

# Open Individualism and Antinatalism: If God could be killed, it'd be dead already

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## Abstract

Personal identity views (closed, empty, open) serve in philosophy the role that conservation laws play in physics [15]. They recast difficult problems in solvable terms, and by expanding our horizon of understanding, they likewise allow us to conceive of new classes of problems. In this context, we posit that philosophy of personal identity is relevant in the realm of ethics by helping us address age-old questions like whether being born is good or bad. We further explore the intersection between philosophy of personal identity and philosophy of time, and discuss the ethical implications of antinatalism in a tenseless open individualist “block-time” universe.

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## 1. Introduction

Learning physics, we often find wide-reaching concepts that simplify many problems by using an underlying principle. A good example of this is the law of conservation of energy. Take for example the following high-school physics problem:

*An object that weighs  $X$  kilograms falls from a height of  $Y$  meters on a planet without an atmosphere and a gravity of  $Zg$ . Calculate the velocity with which this object will hit the ground.*

One could approach this problem by using Newton's laws of motion and differentiating the distance traveled by the object as a function of time and then obtaining the velocity of the object at the time it has fallen  $Y$  meters.

Alternatively, you could simply note that given that energy is conserved, all of the potential energy of the object at a height of  $X$  meters will be transformed into kinetic energy at 0 height. Thus the velocity of the object is equivalent to this amount, and the problem is easier to solve.

Once one has learned "the trick" one starts to see many other problems differently. In turn, grasping these deep invariants opens up new horizons; while many problems that seemed impossible can be solved using these principles, it also allows you to ask new questions, which opens up new problems that cannot be solved with those principles alone.

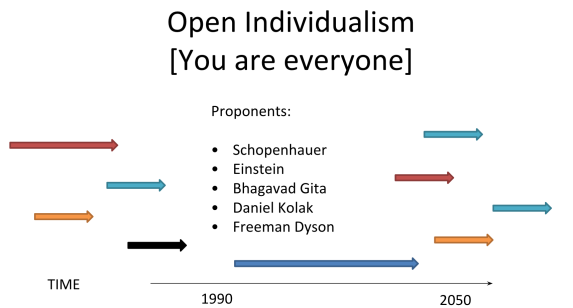
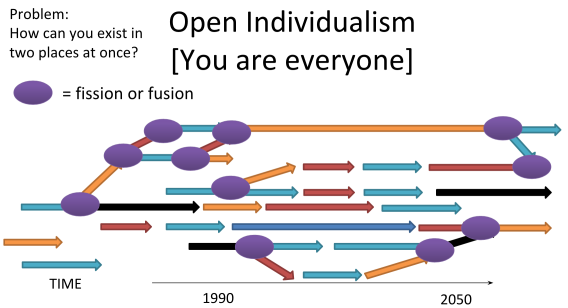
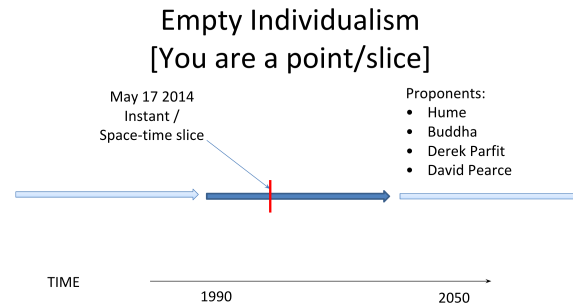
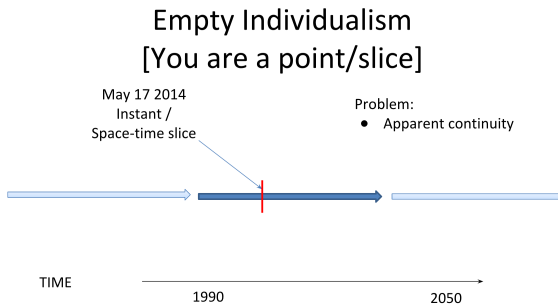
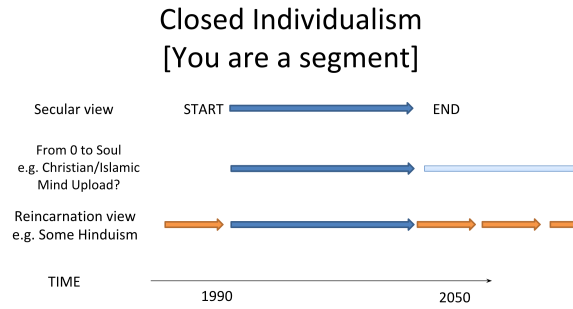
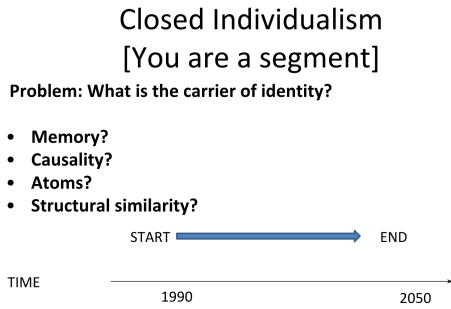
Does this ever happen in philosophy? Perhaps entire classes of difficult problems in philosophy may become trivial (or at least tractable) once one grasps powerful principles. Such is the case, I would claim, of transcending common-sense views of personal identity.

