

A Sino-African perspective and the morality of procreation

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Funding information

Hunan Province Philosophy and Social Science Base Project, Grant/Award Number: 21JD008; Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities, Grant/Award Number: 531118010426; Guizhou Provincial Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project, Grant/Award Number: 21GZGX31

Abstract

Current studies of anti/-natalism have been carried out mainly in the context of western philosophy. In this article, we offer a pro-natalist view based on Confucian and Afro-communitarian philosophy (Sino-African ethics). Grounded in this Sino-African perspective, we uphold that there is, at least, one reason to believe that not only is it morally permissible to procreate, but also that on some occasions, procreating is what morality prescribes. Specifically, we contend that, from a Sino-African perspective, procreating sometimes is the best way to fulfil duties of reciprocity and care towards our parents.

KEYWORDS

anti-natalism and pro-natalism, filial piety, partiality, reciprocity, Sino-African philosophy

1 | INTRODUCTION

Environmental catastrophes, wars, and other evils that haunt contemporary societies have raised the question of whether it is morally justifiable to have children. In addition to this, life tends to be difficult, involving significant suffering which, once more, challenges the morality of bringing children into the world. In the last few decades, anti-natalist literature, which contends that it is immoral to bring new beings into the world, has significantly increased. Broadly speaking, anti-natalists tend to contend that it is a harm to bring beings into existence and, resultantly, it is *always immoral* to have children.¹ In this article, we wish to show that there is, at least, one major justification for procreation from the Sino-African perspective by appealing to the duties of reciprocity and care towards elders grounded in a combination that articulates Confucian and Afro-communitarian value systems, which together we call Sino-African philosophy. We do not mean to contend that this view is representative of all forms of Confucianism and Afro-communitarianism, but we use the term

to mean a view that combines ideas from two distinct philosophical traditions.

To clarify, there are several reasons why we combine Confucianism and Afro-communitarianism. Firstly, existing studies of anti/-natalism are carried out primarily from a perspective of western philosophy. Confucianism and Afro-communitarianism as non-western ethics have much to offer on the topic. Besides, since they are both pro-natalist and communally driven ethics, they offer complementary perspectives on procreation. Secondly and relatedly, recent scholarship has been trying to decolonise research and part of what this entails is to listen to the voices of the Global South, which is what we are doing in this article²; Thirdly, while the population of China is declining, the African population generally remains stable or is increasing. This suggests that African philosophy is not some exotic enterprise but actually an important partner that has something valuable to offer Chinese philosophy. Indeed, much of African philosophy today tries to show how its concepts, theories, etc., can be relevant to the world

¹We are aware that some scholars classified as anti-natalists do not contend that it is always wrong to procreate. We address this issue in Section 3.

²Wareham, C. S. (2017). A duty to explore african ethics? *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 20, 857–872; de Sousa Santos, B. (2018). *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*, Durham and London: Duke University Press Books; Cordeiro-Rodrigues, L. (2022). African higher education and decolonizing the teaching of philosophy. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 54(11), 1854–1867.

and beyond Africa³; as such, several works have been produced in metaphysics, logic, ethics and political philosophy, which aim to show the world of relevance of the field.⁴ Showing the relevance of African philosophy to addressing the ethical and political problem of population decline is one instance of this decolonial enterprise. Fourthly, Africa and China are becoming strong partners in terms of cooperation, and as such, to treat each part as equals means to understand the limits and concerns of each part rather than carrying out one-sided policy or policy that simply relies on one's own perception of the partner rather than their voice. This is not to suggest that one of the parts has done so, but instead to point out that to listen to the other parts' voice is a necessary requirement to treat others as equals. So, to do comparative work like the one done in this paper allows one to encounter strategies for public policymaking which are liberating for both parts. This is the case because this comparative work helps to find a common moral ground for public policy. Fifthly, this cooperation between countries from the Global South is, in fact, a pathway to liberation and resistance to the Global North. Pan-Africanists, such as Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Mário Pinto de Andrade and Amílcar Cabral, have routinely emphasized the importance of unity between the oppressed in order to forward a new global order.⁵ Our paper aims precisely at doing that by uniting African and Chinese philosophy to solve a moral problem.

However, we do not aim to fully defend a Sino-African ethic vis-à-vis all other ethics, including Western ethics. Instead, our argument is that this Sino-African ethic is important due to its understanding of parental relationships, which challenges anti-natalism in ways that are underexplored. In particular, the thesis advanced here differs from previous work in various ways. Some pro-natalist perspectives have been advanced before, for instance, there are popular religious arguments (like in Judeo-Christianity), where procreation is permissible as it is tied to a divine mandate to reproduce (in Genesis 1:28; 9:7). There are also arguments that deny harm since the life a child is born into is specifically the only life that that particular child could have and, by extension, procreation is not a deprivation. Other arguments such as that advanced by Lura Purdy⁶ argue that procreation is permissible, especially once certain conditions of life

are met. Some have even argued that anti-natalism based on potential disability is morally wrong, as it implicitly dehumanises people with disabilities. Our view differs from previous pro-natalist perspectives due to the fact that we uphold a pro-natalist perspective based on under-explored Sino-African philosophy. This perspective is often neglected by anti-natalists in their normative calculations about why one ought not to procreate.

To forward our argument, we divide the article into four sections. In Section 1, we outline the key values of Sino-African ethics: filial piety and partiality, communitarianism, and the special duties towards one's parents that result from these. In Section 2, we contend that the Sino-African point of view we defend implies that to avoid a significant moral loss, and to be able to reciprocate and take care of the welfare of one's parents, one's best moral option is often to have children. Sections 3 and 4 address potential anti-natalist objections to our theory and our responses to these points. In Section 3, we provide various arguments against our views from an anti-natalist perspectives and in Section 4 we respond to these objections.

2 | A SINO-AFRICAN VIEWPOINT

One of the core values of Confucian philosophy is *xiao* (孝 filial piety/family reverence). This can be defined as a key virtue which encompasses respect and care for one's parents.⁷ According to *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字, the earliest dictionary in China, *xiao* means being good at serving one's parents (*shan shi fu mu zhe* 善事父母者). When Meng Yizi asked about it, Confucius replied, "Do not disobey," which he further explained to Fan Chi as "When your parents are alive, serve them in accordance with rites; when they pass away, bury them in accordance with the rites and sacrifice them in accordance with the rites".⁸ On the one hand, *xiao*, i.e., being good at serving one's parents, is not a periodical or intermittent thing. Different from interactions with others, one should serve his parents well no matter if they are alive or not, which implies one's responsibility to continuing serving this tradition when they pass away. On the other hand, there are rules to follow in performing *xiao*. One should not disobey the rites in serving one's parents.⁹ Therefore, *xiao* requires not only providing nourishment but also being respectful towards one's parents, wherein the respectful attitude is more crucial an element than material support and the ostensible obedience to rites. For Confucians, this care and respect for one's parents implies that one has *special duties towards them* that s/he does not have towards others.

