child whom one will raise is to create a new relationship: not just the genetic one, but a psychological, physical, intellectual, and moral one. The parents seek out a connection to a new human being, a connection that not only will serve the needs of that new human being but will also make the parents themselves needy and vulnerable in a way they have never been before.⁴⁷

The best reason, therefore, to have a child is not the child itself—Overall expresses her fears that some children might be exploited or viewed as commodities⁴⁸—but the epiphenomenon that arises out of the existence of the child and the existence of the parent. Not only is a new entity brought into the world, but a new state of being is created: one that did not previously exist, is unique, and will have ramifications for not just the

child and parent but also their larger family and community.

Thus, equipped with a few of Overall's tools it becomes easier to see *Arrival* not as a naïve movie potentially derided by antinatalists, but as a pronatalist film that explores the agency of its main character, her willingness to embrace vulnerability, and the primacy of relationships. Clearly, by being unstuck in time, Louise is able to evaluate an entire life lived out, as Overall also encourages us to do. While an antinatalist such as Benatar might argue that Louise's choice to have Hannah can only arise from some perceived need on Louise's part, and not out of an altruistic desire to share life with Hannah, viewers are forced to reckon with Louise's ability to witness the totality of life and her foreknowledge of the consequences of her actions. In Louise's view, Hannah's life is worth living and thus worth starting, and while Hannah has no say in the matter, Louise is at the very least much more informed than the rest of us who choose a child, hoping to offer it the best the world has to offer.

Louise rejects Benatar's view of the asymmetry of pain and pleasure. For Louise, pain does not trump pleasure; the two are not mutually exclusive, as Benatar seems to indicate. In fact, Louise has the least Pollyanna view of a life anyone could have. She knows Hannah will die. Some may conclude that Louise's choice is abhorrent, as Ian does, for condemning a child to such a fate. Yet Louise has seen Hannah's entire life, and knows that while there will be pain, there will also be joy and love. Louise is much less Pollyanna than most of us who make decisions assuming that our children will be spared suffering. Louise's decision highlights her opinion that the existence of suffering does not negate the existence of good. She rejects an antinatalist position that sees pain and pleasure as mutually exclusive and accepts the idea that they are intertwined, coexisting, and perhaps even dependent upon each other. A complete life must include pain, and to believe otherwise is truly a Pollyanna position. But pain does not define existence, and to run from it seems less narratively satisfying, less rewarding, less human than embracing it. Louise's choice to have Hannah makes Louise vulnerable, and the consequences of that choice do not only affect Hannah. Louise chooses to suffer with Hannah, which is perhaps one of the essential elements of the kind of relationship that Overall identifies as the best reason for having children.⁴⁹

Arrival also recognizes some of Overall's other ethical viewpoints by giving us an ideal mother, one who is well-educated, well-informed, and economically independent. As stated previously, Louise has optimal agency

in choosing Hannah's life. While Ian is the instigator with his "Wanna make a baby" proposal, Louise chooses in the affirmative, ensuring Hannah will exist. The ultimate power of making that baby lies with Louise. Later in the film, once Ian leaves Louise, she becomes Hannah's primary caregiver, teacher, influencer. We do not see Ian with Louise at Hannah's deathbed. In fact we rarely see Ian with Hannah at all, only at the end of the film when he calls her "starstuff."⁵⁰ Ian seems to become a vehicle for ensuring Hannah's existence, then dissolves into a mere sidebar to the relationship Louise and Hannah have. He almost disappears after creating Hannah in the linear timeline. Thus, Louise virtually becomes the sole bearer of the relationship that has been created by having a child, and while Ian appears to have telephone interactions with Hannah, and perhaps visitation rights, Louise demonstrates her primacy in sustaining and caring for Hannah. Where the father has abdicated his position as caregiver, the mother readily accepts her role, and can do so independently of male support. Knowing that Ian would be unable to accept her choice, Louise demonstrates her ability to assert her agency in this choice. She chooses Hannah, knowing full well that the majority of parenting responsibilities and joys will fall on her. While some might argue that this is the default position of most mothers in the Western world, Louise *chooses* that position, rather than simply finding herself there. She is fully aware of her ability to independently provide for Hannah, makes the informed choice, and appears to have few regrets other than wishing Hannah would 'come back to [her]'.⁵¹