## 2. Personal Identity: Closed, Empty, Open

In *Ontological Qualia* [15] I discussed three core views about personal identity. For those who have not encountered these concepts, I recommend reading that article for an expanded discussion.

In brief:

1. Closed Individualism: You start existing when you are born, and stop when you die.
2. Empty Individualism: You exist as a "time-slice" or "moment of experience."
3. Open Individualism: There is only one subject of experience, who is everyone.



Most people are Closed Individualists; this is the default common sense view for good evolutionary reasons. But what grounds are there to believe in this view? Intuitively, the fact that you will wake up in “your body” tomorrow is obvious and needs no justification. However, explaining why this is the case in a clear way requires formalizing a wide range of concepts such as causality, continuity, memory, and physical laws. And when one tries to do so one will generally find a number of barriers that will prevent one from making a solid case for Closed Individualism.

As an example line of argument, one could argue that what defines you as an individual is your set of memories, and since the person who will wake up in your body tomorrow is the only human being with access to your current memories then you must be it. And while this may seem to work on the surface, a close inspection reveals otherwise. In particular, all of the following facts work against it: (1) memory is a constructive process and every time you remember something you remember it (slightly) differently, (2) memories are unreliable

and do not always work at will (*e.g.*, false memories), (3) it is unclear what happens if you copy all of your memories into someone else (do you become that person?), (4) how many memories can you swap with someone until you become a different person?, and so on. Here the more detailed questions one asks, the more ad-hoc modifications of the theory are needed. In the end, one is left with what appears to be just a set of conventional rules to determine whether two persons are the same for practical purposes. But it does not seem to *carve nature at its joints*; you'd be merely over-fitting [7] the problem.

The same happens with most Closed Individualist accounts. You need to define what the *identity carrier* is, and after doing so one can identify situations in which identity is not well-defined given that identity carrier (memory, causality, shared matter, *etc.*).

But for both Open and Empty Individualism, identity is well-defined for any being in the universe. Either all are the same, or all are different. Critics might say that this is a trivial and uninteresting point, perhaps even just definitional. Closed Individualism seems sufficiently arbitrary, however, that questioning it is warranted, and once one does so it is reasonable to start the search for alternatives by taking a look at the trivial cases in which either all or none of the beings are the same.

More so, there are many arguments in favor of these views. They indeed solve and usefully reformulate a range of philosophical problems when applied diligently. I would argue that they play a role in philosophy that is similar to that of conservation of energy in physics. The energy conservation law has been empirically tested to extremely high levels of precision, which is something which we will have to do without in the realm of philosophy. Instead, we shall rely on powerful philosophical insights [34]. And in addition, they make a lot of problems tractable and offer a powerful lens to interpret core difficulties in the field.