Although Afro-communitarians do not usually employ the term "filial piety", the idea of respect and special duties for one's parents is

³Metz, T. (2022). *A Relational Moral Theory: African Ethics in and beyond the Continent*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press; Giddy, P. (2023). In J. O. Chimakonam & L. Cordeiro-Rodrigues (Eds.), *Basic Intuitions in African Ethics*. Bloomsbury Academic.

⁴Chimakonam, J. O. (2019). *Ezumezu: A System of Logic for African Philosophy and Studies* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Springer; Attoe, A. D. (2022). *Groundwork for a New Kind of African Metaphysics: The Idea of Predeterministic Historicity*, Palgrave Macmillan Cham; Matolino, B. (2019). *Afro-Communitarian Democracy*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books; Molefe, M. (2020). *An African Ethics of Personhood and Bioethics: A Reflection on Abortion and Euthanasia*, Palgrave Macmillan Cham.

⁵Cabral, A. (2016). In D. Wood (Ed.), *Resistance and Decolonization* (transl. D. Wood), New York & London: Rowman & Littlefield; Nyerere, J. K. (1969). *Freedom and Unity: Uhuru Na Umoja: Essays on Socialism*, Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press Tanzania Ltd; Nkrumah, K. (1965). *Neo-Colonialism The Last Stage of Imperialism*, London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd; de Andrade, M. P. (1997). *Origens do nacionalismo africano: Continuidade e ruptura nos movimentos unitários emergentes da luta contra a dominação colonial portuguesa, 1911-1961*, Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote.

⁶Purdy, L. (1995). In J. Callahan (Ed.), *Reproduction, Ethics and the Law*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

⁷Li, C. (1997). Shifting perspectives: Filial morality revisited. *Philosophy East and West*, 47(2), 211-232.

⁸See the *Analects* 2.5. 孟懿子問孝。子曰：「無違。」樊遲御，子告之曰：「孟懿子問孝於我，我對曰『無違』。」樊遲曰：「何謂也？」子曰：「生，事之以禮；死，葬之以禮，祭之以禮。」 Texts and translations of the *Analects* in this essay are based on Zhu 2012 and Slingerland 2003.

⁹Confucius. (2003). *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, (transl. E. Slingerland). Hackett Classics Series edition. (p. 10). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

part of the idea of the morality of partiality. Partiality is understood, in the morality realm, as the privileging of relationships with those who are significant others to oneself. This idea is captured, for example, by the Igbo proverb 'Enyi áká nwanne', which translates as 'Faithful friendship is never better than a blood brother'.¹⁰ This proverb suggests that there are special duties towards one's family. Indeed, according to some Afro-communitarians, not only is there nothing wrong with privileging significant others (which include mostly family members) but it is, in fact, a duty to do so. Relationships with our significant others ought to have moral priority. The closer one's relationship, the stronger the duty towards it.¹¹ In principle, the partiality tenet entails that existing and close relationships, as well as relationships of longstanding, have moral importance over future potential bonds and non-longstanding relationships like relationships with foreigners and non-relatives. One relevant Southern African saying here is; Family first and charity begins at home.¹² Another important saying is the Igbo 'Onuru ube nwanne agbala oso', which means 'Don't ignore the cries of your siblings'.¹³ In the Afro-communitarian perspective, this duty is extended to all family members, but as our argument is about special duties towards parents, in this section we will focus only on the implications for parents.¹⁴

The ideas of partiality and filial piety suggest that, from Confucian and Afro-communitarian perspectives, there are moral grounds for privileging significant others. But what arguments are provided to support this moral perspective? Confucians and Afro-communitarians offer a variety of arguments in favor of giving moral priority to one's family. One argument that is grounded in Chinese and African ethics is *intuition*; most of us *intuitively* consider that we have special duties towards our significant others that we do not have towards strangers. For example, we may have a special duty to take care of our parents when they are sick and unable to take care of themselves, but not the parents of other people; or at least we do not normally feel morally compelled to care for the parents of other people, especially if this will prevent us from caring for our parents.¹⁵ In the case of Confucians, they regard *xiao* as a matter of course, the so-called "constancy of the heavenly cycles" (*tian zhi jing* 天之經) and "the appropriate responsiveness of the earth" (*di zhi yi* 地之義), which are expressions of the ultimate justifications of anything that is rightful and moral, and thus "the proper code of the people" (*min zhi xing* 民之行). For Mencius, *xiao* is innate to human beings. According to this view, children instinctively and spontaneously love and respect their parents and elders without being taught. Children will act in respectful and caring ways towards their parents.¹⁶ In the Afro-

communitarian tradition, it is likewise understood that it is intuitively plausible to privilege those who are significant to ourselves over others, as family is the most important of social units.¹⁷

This Sino-African viewpoint also considers that there are special duties that need to be carried out towards one's parents due to the value of *reciprocity*. The reason why a person becomes who she is, is partly due to the efforts, education, and relationship she has with her parents. In the Afro-communitarian ethic, this is best expressed by the maxim 'I am because we are' or the Nguni maxim, *umuntu, ngumuntu ngabantu* (A person is a person through other persons): one's identity is very much dependent on what the other person is, and this is specially the case with respect to one's parents and one's community. For Afro-communitarians, ontologically speaking, one's identity is always connected to others and, therefore, whatever one is, is because of the other; this entails a moral duty to reciprocate for the good one has brought to oneself.¹⁸ One idea that expresses this is the term *Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu*. The common West African art motif of the Siamese Crocodile that aims to represent social reality expresses the idea that is contained in *Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu*. This art motif represents two crocodile heads that share the same stomach; hence everything one crocodile head eats, affects the other. This ontological connection implies a variety of moral norms, but relevant here is the idea that one identity is dependent on the other and, therefore, there is a responsibility and a debt that one owes the other.¹⁹ The Igbo proverb 'Onye ji onye n'ala, ji onwe ya' which translates as 'He who hold someone down is holding himself down'²⁰ also emphasizes this idea of continuity and interdependency. According to this proverb, when someone acts in bad ways towards others is also acting in bad ways towards oneself. This is because people are ontologically connected and one action towards others will always or at least most of the time also affect oneself.