What Happened to Monday and Overpopulation

While *Arrival's* more pro-natal message—seen from the perspective of the mother—resists Benatar's assessment that any suffering is unacceptable, *What Happened to Monday's* bleaker outlook—seen from the viewpoint of the children—reinforces many of Benatar's positions while simultaneously rejecting his foundational premises. In this film, viewers are presented with a dystopic future around fifty years from now—about 2073, in which global overpopulation threatens the existence of all life on Earth. An effort to genetically engineer enough crops to feed the exploding population has the unintended side effect of greatly increasing multiple births, thereby exacerbating the population explosion. A Child Allocation Bureau directed by Nicollette Cayman (Glenn Close) has decreed that to control the world's human population all families will

be allowed to have only one child. Any siblings beyond the first child will be rounded up and put into cryosleep until such time as global resource problems have been solved and the extra population can be supported.⁵² A woman named Karen Settman defies the one child order and, without the help of her babies' anonymous father, chooses to give birth to septuplets in an illicit, underground hospital. When she dies in childbirth, her father, Terrence (Willem Dafoe) takes the seven sisters in and raises them to collectively adopt the Karen Settman identity (played at first by Clara Read and later by Noomi Rapace). Since there are seven sisters, they are named according to the days of the week, and eventually each sister will publicly take on the life of Karen Settman on the day of the week corresponding to their name, living at all other times within the confines of the family home and having no public existence. Having been trained by their grandfather to protect each other and to live an intensely cautious life, their existence is both limited and complicated. Their life gets worse when Monday falls in love with Adrian (Marwan Kenzari) and becomes pregnant with twins. Realizing that the existence of her siblings potentially threatens the lives of her own children, Monday makes a deal with Cayman that ensures she will become the only Karen Settman. While Monday adopts the identity, her sisters will presumably be consigned to cryosleep. The deal fails since, as viewers learn, Cayman is far from trustworthy. Not only are all the sisters except Tuesday and Thursday killed, but we learn that all the children supposedly put into cryosleep have been killed and incinerated. In the end Monday is herself killed, but she extracts a promise from Thursday to ensure that her twins will survive. We witness the twins developing in an artificial womb⁵³ surrounded by extensive shelves of infants who are presumably now allowed to exist in the wake of the repeal of Cayman's Child Allocation Act.⁵⁴

What Happened to Monday and Benatar

Cayman is clearly the character most aligned with the views of those antinatalists concerned with the social and environmental impact of having children, although even her radical ethical choices do not adopt Benatar's premise that humanity should be allowed to go extinct. In fact, her actions seem designed to ensure continued, if limited, procreation. Like Cayman, many non-parents who choose not to have children for environmental reasons do not generally feel that humanity should cease

to exist, such as those adults featured in *The Guardian* article mentioned early in the chapter. While Cayman's actions are designed to reduce the overall amount of suffering in the world—and she claims her policies have an apparent positive impact on reducing population and suffering as the number of European Federation live births per year drops from around two million at the introduction of the Child Allocation Act to around one hundred thousand, as we learn at the end of the film⁵⁵—she still clings to the belief that humanity must continue, as, apparently, do the sisters. Benatar does not make any claim that those who have the misfortune to exist should be relieved of that misfortune: once we exist it is unethical to take existence from us. Benatar believes humans should eventually become extinct, indeed we should never have existed, although he does not advocate taking extinction matters into our own hands: “Humans killing their own species to extinction is troubling for all the reasons killing is troubling.”⁵⁶ Instead, he advocates a “dying extinction” or “non-generative extinction”⁵⁷ in which we allow ourselves to eventually fade from existence, no longer procreating. This is where Cayman and Monday diverge from an ideal Benatarian situation—they still believe that humans have a right to continue as a species, albeit under severely controlled conditions in which Cayman makes the tough decisions about who lives and who dies for the greater benefit of future generations and in which Monday betrays her sisters to ensure her progeny's existence.