Open and Empty Individualism either solve or have bearings on: Decision theory [12], utilitarianism [30], fission [36]/fusion [14], mind-uploading [35] and mind-melding [18], panpsychism [28], *etc.* For now, let us focus on. . .

### 3. Antinatalism

Antinatalism is a philosophical view that posits that, all considered, it is better not to be born. Many philosophers could be adequately described as antinatalists, but perhaps the most widely recognized proponent is David Benatar. A key argument Benatar considers is that there might be an asymmetry between pleasure and pain. Granted, he would say, experiencing pleasure is good, and experiencing suffering is bad. But while “the absence of pain is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone”, we also have that “the absence of pleasure is not bad unless there is somebody for whom this absence is a deprivation.” Thus, while being born can give rise to both good and bad, not being born can only be good.

Contrary to popular perception, antinatalists are not more selfish or amoral than others. On the contrary, their willingness to “bite the bullet” of a counter-intuitive but logically defensible argument is a sign of being willing to face social disapproval for a good cause.

But along with the stereotype, it is generally true that antinatalists are temperamentally depressive. This, of course, does not invalidate their arguments. If anything, sometimes a degree of depressive realism is essential to arrive at truly sober views in philosophy. But it shouldn't be a surprise to learn that either experiencing or having experienced suffering in the past predispose people to vehemently argue for the importance of its elimination [40]. Having a direct acquaintance with the self-disclosing nastiness of suffering does give one a broader evidential base for commenting on the matter of pain and pleasure.

#### 4. Antinatalism and Closed Individualism

Interestingly, Benatar's argument, and those of many antinatalists, rely implicitly on personal identity background assumptions. In particular, antinatalism is usually framed in a way that assumes Closed Individualism.

The idea that a "person can be harmed by coming into existence" is developed within a conceptual framework in which the inhabitants of the universe are narrative beings. These beings have both spatial and temporal extension. And they also have the property that had the conditions previous to their birth been different, they might not have existed. But how many possible beings are there? How genetically or environmentally different do they need to be to be different beings? What happens if two beings merge? Or if they converge towards the same exact physical configuration over time?

This conceptual framework has counter-intuitive implications when taken to the extreme. For example, the amount of harm you do involves how many people you allow to be born, rather than how many years of suffering you prevented.



For the sake of the argument, imagine that you have control over a sentient-AI-enabled virtual environment in which you can make beings start existing and stop existing. Say that you create two beings, A and B, who are different in morally irrelevant ways (*e.g.*, one likes blue more than red, but on average they both end up suffering and delighting in their experience with the same intensity). With Empty Individualism, you would consider giving A 20 years of life and not creating B vs. giving A and B 10 years of life each to be morally equivalent. But with Closed Individualism you would rightly worry that these two scenarios are completely different. By giving years of life to both A and B (any amount of life!) you have doubled the number of subjects who are affected by your decisions. If the gulf of individuality between two persons is infinite, as Closed Individualism would have it, by creating both A and B you have created two parallel realities, and that has an ontological effect on existence. It's a big deal. Perhaps a way to put it succinctly would be: God considers much more carefully the question of whether to create a person who will live only 70 years versus whether to add a million years of life to an angel who has already lived for a very long time. Creating an entirely new soul is not to be taken lightly (incidentally, this

may cast the pro-choice/pro-life debate in an entirely new light).

Thus, antinatalism is usually framed in a way that assumes Closed Individualism. The idea that a being is (possibly) harmed by coming into existence casts the possible solutions in terms of whether one should allow animals (or beings) to be born. But if one were to take an Open or Empty Individualist point of view, the question becomes entirely different. Namely, what kind of experiences should we allow to exist in the future. . .

## 5. Antinatalism and Empty Individualism

I think that the strongest case for antinatalism comes from a take on personal identity that is different than the implicit default (Closed Individualism). If you assume Empty Individualism, in particular, reality starts to seem a lot more horrible than you had imagined. Consider how in Empty Individualism fundamental entities exist as “moments of experience” rather than narrative streams. Therefore, every time that an animal suffers, what is actually happening is that some moments of experience get to have their whole existence in pain and suffering. In this light, one stops seeing people who suffer terrible happenings (*e.g.*, kidney stones [11], schizophrenia, *etc.*) as people who are unlucky, and instead one sees their brains as experience machines capable of creating beings whose entire existence is extremely negative.