In the Confucian tradition, children are always in debt to their parents, given the fact that parents give life to their children and, in most cases, if not all, take care of them throughout their developing years. It would be immoral and inhuman for one to forget the great kindness and benefits received from his/her parents. For example, it is recorded in the *Analects* 17.21 that when Zai Wo asked about the three-year mourning period, which he regarded as impractical and counterproductive, and suggested replacing it with a one-year mourning period, he commented, "Surely one year is enough. If the gentleman refrains from practicing ritual for three years, the rites will surely fall into ruin; if he refrains from music for three years, this will surely be disastrous for music. After the lapse of a year the old grain

¹⁰Ibekwe, O. H. (2017). *1,000 Igbo Proverbs: A Compilation*, Independently published (p. 4).

¹¹Molefe, M. (2016). African ethics and partiality. *Phronimon*, 17, 104–122; Molefe, op. cit. note 4 (iv); Cordeiro-Rodrigues, L., & Ewuoso, C. A. (2021). A relational approach to rationing in a time of pandemic. *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 56, 409–429.

¹²Ramose, M. B. (2003). The Ethics of Ubuntu. In P. H. Coetzee & A. P. Roux (Eds.), *The African Philosophy Reader*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

¹³Ibekwe, op. cit. note 10, p. 118.

¹⁴We do not claim here that all African theories are partial.

¹⁵Molefe, op. cit. note 11 (i); Molefe, op. cit. note 4 (iv).

¹⁶Mengzi. (2008). *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, (transl. B. W. van Norden). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

¹⁷Metz, M. (2012). An african theory of moral status: A relational alternative to individualism and holism. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 15(3), 387–402.

¹⁸Ewuoso, C., & Hall, S. (2019). Core aspects of ubuntu: A systematic review. *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law*, 12(2), 93–103; Agada, A. (2019). Rethinking the metaphysical questions of mind, matter, freedom, determinism, purpose and the mind-body problem within the pansychist framework of consolationism. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 38(1), 1–16.

¹⁹Cordeiro-Rodrigues, L. (2020). Toward a decolonized healthcare ethics: Colonial legacies and the siamese crocodile. *Developing World Bioethics*, 20(3), 118–119.

²⁰Ibekwe, op. cit. note 10.

has been used up, while the new grain has ripened, and the four different types of tinder have all been drilled in order to rekindle the fire. One year is surely long enough." Confucius, after acknowledging that Zai Wo would feel comfortable enjoying luxury food and clothes after a one-year mourning period, although this would be discourteous according to the rites, remarked that he was "lacking in Goodness (*bu ren* 不仁)." The reason Confucius gave for this criticism, is that, "A child is completely dependent upon the care of his parents for the first three years of his life — this is why the three-year mourning period is the common practice throughout the world. Did Zai Wo not receive three years of care from his parents?" While the three-year mourning is a way to express one's gratitude towards his late parent for the love and care received, Zai Wo's proposal of a one-year mourning period signifies that he lacked "a feeling of benevolence (*ren'en* 仁恩) towards his parents".²¹

More importantly, for Confucians, a person does not exist in isolation but in relationships and interactions with others, he or she is thus a "role-bearing person," a term borrowed from Henry Rosemont, Jr. As Rosemont addressed, on the one hand, "there can be no me in isolation, to be considered abstractly: I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others," and these roles "weave, for each of us, a unique pattern of personal identity, such that if some of my roles change, others will of necessity change also, literally making me a different person".²² Therefore, role-bearing persons mutually constitute and complete each other, for they are cultivated through interacting with specific others. Note also that the roles that one ought to perform are relative and changeable. For example, the role of a 'mother' only exists in the mother-child relationship. To develop into and maintain a positive relationship, requires constitutors of the relation act in line with their specific responsibilities endorsed by their roles.²³

It is important to point out that we do not take these theories at face value. We do not claim that we owe the reverence that, for example, Confucians often have for their parents. Instead, our point is simply that there are good reasons for being partial towards our parents and, thereby, enact special duties towards them. More precisely, we uphold that there are reasons for being partial towards one's parents, that there is indeed some degree of respect we owe our parents. Much of what we are is because of them and we should reciprocate.

3 | RECIPROCITY, NON-IDEAL THEORY, AND THE ETHICS OF PROCREATION

The above ethic implies that there are good moral reasons to have children. We do not wish to go as far as claiming that there is a duty, but simply that, in some situations, morality points in the direction

where it is not morally impermissible to have children. In fact, having children seems, in many cases, the best moral option available. That is because grandchildren can potentially take an important role in their grandparents' lives, offering help in a very *pragmatic and objective* way. Grandchildren can indeed serve as a bond between one's family of origin and a person's current life by either inviting one's parents in to take care of the grandchildren or making contact and communication with parents more frequent. Besides being involved in childcare, the elderly play a helpful role within the family unit, which in turn gives them a sense of achievement and belonging. Grandchildren also bring spiritual comfort to the elderly. Often, one of the best moments experienced by grandparents happens when they actually spend time with their grandchildren. It is not unusual that grandparents wish to continue living in a fruitful way, to have joy is to feel they have a purpose and are not a burden to others; one meaningful way to understand themselves as not being burden is to participate in the education of their grandchildren. Grandparents who spend time taking care of their grandchildren have a lower risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.²⁴ Spending time with their grandchildren also reduces the risk of depression and other mental imbalances caused by loneliness and isolation. Note that these problems significantly affect elders in the contemporary world. Precisely, some scholars have found that suicide cases tend to be higher amongst older adults, and are closely associated with depression. One key contributing factor (to depression) in elders is the curtailment of daily activities.²⁵ It seems intuitive that increasing their daily activities, namely engaging these elders in childcare, can help to offset or serve as a protective factor against depression. In fact, some grandparents have reported that "grandchildren bring something of unique value into their lives that gives them an additional *raison d'être* and contributes to their health and longevity".²⁶

Given the limited number of activities that can be enjoyed by elders due to factors such as limited finances, health issues etc., there is not an abundance of ways to find meaning in life and keep up good mental health. So, a great source of routine meaning in life and happiness for grandparents is linked with raising grandchildren. This is not just because of the lack of alternatives but also due to the great significance that tends to be given in various cultures with regards to engaging in meaningful activities with family, and the continuation of one's family as a sign of having lived a meaningful life. It is intuitive, we believe, that most people would likely find more meaning in their lives by helping with their grandchildren's education than in, say, learning a new language at age seventy.

²¹Mengzi, op. cit. note 16, p. 210.

²²Rosemont, H., & Ames, R. T. (2008). *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*, University of Hawaii Press, 52–53.

²³Sun, Q. (2019). Relationship Between Confucian Ethics and Care Ethics: A Reflection, Rejection, and Reconstruction. *Journal of East-West Thought*, 9, 53–66.

²⁴Burn, K. F., Henderson, V. W., Ames, D., Dennerstein, L., & Szoek, C. (2014). Role of grandparenting in postmenopausal women's cognitive health: Results from the women's healthy aging project. *Menopause*, 21(10), 1069–1074.