What Happened to Monday and Overall

Overall does not shy away from the tough decisions that face those who fear the problems caused by overpopulation. Indeed, Overall argues that the specter of overpopulation should be a factor in every choice to have a child. Recognizing that overpopulation poses a real threat to not only the quality of life of every person on the planet but also the very existence of every person, Overall suggests “that every individual adult has a moral responsibility to limit himself or herself to procreative replacement only.”⁵⁸ Her proposal is not at all a new one, but her framing of the argument better recognizes the agency of women than most proposals:

All persons get to (try to) have a child of “their own,” if they want one, and the value of every adult is implicitly endorsed through the fact that each one is allowed to reproduce herself or himself. Such a responsibility implies that every person is sufficiently valuable as to be worth replacing (even though a

one-child-per-person morality will eventually result in population decline, given that some people will have no children and some couples will choose to have only one).... Finally, “one child per person” is not the same as “two children per couple.” “One child per person” is preferable because it is not based on a sexist and heterosexist notion that women must necessarily be in a couple and that every couple must consist of a male and a female. “One child per person” recognizes the possibility that a single woman might procreate, as might two women in a committed relationship.⁵⁹

Overall’s suggestion would go a long way to begin to counter overpopulation if it was implemented in our present era, but for the world of *What Happened to Monday*, that suggestion comes too late. However, to her credit, Monday does not violate Overall’s guidelines. Monday appears to have avoided the extreme multiple pregnancy caused by genetically engineering crops, instead having only twins that will replace her and Adrian.

Monday’s lucky circumstances reveal that, like *Arrival*, *What Happened to Monday* features women who empower themselves to make their own reproductive choices. For Overall, empowering women’s choices is of the utmost importance:

As a feminist, I therefore take women’s bodily freedom (the absence of physical, legal, or social constraints on one’s decisions about one’s body) and autonomy (the capacity to be self-determining, especially with respect to one’s body) to be the sine qua non for women’s equality and full citizenship. The deontological basis for reproductive rights is that they are indispensable to protecting women’s personhood. Without moral recognition and legal protection of their bodily freedom and autonomy, women are little more than procreative slaves. It is essential to respect women’s bodily freedom and autonomy because it is simply wrong to subject women to forced reproduction; it is wrong to use women as a means to others’ reproductive goals. Such treatment violates their personhood.⁶⁰

Overall’s position stems largely from her engagement with the abortion debate. Being an advocate of a woman’s right to choose, she would likely side with Monday in this film, which features a government that forces women not to have children rather than insisting they have them.

In fact, *What Happened to Monday* works well as a film that explores a woman asserting her right to make her own reproductive choices. Through inverting the more familiar debates of whether a woman can choose an abortion or not, the film presents us with at least two women who defy government regulation to exert their own right to choose. In fact, much of the

emotional impact of the film seems to drive viewers to align their views with a woman's right to choose and to oppose a government's right to interfere in reproductive choices. The totalitarian impact of the Child Allocation Bureau's policies is an individualist's worst nightmare.

Karen Settman chooses an illegal multiple-birth clinic to have her septuplets in a scene that resembles an underground abortion clinic. Her daughter, Monday, also makes a choice to defy the government and give birth to twins. Monday diverges from Overall, and even from Benatar, when she privileges her own children over the rights of her sisters. While Overall identifies the relationship between parent and child as a primary motivation for having children, her concern for the impact that those children will have on other people through overpopulation and environmental impact reveals that one's relationship with one's children should not be created at the expense of others. Benatar shares Overall's concern for the welfare of other people in both his warnings against overpopulation and his admonishment that choosing to start a life is an entirely different conversation from choosing to end a life. Thus, whereas *Arrival* features a mother whose choice to have a child, while not entirely selfless, is at least sacrificial, *What Happened to Monday* delves into the repercussions of selfish reproductive choices.

What Happened to Monday and the Consequences of Selfish Choice

Karen Settman, by giving birth to seven selves, defies the Child Allocation Bureau's one child policy, while fiercely rejecting an antinatalist philosophy. While the world of *What Happened to Monday* anticipates the anxieties of those potential parents who hesitate to bring children into the world because of the negative political and environmental state of the world, the mother Karen Settman rejects such anxieties as grounds not to procreate. We can assume that in choosing to carry her septuplets to term, she did not anticipate her own death in that choice, or if she did, she assumed that her sacrifice would be 'worth it'. Nor does it seem that she understands the depth of suffering her choice will cause in the lives of those around her, including her daughters. Ultimately, her pro-natal choice results in her death, the burdening of her father, Terrence, and the arguably incomplete existence of her seven daughters. However, her choice does result in the seven sisters, whose existence will ultimately

bring about the end of Cayman's hegemony.