With Empty Individualism there is simply no way to “make it up to someone” for having had a bad experience in the past. Thus, out of compassion for the extremely negative moments of experience, one could argue that it might be reasonable to try to avoid this *whole business of life altogether*. That said, this imperative does not come from the asymmetry between pain and pleasure Benetar talks about (which as we saw implicitly requires Closed Individualism). In Empty Individualism it does not make sense to say that *someone* has been brought into existence. So antinatalism gets justified from a different angle, albeit one that might be even more powerful.

In my assessment, the mere possibility of Empty Individualism is a good reason to take antinatalism very seriously.

It is worth noting that the combination of Empty Individualism and Antinatalism has been (implicitly) discussed by Thomas Metzinger (*cf.* Benevolent Artificial Anti-Natalism (BAAN) [31]) and Foundational Research Institute’s Brian Tomasik [1].

## 6. Antinatalism and Open Individualism

Here is a Reddit post and then a comment on a related thread (by the same author) worth reading on this subject (indeed these artifacts motivated me to write the article you are currently reading):

There’s an interesting theory of personal existence making the rounds lately called Open Individualism [29] [49] [30]. Basically, it claims that consciousness is like a single person in a huge interconnected library. One floor of the library

contains all of your life's experiences, and the other floors contain the experiences of others. Consciousness wanders the aisles, and each time he picks up a book he experiences whatever moment of life is recorded in it as if he were living it. Then he moves onto the next one (or any other random one on any floor) and experiences that one. In essence, the "experiencer" of all experience everywhere, across all conscious beings, is just one numerically identical subject. It only seems like we are each separate "experiencers" because it can only experience one perspective at a time, just like I can only experience one moment of my own life at a time. In actuality, we're all the same person.

Anyway, there's no evidence for this, but it solves a lot of philosophical problems apparently, and in any case there's no evidence for the opposing view either because it's all speculative philosophy.

But if this were true, and when I'm done living the life of this particular person, I will go on to live every other life from its internal perspective, it has some implications for antinatalism. All suffering is essentially experienced by the same subject, just through the lens of many different brains. There would be no substantial difference between three people suffering and three thousand people suffering, assuming their experiences don't leave any impact or residue on the singular consciousness that experiences them. Even if all conscious life on earth were to end, there are still likely innumerable conscious beings elsewhere in the universe, and if Open Individualism is correct, I'll just move on to experiencing those lives. And since I can re-experience them an infinite number of times, it makes no difference how many there are. In fact, even if I just experienced the same life over and over again ten thousand times, it wouldn't be any different from experiencing ten thousand different lives in succession, as far as suffering is concerned.

The only way to end the experience of suffering would be to gradually elevate all conscious beings to a state of near-constant happiness through technology, or exterminate every conscious being like the Flood from the Halo series of games. But the second option couldn't guarantee that life wouldn't arise again in some other corner of the multiverse, and when it did, I'd be right there again as the conscious experiencer of whatever suffering it would endure.

I find myself drawn to Open Individualism. It's not mysticism, it's not a Big Soul or something we all merge with, it's just a new way of conceptualizing what it feels like to be a person from the inside. Yet, it has these moral implications that I can't seem to resolve. I welcome any input.

–*“Open individualism and antinatalism”* by Reddit user CrumbledFingers in r/antinatalism (March 23, 2017). [13]

And on a different thread:

I have thought a lot about the implications of open individualism (which I will refer to as “universalism” from here on, as that’s the name coined by its earliest proponent, Arnold Zuboff) for antinatalism. In short, I think it has two major implications, one of which you mention. The first, as you say, is that freedom from conscious life is impossible. This is bad, but not as bad as it would be if I were aware of it from every perspective. As it stands, at least on Earth, only a small number of people have any inkling that they are me. So, it is not like experiencing the multitude of conscious events taking place across reality is any kind of burden that accumulates over time; from the perspective of each isolated nervous system, it will always appear that whatever is being experienced is the only thing I am experiencing. In this way, the fact that I am never truly unconscious does not have the same sting as it would to, for example, an insomniac, who is also never unconscious but must experience the constant wakefulness from one integrated perspective all the time.