²⁵Fiske, A., Loebach Wetherell, J., & Gatz, M. (2009). Depression in older adults. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 5, 363–389; Jeste, N. D., Hays, J. C., & Steffens, D. C. (2006). Clinical correlates of anxious depression among elderly patients with depression. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 90(1), 37–41.

²⁶Brooks, F., Klemera, E., Offredy, M., Hill, C., Cook, L., & Clark, R. (2009). *Do Grandparents Matter?: The Impact of Grandparenting on the Wellbeing of Children*, University of Hertfordshire/Family Matters Institute, p. 3.

With respect to the continuation of the family, in the African context, individuals often have to procreate because having a great number of children is understood as a sign of success and, indeed, is seen as contributing to the good of the community.²⁷ Amongst the Igbo people of South-East Nigeria, a man who fails to produce a heir is perceived as struggling to remain an ancestor, as the individuals (his/her descendants) who are supposed to remember him/her after his/her demise would be limited, by virtue of the lack of an heir. As Mbiti and Menkiti suggest, it is this lack of remembrance that leads to a “second death”.²⁸ This is why names like *Ikemefuna* (my lineage will endure to the end of time) and *Ahamefuna* (never will my name disappear), in the Igbo tradition, for instance, reveal a strong inclination for the need to produce offspring based on the need to potentially sustain ancestorhood. Indeed, the average Igbo believes that to die childless is to drift away into oblivion – the second death. Similarly, it is commonly understood in Confucian societies that the more descendants, then the more the blessings. Except for practical considerations such as providing more labor for a family, having children in Confucianism has much deeper moral grounds.²⁹ In both these societies, the failure to have grandchildren sometimes constitutes a great moral loss to one's parents.

Additionally, it is not uncommon for grandchildren to perform a variety of other forms of family labor (analogous or not to employed labour).³⁰ A variety of functions are performed by grandchildren in taking care of their grandparents; some of these include taking them to the doctor, helping them adapt to new technologies, helping with mobility and administrative issues and so forth. These are all examples of how relevant grandchildren are to pragmatically aid grandparents, a function that perhaps no-one else can perform given that they are uniquely and specially well placed to offer such protection.

Taking this on board, what the partiality and reciprocity arguments imply is that because we generally believe we owe more to our parents because we ought to reciprocate what they did for us, and having children is precisely a realistic way to reciprocate and ensure one's parents' welfare, then we have good moral reasons to do so. It is often the case that even if there could be a theoretical case whereby there were other ways to ensure welfare of one's parents, the *non-ideal reality* is that it is often the case that other ways are not available. Not only do governments usually fail to provide (for whatever reason) a satisfactory level of necessary welfare, but also the people around who are not significant others have limited availability. Hence, it falls especially to grandchildren to perform these caring functions.

Thus, if not having children entails that one fails to provide adequate aid to one's parents, reciprocate one's parents actions, or is a great moral loss, even ballast against life becoming meaningless and, thereby, causing great suffering, then it is not morally impermissible to have children. Furthermore, it seems that this is what morality requires us to do. That is, there may be situations where to avoid a great loss or to reciprocate and take care of one's own parents, one is morally permitted to have children. This is because in the non-ideal world that we live in, it is often the case that having children is the only or the most feasible possibility for fulfilling reciprocity, providing care for the welfare of one's parents, and helping them find meaning in life.

This of course does not mean one ought to be forced to do so. Forced procreation is clearly an abuse of authority and for prescribing a duty to procreate then more information is necessary.

4 | THE ANTI-NATALIST CRITIQUE

In this section, we examine some criticisms that can be levelled against our view from the anti-natalist perspective. These include the consent-harm argument, the child as a means to an end, the argument from a lack of obligation, the adoption argument and the natural disaster argument. Having outlined these arguments, we respond to them in the next section.

4.1 | The consent-harm argument

Anti-natalists like David Benatar, Seana Shiffrin, and John Broome, uphold that procreation is morally impermissible because it constitutes a harm and because it is a harm there are both deontological and consequentialist reasons for not procreating. The badness in living outweighs any benefit, either to the living or those who birthed them. Life's pleasures may be good to have once alive, but this will be at the cost of life's misfortune, since the fact of birth necessarily entails harm. Some or most people may think that their lives are good and worth living but this evaluation is problematic in different ways. First, the assessment arises from biases in favor of optimism that often make humans overestimate or underestimate the quality of their lives, and act in favour of the reality of human adaptation that can cause our perceptions of what is good to drop as we adapt.³¹ Reflections from hedonism, desire-fulfilment and objective list theories all yield the same conclusion whereby the harm of procreation is serious enough to establish it as always being immoral. Most people will experience negative mental states such as thirst or hunger in their lifetime, but which they tend not to remember because of ‘Pollyanna thinking’ (that is, the tendency to focus on the

²⁷ Metz, op. cit. note 3; Attoe, op. cit. note 4 (ii).

²⁸ Mbiti, J. S. (1990). *African Religions & Philosophy*, 2nd revised & enlarged edition. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; Menkiti, I. (1984). Person and Community in African Traditional Thought. In R. A. Wright (Ed.), *African Philosophy: An Introduction* (pp. 171–181). Lanham: University Press of America.

²⁹ Rosemont & Ames, op. cit. note 22, p. 83.

³⁰ Donaldson, S., & Kymlicka, W. (2011). *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (1st ed.). Oxford: University of Oxford Press.

³¹ Aleksandrova-Yankulovska, S. (2019). Rivka Weinberg: The risk of a lifetime: How, when, and why procreation may be permissible. *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, 40, 67–73; Visser, R. P. (2018). *Keep Our Eggs in Earth's Basket: The Anti-Natalist Case against Space Colonisation*. University of the Witwatersrand.

pleasant aspects of life more than the unpleasant ones). Every new life, as Harrison clarifies, can expect to suffer one form of harm or another.³² They will suffer, or may have already suffered, frustration, which is sometimes due to unfulfilled desires. Even with fulfilled desires, the pleasure that often comes with this is temporary. The worst human pains and sufferings tend to endure longer, and are more brutal than the best human pleasures. On this account, our best lives are really bad lives since there is really no overall net advantage to human existence. Human existence tend to be closer to hell than heaven.³³

Anti-natalists, like Benatar, also contend that life is always a harm on the basis of an axiological asymmetry between a negation or absence of harm and a negation or absence of benefit. A negation of benefit is bad only if there is someone who is deprived of the benefits, whereas a negation of harm is always good, even when there is no one to benefit from it. In Benatar's opinion, "the avoidance of the bad [harm] by never existing is a real advantage over existence, whereas the loss of certain goods [benefits] by not existing is not a real disadvantage over never existing".³⁴ In other words, the harm that accrues from procreation outweighs the benefits one loses by not existing. The absence of pain or harm is better than its presence. Pain or harm have a likelihood of existing if there is some existent being in whom such pain can inhere.³⁵ Existence itself tends to involve harm, and some people exist who believe that their lives are not worth continuing. In short, his asymmetry argument can be thought about in this way:

- 1) X exist
 - a) Presence of pain (bad)
 - b) Presence of pleasure (good)
- 2) X will not exist
 - a) Absence of pain (good)
 - b) Absence of pleasure (not bad)

For Benatar (2) is a better situation than (1), since (1) always includes pain (a), (1) is always a harm, but (2) is not. According to Benatar, it is better to have no experience at all than have an experience of harm.