It is through the unfolding of the sisters' story that we most clearly see Benatar's antinatalist perspective come into focus, for the film is fraught with their suffering. Since each daughter only 'exists' as Karen Settman one day a week, they are unable to make autonomous decisions or individually choose the trajectory of their lives. While we see personality differences within the sisters' home life, when they enter the broader world of humanity, each sister is constrained to a role that they all share. As Terrence points out, "What happens to one of you happens to all."⁶¹ When a sister does assert autonomy, the results are catastrophic. As a child, Thursday loses the tip of her left pointer finger in an accident when she goes out to skateboard on a day that was not hers, and Terrence must amputate all the sisters' left pointer fingertips to prevent discovery. Later, as an adult, Monday falls in love, gets pregnant, and puts in motion her plan to become the only Karen Settman. Like her mother, Monday's determination to give birth to her children will greatly increase the net suffering of all the people in her life and culminate in her own death. Ultimately, every choice to have children in the film obviously increases suffering. This fact reinforces Benatar's views on the immorality of bringing new life into the world, yet the characters continuously insist on either their right to procreate without interference or their right to procreate at all.

The suffering brought about by choosing to give birth is compounded by Monday's belief that the lives of her own children are more valuable than the lives of her sisters. Although she claims that she didn't know her sisters would be killed, she seems prepared to take Thursday's life when confronted by her at Cayman's campaign launch party. As Monday herself lies dying after being shot, she begs of Thursday, "Promise me. Don't let them take them."⁶² Thursday never explicitly says, "I promise", but gives a slight nod in the moment she feels Monday's belly. Later, viewers witness Monday's twins growing in a tank. Gazing at the twins, Thursday, Tuesday, and Adrian contemplate their future. Thursday says, "Monday did it all for them. She wanted them to be safe." Tuesday, now Terry, replies, "Well, they will be."⁶³ While Terry, at least, seems to indicate an interest in taking responsibility for caring for the twins, Thursday—who now claims the name Karen Settman—appears less committed. Monday's choice to have children in defiance of the Child Allocation Act and her sisters' lives impacts her surviving sisters by requiring them to care for the children that Monday can no longer support. As with the sisters' own existence, the one who made the choice to

bring these children into existence indirectly forces others to care for the products of that choice, effectively disrupting the agency of the new caregivers. Choosing to be a parent is not only a sacrifice for the ones who make that choice, but also often winds up being a burden on others who did not.

Indeed, throughout the dystopian world of the film, choosing to be a parent, especially a mother, is a terrible choice. Mothers are often erased, as almost every mother we see dies before she has a chance to perform any typical maternal behavior. The only other obvious mother we see merely serves to display intense grief and to heighten viewers' sense of the injustice of the Child Allocation Act as her illegally conceived child is taken from her. Having children intensifies suffering for mothers, for the children they bear, and for the entire world.⁶⁴

Throughout the film, viewers are encouraged to believe that Cayman's and Monday's choices, which infringe on the rights of those around them, are immoral, that humans have a right to exist and procreate. We cheer with the sisters who survive at their victory in overthrowing the system and exposing Cayman, but the victory is shallow. Of Karen Settman's seven daughters, only two remain, and their lives are marred by the suffering brought about through maternal instincts. As that moment of triumph collapses, we are left with the images of those rows of infants. In the final scene of the film we are confronted with the overwhelming image of population growth as represented by the shelves of crying infants, and our views of the sisters' heroism are deconstructed by the harsh reality that Cayman's admittedly immoral acts were perhaps actually doing something good for the world. Ultimately, we are invited to ask ourselves who made the right choices in the film.

Final Thoughts on *Arrival*, *What Happened to Monday*, and Natal Choices

Compared to *What Happened to Monday*, *Arrival* provides a heartwarming answer to Benatar that simultaneously challenges and supports his views. The Heptapods indicate they will need us in 3,000 years, so Benatar's hopes of human extinction will not be fulfilled by then in the world of the film. Louise believes that the suffering is worth it—the joy of Hannah's life outweighs the suffering. We don't get to know what Hannah thinks, for she's simply an incidental character. We know Ian believes Louise made the wrong choice in choosing to have Hannah, and since Louise loses both Hannah and Ian, her net effect appears to be loss and

suffering. On the one hand, Louise demonstrates Benatar's great concern: we see her suffer a lot. On the other hand, *Arrival* interrogates one of the core premises of Benatar and other rejectionists by claiming that suffering is not purely bad—that life can only exist in a binary of either bad or good—but by claiming that life is both good and bad, and that complexity—and Overall's prized relationships—may be what makes life worth living.