Given the significant suffering that living entails, there is a duty to discontinue procreation even if this might mean failing to honor one's duties to one's parents. For the individual, and the non-consensual individual, suffering caused by a new existence *significantly outscapes* the problems caused by not having aid or feeling one's life is meaningless. The deontological version of the argument that is based on this states that it is morally wrong to harm someone

without their consent. From the deontological perspective, procreation violates not just a child's right to consent to being born, but also reduces the child to a mere means (within this context, the means of reciprocating one's parents' care). As Seana Shiffrin puts it, birthing a child often forces the child into existence where s/he would have to "assume moral agency, to face various demanding and sometimes wrenching moral questions, and to discharge taxing moral duties".³⁶ Pain, suffering, illness, and death are other negative effects of procreation and significant burdens to foist on a non-consenting child. Indeed "the avoidance of the bad [harm] by never existing is a real advantage over existence, whereas the loss of certain goods [benefits] by not existing is not a real disadvantage over never existing".³⁷ The implication is that procreation tends to be worse than the failure to procreate. That is, the suffering grandparents can suffer (loss of meaning, welfare not taken care of, feeling disrespected, etc.) is not comparable to the suffering a new life will experience. These tend to justify the view that it is better to have never been born.

4.2 | The child as a means to an end

This criticism focuses on the idea that procreating merely for the purpose of care might just be a case of using an individual as a means to an end in a way that even reciprocity fails to help. It would mean, following Kant's categorical imperative, that the reasons for which we propose procreation, is an immoral one. What benefits, really, accrue to the child beyond the benefits to grandparents and parents?

4.3 | The argument from a lack of obligation

Some might argue that individuals only have caring obligations *qua initiating* interpersonal relationships and not *qua interpersonal relationships*. Children are born out of free decisions of their parents. Hence parent's moral obligation to care for their children arises from this free decision to initiate parental relationship. In contrast, children cannot choose to be a part of this parental relationship. Thus, it is a harder question of whether children should be considered not merely as a right-claimer, but also a duty-bearer in a parental relationship. The critic's main concern here is; how do individuals come to share a way of life and care for others in a relationship that they were not actively part of its origin or formation?

4.4 | The adoption argument

Additionally, friends of anti-natalism may argue that it is false that having children is the only way to give meaning to grandparents and to perform duties of reciprocity and care. The most obvious example

³²Harrison, G. (2012). Antinatalism, asymmetry, and an ethic of prima facie duties. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 31(1), 94–103.

³³Himma, K. E. (2010). Birth as a Grave Misfortune: The Traditional Doctrine of Hell and Christian Salvific Exclusivism. In J. Buenting (Ed.), *The Problem of Hell: A Philosophical Anthology*, London: Routledge.

³⁴Benatar, D. (2008). *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm Of Coming Into Existence*, Illustrated edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 14.

³⁵Benatar, D., & Wasserman, D. (2015). *Debating Procreation: Is It Wrong to Reproduce?* Debating Ethics. Oxford University Press.

³⁶Shiffrin, S. V. (1999). Wrongful life, procreative responsibility, and the significance of harm. *Legal Theory*, 5(2), 137.

³⁷Benatar, op. cit. note 34, p. 14.

is adoption: one can adopt children and experience the same functions as are demanded by one's own child. On top of this, anti-natalists are not always committed to eliminating procreation. For example, Lisa Cassidy contends that procreation is morally impermissible if the parents cannot provide a good life for their children (such as economic safety) or incompetent.³⁸ Thus, we attacked a strawman.

4.5 | The natural disaster argument

Anti-natalists also argue that we have a duty not to contribute towards evil, pain or death, by birthing creatures who can cause the same. The destruction, suffering, and harm – against human and non-human species – which have been perpetrated by the human race has been immense.³⁹ Pain and inhumanity are less likely to occur if there are no humans. This reasonably entails a stronger moral obligation to cease to procreate humans who, in principle, cause harm. Potentially, an example of the harm humans bring to the world is environmental destruction. Arguably, our present planet, Earth, began its accelerated decline hundreds of thousands of years ago, when human beings stepped into the picture. The impact of the human being on the planet is best conceived in collective terms – that is, our ecological footprint as a species. Owing to the fact that human existence causes significant harm in the world, then the reduction of our ecological footprint (most significantly) through the reduction of the human population – perhaps its own extinction – would aid the process significantly and seems to be what morality prescribes.

5 | RESPONDING TO THE ANTI-NATALISTS

5.1 | A response to the consent-harm argument

In our reply to the consent-harm argument, we argue that it is not always the case that we are not allowed to bring harms without consent. It may be justifiable if there are overriding reasons to do so. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic or other health emergency situations, it is morally acceptable to restrain freedom because there are overriding reasons (public health) to do so.⁴⁰ Also, in rescue situations, such as when individuals are rescued from burning cars or buildings, significant burdens may have to be imposed on non-consenting individuals, especially if this is necessary and inevitable to stop further harm or mitigate the same.⁴¹ Hence, the real question is whether these overriding reasons exist; this can only be decided by comparing the costs and benefits of bringing a new life

with the costs of benefits of not doing so. We do not think it is. Imagine that due to technological advancements there is a machine that allows us to calculate and predict with accuracy the suffering of the newborn and the grandparent. The grandparent will suffer from a serious form of cancer, which will also decrease his mobility. This can only be mitigated by having someone take him to a clinic for daily treatment. For a variety of reasons, neither the government nor anyone else can take the grandparent to the clinic. The only option is this potential newborn who will eventually help. If the suffering of the grandparent for not having support significantly outpaces the suffering of the newborn for existing, then there is a moral justification for procreation. The situation is thus similar to a rescue situation. In such a situation, it seems that the grandchild being born avoids much more suffering, so it is a *lesser evil* for the grandchild to be born.

Friends of the *deontological perspective*, could claim that inflicting harm in the absence of consent is not always justified even when the benefits outweighs the harm. For example, it would be immoral to break my bone without my consent to save a stranger. Similarly, it would be immoral to procreate without a child's consent to help a grandparent. Hence, the reasons need to be immense and significant to form an overriding reason for inflicting harm. But, the critic could argue, we have not demonstrated this to a significant degree. However, this article does not adopt a deontological reading of Sino-African philosophy. Notable, the reader would observe that we have mostly drawn on a *consequentialist reading* of the philosophy that justifies an action to the extent that it outweighs potential harm. From the Sino-African perspective, the harmony of the group, the preservation of its values by way teaching those values to future generations, and collective decision-making often take precedence over personal ambitions or interests. In fact, the former form the standard by which one ought to assess the latter. As one empirical study has found, (informed) consent is difficult to apply, as well as less relevant in the African setting because of importance placed on community good and the *preservation of community values*.⁴² As Ifeanyi Menkiti famously remarks, “a crucial distinction between the African view of man and man's idea in Western thought: in the African worldview, it is the community that defines the person as a person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will, or memory”.⁴³ Concerning the *preservation of these values*, both grandparents and children have important roles to play. The former are custodians, educators of these values and the latter are the recipients of these values, who also have a responsibility of communicating the same to future generations. The implication – not limited to a consequentialist one but also including a deontological implication – of the preceding is that procreation, in the absence of consent, would still be significant and immense since we have a duty to foster the flourishing and sustenance of the community and its values, at least

³⁸Cassidy, L. (2006). That many of us should not parent. *Hypatia*, 21(4), 40–57.

³⁹Benatar & Wasserman, op. cit. note 35.

⁴⁰Cordeiro-Rodrigues, L., & Metz, T. (2021). Afro-communitarianism and the role of traditional african healers in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Public Health Ethics*, 14(1), 59–71.

⁴¹Shiffrin, op. cit. note 36.

⁴²Akpa-Inyang, F., & Chima, S. C. (2021). South african traditional values and beliefs regarding informed consent and limitations of the principle of respect for autonomy in african communities: A cross-cultural qualitative study. *BMC Medical Ethics*, 22, 111.

⁴³Menkiti, op. cit. note 28 (ii), p. 175.

from the Sino-African perspective. We could go a step further by claiming that grandparents need to be sustained and helped to adequately play their roles as custodians of community values. Notice that this is different from premising the importance of grandparents on the enjoyment of grandparental relationship with future generation, and our argument will likely not apply suppose this is all grandparents are good for. However, in most formulations, this is not the *primary* role grandparents, including elders play.

In addition to the response we provide, it is also worth addressing how the anti-natalist may object that although this is true, it does not imply that we are entitled to inflict a harm on the child. Judith Thomson contends that individuals are entitled to their own bodies and we cannot use their bodies without their consent, even if the benefits of that use seems to outweigh the costs of using the same.⁴⁴ In fact, the situation seems similar to the violinist: an individual who was forced into a situation of care, but did not voluntarily enter it and, therefore, had no duty to continue it.⁴⁵ However, we challenge this view. Even if the violinist example is correct, Thomson is mistaken in claiming that we cannot force people into situations of care. A child who is already born and is dependent on her parents deserves to be taken care of and authorities can reasonably force the parents to do so. This is mostly because specific kinds of situations like the special relationship between a parent and a child, impose special responsibilities on individuals. Specifically, some courts – as is the case in *Volk v. DeMeerleer* (2016) – have held that special relationships do often oblige individuals to take affirmative steps which reasonable persons will consider necessary to protect or care for others. A failure to do this is sometimes adjudged as negligence.

Finally, one can also say that the idea of consent fails in another way. Precisely, there is an existence of an idea a community of persons yet-to-be-born, within the African view. This community of person, as a matter of necessity, require themselves to be born into the world in order for them to transit through life to ancestorhood. Indeed, as Segun Gbadegesin describes, these yet-to-be-born individuals receive purposes and destinies from God, which they must fulfill in the present world.⁴⁶ In such a metaphysical scenario, consent is moot as it is, in fact, a required good for children to be born in order to transit to the world of ancestors or to fulfil their destinies, respectively. If one believes such a notion to be far-fetched then one must commit to the view that the absence of persons-yet-to-be-born removes the requirement for prior consent, since the non-existence of such persons implies a lack of a subjective conscious personality who would then receive the request for consent or provide said consent. In other words, the requirement for consent is moot since one cannot request consent from nothingness. Thus, in

both scenarios, at least from the African perspective, the question of prior consent is irrelevant to the discussion on procreation.

5.2 | The child as a means to an end: A response

Anti-natalists are correct in stating that existence is not good in itself because we can also experience pain in life. Nonetheless, broadly speaking, the best way to understand existence is similar to the Stoics' concept of 'preferred indifferents'. A preferred indifferent for the Stoics is the idea that there are things in life that can be both good and bad (so not good in themselves) but tend to be good. For example, having fame and money tends to be good, but, if used in the wrong way, these things can become bad.⁴⁷ The reason why existence is like this is because existing is the necessary condition to experiencing something good, and having the possibility of experiencing something good is better than not having that possibility. The critic may push back that existence also gives the possibility of experiencing something bad and this is sufficient to never been born, as Benatar suggests. Nonetheless, this does not reflect individuals' perception of what life is – most people do not commit suicide and many people fear death; it is plausible to assume that it is because they see some value in life. Note that this is crucial because the most fundamental indicator for suffering is, in fact, people's own perception and experiences.⁴⁸

5.3 | Response to the Obligation critique

Our theory tends to favor the idea that community is the core value and this, sometimes, may come at the cost of suppressing some individual differences. Nonetheless, Afro-communitarians also consider that it tends to be beneficial for the individual to be *actively involved* in *initiating* dependent relationships.⁴⁹ As one of the Igbo proverbs suggests, to harm others is to harm oneself and, likewise, to do good to others also means to do good to oneself. Likewise, in Confucianism, it is considered to be a good thing to take care of others. In both traditions, this is the case because virtue is good for oneself and virtue is acquired through acts of care towards others. Individuals who are introduced to dependent relationships can have caring obligations. So, it is unclear whether the case is the same as the violinist. Unlike the case of the violinist, the relationship of grandparents and grandchildren is one of reciprocity and benefit. It is a great good to be able to take care of significant others, even if it may come at a significant cost to oneself. This value is partly intrinsic

⁴⁴Thomson, J. J. (1976). Killing, letting die, and the trolley problem. *The Monist*, 59(2), 204–217.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Gbadegesin, S. (2004). Towards a theory of destiny. In K. Wiredu (Ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy* (pp. 313–323). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

⁴⁷Stephens, W. O. (2023). Stoic Ethics. Internet encyclopedia of philosophy. Retrieved September 9, 2023, from <https://iep.utm.edu/stoiceth/>

⁴⁸Bos, D. C., de Graaf, E., de Graeff, A., & Teunissen, S. C. C. M. (2021). Determinants of unbearable suffering in hospice patients who died due to euthanasia: A retrospective cohort study. *Death Studies*, 45(6), 451–458.