What Happened to Monday more unambiguously supports Benatar's conclusions and Overall's concerns. The film shows us humanity's propensity for procreation, our biological drives that keep us making more babies. Characters in the film seem to act as though when choice is taken from them a human right is being stolen, and viewers root for the restoration of those rights. But by the end, we are left with the impression that the anti-population forces were at least partially correct. They claim to have improved the quality of life for many people, if we can believe their propaganda, but with the assumed removal of the one-child laws, the end of the world through overpopulation becomes alarmingly nigh. In *What Happened to Monday*, Benatar's and Overall's worst apocalyptic scenarios come true: unexamined, uncontrolled human reproduction that ultimately increases tremendous suffering and the impending collapse of the world due to too many people. While there are spots of joy in the film, they are overshadowed by the vast suffering created by people choosing to have children. The complexity of life—the reality that joy is always mingled with suffering—may make life not worth living.

Both films provide ample food for thought for those considering the possibility of bringing a child into the world. Thanks to our perceptions of free will, some of us will have to make a choice about procreation. Both films rightfully agree that immense suffering exists. But whereas *What Happened to Monday* offers a world in which joy and pleasure are vastly overwhelmed by pain and suffering, *Arrival* argues that suffering is an intrinsic part of life that seems to make life better. If we listen to the mothers in both films, babies are important. In *Arrival* choosing to have a child results in both pain and joy, yet in *What Happened to Monday* the choice to have a child might lead to glimpses of joy but inevitably leads to suffering. In the end, both films, along with Benatar and Overall, encourage us to reconsider the implications of an act that many of us take for granted or even celebrate, an act that is much, much more ambivalent than most of us would like to believe.

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- ¹ Genesis 1:28. *The ESV Bible*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2001, www.esv.org/ (accessed 2022-11-28).
- ² For a much more exhaustive exploration of the factors that contribute to the choice to have children or not, readers should explore the article “Childbearing intention and its associated factors: A systematic review,” which explores the vast ecosystem of influences that affect whether couples embrace or deny fertility: Mozghan Hashemzadeh, Mohammad Shariati, Ali Mohammad Nazari, and Afsaneh Keramat. Childbearing intention and its associated factors: A systematic review. *NursingOpen*. Vol 8, no. 5, 2021: 2354–2368. doi: 10.1002/nop2.849.
- ³ Christine Overall. *Why have children?* Cambridge: MIT press, 2012, p. 2.
- ⁴ Henderson, Richard. Employment outlook: 2010–2020. Industry employment and output projections to 2020. *Monthly Labor Review*, 2012-01, 65–83. *Bureau of Labor Statistics*. p. 70. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2012/01/art4full.pdf> (accessed 2018-04-13)
- ⁵ United Nations. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. 2015. https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf (accessed 2022-11-28).
- ⁶ Maggie Astor. No children because of climate change? Some people are considering it. *The New York Times*. 2018-02-05. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/05/climate/climate-change-children.html> (Accessed 2022-11-28).
- ⁷ Amy Fleming. Would you give up having children to save the planet? Meet the couples who have. *The Guardian*. 2018-6-20. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/20/give-up-having-children-couples-save-planet-climate-crisis> (accessed 2022-11-28).
- ⁸ Alexandra Sifferlin. More Women are Investing in IUD after President Trump’s Election. *Time*. 2017-01-26. time.com/4650190/iud-trump-election/ (accessed 2022-11-28).
- ⁹ Christina Cauterucci. IUD demand has risen 900 percent since the election, planned parenthood says. *Slate Magazine*. 2017-01-10. <https://slate.com/human-interest/2017/01/iud-demand-has-risen-900-percent-since-the-election-planned-parenthood-says.html> (accessed 2022-11-28).
- ¹⁰ An article in *The Washington Post* in 2018 by Petula Dvorak indicates that there is anecdotal evidence that Trump’s election had an impact on women’s choices to have children. Dvorak mentions a California therapist whose specialty is helping women make motherhood choices. The therapist tells Dvorak about a client who, shortly after Trump’s election, dropped out of her class, leaving a voice mail message that said, “When Trump was elected, I didn’t need your class to decide.” Petula Dvorak. The child-free life: Why so many American women are deciding not to have kids. *The Washington Post*. 2018-05-31. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/the-child-free-life-why-so-many-american-women-are-deciding-not-to-have-kids/2018/05/31/89793784-64de-11e8-a768-ed043e33f1dc_story.html (accessed 2022-11-28).
- ¹¹ As an opinion piece in the *Los Angeles Times* reveals, “In ‘Mein Kampf,’ published in 1925, [Hitler] celebrated the ideology [of sterilization in the United States]. ‘There is today one state,’ wrote Hitler, ‘in which at least weak beginnings toward a better conception [of citizenship] are noticeable. Of course, it is not our model German Republic, but the United States.’ Hitler’s Reich deployed its own sterilization laws, nearly identical to those in the United States, within six months of taking power in 1933.” Mark G. Bold. It’s time for California to compensate its forced-sterilization victims. *Los Angeles Times*. 2015-03-05. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0306-bold-forced-sterilization-compensation-20150306-story.html#:~:text=California%20was%20the%20third%20state,in%20North%20Carolina%20and%20Virginia> (accessed 2022-11-28).

- ¹² John Huntington. Science Fiction and the Future. *College English*. Vol. 37, no. 4, 1975: 345–352. www.jstor.org/stable/376232, p. 345.
- ¹³ Saying science fiction is the literature of the future may be a bit hackneyed. With an abundance of texts that focus on time travel, alternate worlds and histories, let alone a juggernaut of a media franchise that takes place “a long time ago,” saying sf is all about the future would be misinformed. However, failing to acknowledge that sf is a genre that often speculates about the future is arguably naïve.
- ¹⁴ Obvious exceptions include dystopian novels and films such as the films *Logan’s Run* (1973), based on the 1967 novel of the same name by William F. Nolan and George Clayton, and *Soylent Green* (1973), based on Harry Harrison’s 1966 novel *Make Room! Make Room!*
- ¹⁵ Denis Villeneuve, (dir.), *Arrival* (Paramount Pictures, 2016).
- ¹⁶ Villeneuve, (dir.), *Arrival*, (1:48:39-1:48:58).
- ¹⁷ Benatar, David. *Better never to have been: The harm of coming into existence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. p. 1.
- ¹⁸ Benatar. *Better never to have been*, p.1
- ¹⁹ Benatar. *Better never to have been*, p.30.
- ²⁰ Benatar. *Better never to have been*, p.30.
- ²¹ Benatar. *Better never to have been*, p. 30. Of course, Benatar argues that suffering cannot be boiled down to a simple equation, for one must consider the intensity of one’s pain and the order in which pleasure and pain appear in one’s life. Still, his initial simple table provides the foundation for his later, more complex arguments.
- ²² I must acknowledge that Benatar is not original in his view that life is filled with suffering. No one would deny that claim. Where his view becomes different than most who recognize life’s pain is in his claim that we commit an immoral act by bringing another life into this painful world. Benatar is more preoccupied with preventing pain than on how to cope with it.
- ²³ Villeneuve, (dir.), *Arrival*, (1:48:39-1:48:58).
- ²⁴ Villeneuve, (dir.), *Arrival*, (1:46:26-1:46:41).
- ²⁵ Benatar. *Better never to have been*, p. 95.
- ²⁶ Villeneuve, (dir.), *Arrival*, (1:49:51-1:50:30).
- ²⁷ The film runs for about one hour and fifty-eight minutes, and Hannah appears in 462 seconds of it.
- ²⁸ Villeneuve, (dir.), *Arrival*, (1:32-1:35).
- ²⁹ Villeneuve, (dir.), *Arrival*, (1:46:07-1:46:17).
- ³⁰ Benatar. *Better never to have been*, p. 2.
- ³¹ Benatar. *Better never to have been*, p. 1.
- ³² Ted Chiang. Story of your life. In *Nebula awards showcase* 2001, Robert Silverberg (ed), 1–48. San Diego: Harcourt, 2001, p. 36.
- ³³ Chiang. The story of your life, p. 41.
- ³⁴ Benatar. *Better never to have been*, p. 48.
- ³⁵ Benatar. *Better never to have been*, p. 224.
- ³⁶ Benatar. *Better never to have been*, p. 65.