⁴⁹Cordeiro-Rodrigues, L. (2021). Afro-communitarianism and the duties of animal advocates within racialized societies: The case of racial politics in south africa. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, 18, 511–523.

because responsibility and care are valuable in themselves. It seems intuitive that there is something objectively good about caring for others' wellbeing. Additionally, it also has instrumental value because family relationships (as per the school of moral development) can contribute to both one's own moral development and to the good of the society. Communal values, namely caring, cohesion, solidarity, identity, justice, to name a few, are first introduced – through punishment, reinforcement and teaching – to the children in the family.⁵⁰ Likewise, for Confucians, a person is a person in relationships; with family the starting point of one's personal network construction, and the initial field for one's moral cultivation. Furthermore, relationships within one's family are miniatures of social relationships. Family is regarded as the basic unit of society and in terms of organizational structure has a commonality with larger social groups like the State. More precisely, according to Confucianism, the relationship between parents and children and sometimes with brothers is the model for other relationships in society. By learning these family relationships, one can then transport them to a broader social realm.

On a deeper level, we can also respond that the metaphysical conception of relationship in the Sino-African philosophy tends to think of community as consisting of all lives both in the physical world (from humans to the environment) and spiritual world (from unborn babies to ancestors and spirits); the past, present and future. What this implies is that the default state of entities is that they are constantly in an inter-relational and interdependent relationships. The common intuition in the Sino-African philosophy, as far as, we can tell is informed consent, or even just consent, is not required to be part of inter-relatedness with the past or the future or bear its obligations.⁵¹ The default state of being already in an inter-relatedness confers these obligations.

On top of this, there are situations where consent seems to be unnecessary to place someone under a duty towards both strangers and significant others; resultantly, there are duties towards others even if they are not the result of free decisions. Thomson, in another article, argues that, sometimes, in the following situation, it is permissible to ignore consent and force people to provide help:

'There is a child who will die if he is not given some drugs in the future. The only bit of that drug which can be obtained for him in the near future is yours. You are out of town, so we telephone you to ask. You refuse consent. You keep your supply of the drug in a locked box on your back porch.'⁵²

According to Thomson, it is permissible to ignore consent in this situation and we are allowed to seek your property for saving the person if (a) it is an urgent ethical situation (saving the child) and (b) if the owner of the drug can be easily compensated for their loss.⁵³ These seem plausible conditions and we will not delve into the

discussion of they are plausible; so the key question is whether bringing someone into existence fulfils such conditions. Regarding condition (a), we believe we have provided evidence that there are situations where bringing a child into life can respond to an ethical emergency; so, for this situation in particular, this condition allows us to act against consent and bring someone into existence.

With respect to (b), this is also possible to demonstrate. One way to compensate the person would be to make this person's life extremely pleasant so that they are compensated for existence. Nonetheless, the critic may respond that there is no way that life can be made pleasant enough to compensate for bringing someone into existence because what we took from them was inexistence. Inexistence is what the person wants so to make their life pleasant is not enough. But if what the person wants is inexistence, then the person in question can have the right to self-determine their own life and decide if they want to continue living. We are not suggesting that if someone suffers, then they should kill themselves. Rather, what we contend is that if a specific person feels that inexistence is something that was taken from them, that the only way to get it back is to not exist and that to make their life extremely pleasant is not a sufficient compensation for bringing them into existence, then, in such an extreme case, inexistence is possible to be compensated by allowing this person to self-determine their destiny. Note that this reply sounds too abstract and non-ideal, but this is simply because the objection itself is non-ideal. Just like the objection poses an extreme case, our response is that, even for such extreme cases, compensation is possible. Having said that, this option becomes less counter-intuitive when we realise that some people with terminal diseases such as ALS do prefer non-existence over existence and that life can be, for some people, extremely painful.

5.4 | The adoption and strawman arguments: A response

With regards to alternatives to attempting to procreate, such as adoption, the anti-natalist may be right to say that adoption is preferable to a new birth. More precisely, the special duties we articulate in this paper may sometimes be fulfilled through other means such as through adoption. But there are at least two problems with this. Firstly, it is questionable whether the problem of loss of meaning is addressed by this. What many cultures understand as meaningful is to continue their generation and not simply to be given a child to raise. The anti-natalist may note here that this is a cultural relativist viewpoint but this is a misunderstanding of the argument. Our point is that well-being depends partly on cultural beliefs and expectations, and these cannot easily be changed or fulfilled by substitutes. Individuals attribute significant value to cultural aspects of their life and this becomes integral to their well-being. There is nothing culturally relativist about claiming that individuals are influenced by culture and their well-being depends partly on their cultural norms being realized. As Gerald Cohen contends, unlike the utilitarian view, people may attribute value to the familiar and, if this does not refer to an unreasonable practice (e.g., like human sacrifice) there is nothing wrong with this. Of course, the anti-natalist may contend that

⁵⁰Letseka, M. (2013). Anchoring ubuntu morality. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(3), 351.

⁵¹Ewuoso & Hall, op. cit. note 18.

⁵²Thomson, J. J. (1977). Some ruminations on rights. *Arizona Law Review*, 19, 52–53.

⁵³Ibid.

having children is an unreasonable practice. But then we have to return to the reply above where we demonstrate that it is justified to cause harm to others in some situations.⁵⁴

Secondly, adoption is not available for everyone. Sometimes adoption agencies are run by religious organizations or there are country laws that impede some groups from adopting. For example, many lesbian women decide to carry out artificial insemination because religious adoption agencies and governmental laws impede them from adopting. This is what happened in Portugal a few years ago: lesbian women could not adopt so they went to Spain to undertake artificial insemination. The cases do not only refer to same-sex couples, but also to other socio-economic differences. Many adopting agencies are semi-private religious agencies and it is possible that they discriminate against adoptive parents based on factors such as ethnicity or religious background. Hence, there are some cases where adoption is not an option.⁵⁵

Finally, regarding the strawman argument, as it pertains to more moderate anti-natalists, there are two responses. Firstly, we wonder if this position can reasonably be called anti-natalism, as it seems more like a commonsensical view whereby if parents are not fit for parenthood (e.g., because they are poor or have paedophilic tendencies), then it is morally impermissible for them to have a child. Secondly, even if this view can be considered anti-natalist, we also have advanced reasons which these anti-natalists do not usually consider to be good ones for procreation and therefore have made the anti-natalist case weaker.