³⁷ However, one wonders if a fall would be more preventable than a terminal disease. Louise's failure to intervene in Hannah's fall signals her acceptance of Hannah's death as somehow predetermined and raises questions about Louise's culpability in Hannah's death in the novella.

³⁸ Overall. *Why have children?* p. 173.

³⁹ Overall. *Why have children?* p. 173.

⁴⁰ Overall. *Why have children?* p. 8.

⁴¹ Overall. *Why have children?* p. 109.

⁴² Overall. *Why have children?* p. 107.

⁴³ Overall. *Why have children?* p. 108.

⁴⁴ Overall. *Why have children?* p. 108.

⁴⁵ David G. Myers. The funds, friends, and faith of happy people. *American Psychologist*. Vol. 55, no. 1, Jan. 2000: 56. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.56., pp. 57–58.

⁴⁶ Overall. *Why have children?* p. 108.

⁴⁷ Overall. *Why have children?* p. 216.

⁴⁸ Overall. *Why have children?* p. 211.

⁴⁹ These sentiments resonate with those Friedrich Nietzsche expressed in *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. For Nietzsche, pain is not something to be avoided, happiness and freedom from pain are not necessarily desirable goals: "You want, if possible (and no "if possible" is crazier) to *abolish suffering*. And us? – it looks as though *we* would prefer it to be heightened and made even worse than it has ever been! Well-being as you understand it – that is no goal; it looks to us like an *end!* – a condition that immediately renders people ridiculous and despicable – that makes their decline into something *desirable!* The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering – don't you know that *this* discipline has been the sole cause of every enhancement in humanity so far?" (emphasis Nietzsche's). Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond good and evil: Prelude to a philosophy of the future*. Cambridge texts in the history of philosophy, Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2002, pp. 116–117. <https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/Nietzsche-Beyond-Good-and-Evil.pdf>. Curiously, Benatar has no overt response to Nietzsche's philosophy; Nietzsche does not make an appearance in *Better Never to Have Been*.

⁵⁰ Villeneuve, (dir.), *Arrival*, (1:47:23-1:48:00).

⁵¹ Villeneuve, (dir.), *Arrival*, (3:37:26-3:43:36).

⁵² Birth control and abortion are rarely, if ever, mentioned in the film, so choice in *What Happened to Monday* appears to be extremely limited.

⁵³ The end of the film provides the first appearance of ectogenesis, and the presence of the artificial womb seems more of a convenient plot point to ensure the survival of the twins beyond the death of Monday than a readily available form of procreation or birth/population control. It is not outside the realm of possibility that infants conceived through ectogenesis might not be affected by the multiple-birth side effect of genetically engineered food, assuming the mother's body is the site of the side effects. However, if ectogenesis solved the problem of the population explosion, we would not have a plot, and viewers are left wondering why Monday didn't choose ectogenesis in the first place to hide her pregnancy and ensure the safety of herself and her sisters.

⁵⁴ Tommy Wirkola, (dir.), *What happened to Monday* (Netflix, 2017).

⁵⁵ Viewers might question Cayman's statistics for two reasons: 1. Do her numbers account for unofficial babies born to mothers such as Karen Settman? At the end of the film, a reporter observes that after the repeal of the Child Allocation Act, "Pregnant women are coming out of hiding in droves" (1:56:28–1:56:344). 2. Given her other unethical choices, what guarantee do we have that she is telling the truth in a political rally designed to make her look good?

⁵⁶ Benatar. *Better never to have been*, p. 196.

⁵⁷ Benatar. *Better never to have been*, p. 195.

⁵⁸ Overall. *Why have children?* p. 183.

⁵⁹ Overall. *Why have children?* pp. 183–84.

⁶⁰ Overall. *Why have children?* p. 21.

⁶¹ Wirkola, (dir.), *What happened to Monday*, (23:28–23:30).

⁶² Wirkola, (dir.), *What happened to Monday*, (1:54:46–1:54:57).

⁶³ Wirkola, (dir.), *What happened to Monday*, (1:58:12–1:58:21).

⁶⁴ Fathers also suffer in the film, but at least their participation in procreation generally does not kill them.

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