5.5 | The natural disaster argument: A response

We ought to realize that in the current world, there are a variety of goods, some nobler than others, and some of which are either beyond our station or beyond our sphere of interest. Certain types of goods are of concern, like providing food to one homeless person down the block, while some are beyond us or our sphere of concern such as writing the greatest policy document in the world, the document that would solve the Israel-Palestine conflict or the Ukrainian-Russian war and prevent further bloodshed and loss of lives. Both concerns are ends in themselves, and one could argue that the moral weight of saving the Israel-Palestine region from further conflict is heavier than the concern of feeding one homeless person down the block. Both ends are conceivable, one only needs to put in the extra work, to have the money to cook some extra food or think exceptionally hard to achieve each respective end. However, it would be strange to berate a philosopher or political analyst for working extra hours as a waiter or waitress in order to have the means to give food to the homeless person down the block, rather than consistently spend time in his/her study, thinking hard about the document that would broker peace in Israel/Palestine or the Ukrainian-Russian war. It would be even stranger if one considers

providing food to the homeless person as a harm to those who would otherwise be affected by the Israel-Palestine conflict, or considers the act to be morally wrong on the basis that people are dying in Israel and Palestine and the philosopher/political analyst is spending time earning extra money to feed a homeless person. The point is that – from the Sino-African perspective – the moral weight of a more grandiose moral end does not necessarily imply that the pursuit of other less grandiose moral goods are morally bad insofar as they do not allow us to pursue the more grandiose goods. The thinking about filial piety and partiality grounded in the Sino-African perspective does sometimes require us to prize immediate and proximate or close relationships like familial relations and close friendships that we alluded to in the previous section. These are more significant others. In the same vein, one can argue that the pursuit of certain less grandiose goods, rather than the more weighty attempt to save the environment or save other persons from suffering, ought not to be considered necessarily harmful or necessarily wrong. In fact, from the Sino-African perspective, we ought to prize *human, actual and longstanding* relationships over the relationship with the environment.

Notwithstanding the above, it is still imperative to ask the question: does having a child *necessarily* undermine the goal of saving the planet? Another way of asking this question is: “is the harm” associated with procreation outweighed by the good associated with the same? We think so for different reasons. First, given the Sino-African philosophy that confers higher moral status to humans who relate and are related with, as hinted in the previous paragraph. In fact, it tends to be the case that those humans who relate in the relevant ways have higher moral status than animals or the environment that are commonly believed to have lower moral status. Second, given that humans are the only ones who can actually develop the technology to prevent further damage to the environment, humans are also the only ones who could mitigate the damages caused. The anti-natalist option is similar to a nation that invades another country, destroys it and then leaves on grounds that they should let people prosper. Nonetheless, the right action of the invading nation is to help rebuild the country, not to abandon it in chaos. Likewise, humans are the only ones who can protect other species from suffering by trying to solve the environmental catastrophe they have created.

One reply to our response would be to say that this is not true. If there were no humans, the planet would recover from the present environmental crisis quicker. Accordingly, the good associated with procreation does not outweigh the harm associated with the same. Furthermore, having a child does undermine the goal of saving the planet by increasing the number of persons feeding off the planet. Hence, a better analogy with war would be that an invading country continues in the invaded territory indefinitely and by doing so continuously makes things worse. In reply, note that although the anti-natalist may be right about this, however, this does not directly undermine the thinking about moral status in the Sino-African perspective. Moreover, the problem needs to be approached from a non-ideal theory viewpoint. The anti-natalist option would only be fruitful if a significant number of people abided by anti-natalism or if there were forced abortions. The first possibility is unlikely and the second would entail a form of authoritarian intervention in people's lives which seems morally unacceptable from the

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Cordeiro-Rodrigues, L. (2016). Associative democracy, heterosexism and sexual orientation. In L. Cordeiro-Rodrigues & M. Simendic (Eds.), *Philosophies of Multiculturalism: Beyond Liberalism*, London: Routledge.

Sino-African perspective since this will entail a failure to respect *significant others* (that is humans) who are significant by virtue of their capacity for relationships and close association with the human species. Hence, it is possible that those who do not have any moral concerns would continue procreating which would make the world much worse. From this non-ideal standpoint, it seems that the prospect of not having children would be worse for the environment. People tend to behave egoistically and if they have no reason to care about the environment in the future (like the welfare of their children), it seems less likely they will do so. This has not been the case in the past partly due to lack of information about global warming, which only recently became a stronger moral concern.

Additionally, some level of suffering may be better than not experiencing anything at all. Robert Nozick designed a thought experiment where he proposed an experience machine where individuals could experience any life they wanted but all would be only virtual and they would not be really that kind of person. Nozick concludes that most people would not connect to this machine as an alternative to their lives because they do not want to experience happiness simply; they also want to be a certain kind of person, even if that means going through unpleasant experiences. The point we wish to convey is that existence also has some value and therefore when someone comes to life this person also gains something from it. Sino-African scholars tend to think that a person is an entity with dignity and moral value, and therefore a being of moral worth – an end whose existence is valuable in itself. This value is shown in the value they place on human life itself by always abhorring even the minutest harm to that individual.

6 | CONCLUSION

In this article, we have offered a Sino-African perspective on procreation. Contrary to anti-natalist arguments, we contend that procreation is morally permissible and sometimes what morality requires us to do. This is because in a non-ideal world the duties of reciprocity and care for our parents is sometimes better fulfilled by the option of procreation. We also challenged the anti-natalist view that the harm of bringing a child to life outpaces the benefits of the good things the child can bring. Additionally, we contested the anti-natalist view that we cannot bring a child to life without consent. This research is of crucial importance for today's public policy, as many countries have a decline in natality. We have not here suggested how to implement this ethical theory as a policy and further research should carry out inquiries into this.

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

This study is a concept paper and does not require ethical approval.

CONTRIBUTOR-SHIP STATEMENT

Luís Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Cornelius Ewuoso wrote the first draft of the paper. Qingjuan Sun added the Chinese philosophy aspects and Aribiah David Attie helped with some of the anti-natalists' objections as well as the replying to the objection.

FUNDING STATEMENT

Luís Cordeiro-Rodrigues disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research has been funded by Hunan University's Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities, fund number 531118010426. 本文受湖南大学“中央高校基本科研业务费”专项资金资助(531118010426).

Qingjuan Sun disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: 1) 2021 Guizhou Provincial Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project [Grant number 21GZGX31]; 2) 2021 Hunan Province Philosophy and Social Science Base Project [Grant number 21JD008]

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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How to cite this article: Cordeiro-Rodrigues, L., Sun, Q., Attie, A. D., & Ewuoso, C. (2023). A Sino-African perspective and the morality of procreation. *Developing World Bioethics*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dewb.12425>