It’s like being told that I will suffer total irreversible amnesia at some point in my future; while I can still expect to be the person that experiences all the confusion and anxiety of total amnesia when it happens, I must also acknowledge that the residue of any pains I would have experienced beforehand would be erased. Much of what makes consciousness a losing game is the persistence of stresses. Universalism doesn’t imply that any stresses will carry over between the nervous systems of individual beings, so the reality of my situation is by no means as nightmarish as eternal life in a single body (although, if there exists an immortal being somewhere in the universe, I am currently experiencing the nightmare of its life).

The second implication of this view for antinatalism is that one of the worst things about coming into existence, namely death, is placed in quite a different context. According to the ordinary view (sometimes called “closed” individualism), death permanently ends the conscious existence of an alienated self. Universalism says there is no alienated self that is annihilated upon the death of any particular mind. There are just moments of conscious experience that occur in various substrates across space and time, and I am the subject of all such experiences. Thus, the encroaching wall of perpetual darkness and silence that is usually an object of dread becomes less of a problem for those who have realized that they are me. Of course, this realization is not built into most people’s psychology and has to be learned, reasoned out, intellectually grasped. This is why procreation is still immoral, because even though I will not cease to exist when any specific organism dies, from the perspective of each one I will almost certainly believe otherwise, and that will always be a source of deep suffering for me. The fewer instances of this existential dread, however misplaced they may be, the better.



This is why it's important to make more people understand the position of universalism/open individualism. In the future, long after the person typing this sentence has perished, my well-being will depend in large part on having the knowledge that I am every person. The earlier in each life I come to that understanding, and thus diminish the fear of dying, the better off I will be. Naturally, this project decreases in potential impact if conscious life is abundant in the universe, and in response to that problem I concede there is probably little hope, unless there are beings elsewhere in the universe that have comprehended who they are and are taking the same steps in their spheres of influence. My dream is that intelligent life eventually either snuffs itself out or discovers how to connect many nervous systems together, which would demonstrate to every connected mind that it has always belonged to one subject, has always been me, but I don't have any reason to assume this is even possible on a physical level.

So, I suppose you are mostly right about one thing: there are no lucky ones that escape the badness of life's worst agonies, either by virtue of a privileged upbringing or an instantaneous and painless demise. They and the less fortunate ones are all equally me. Yet, the horror of going through their experiences is mitigated somewhat in the details.

—A comment by Thestartofending in the Reddit post “*Antinatalism and Open individualism*“, also in r/antinatalism (March 12, 2017). [46]

Our brain tries to make sense of metaphysical questions in wet-ware that shares computational space with a lot of adaptive survival programs [25]. It does not matter if you have thick barriers (*cf.* thick and thin boundaries of the mind [3]), the way you assess the value of situations as a human will tend to over-focus on whatever would allow you to go up Maslow's hierarchy of needs (or, more cynically, achieve great feats as a testament to signal your genetic-fitness [22]). Our motivational architecture is implemented in such a way that it is very good at handling questions like how to find food when you are hungry and how to play social games in a way that impresses others and leaves a social mark [5]. Our brains utilize many heuristics based on personhood and narrative-streams when exploring the desirability of present options. We are people, and our brains are adapted to solve people problems. Not, as it turns out, general problems involving the entire state-space of possible conscious experiences [17].

## 7. Prandium Interruptus

Our brains render our inner world-simulation with flavors and textures of qualia to suit their evolutionary needs. This, in turn, impairs our ability to aptly represent scenarios that go beyond the range of normal human experiences. Let me illustrate this point with the following thought experiment:

Would you rather (a) have a 1-hour meal, or (b) have the same meal but at the half-hour point be instantly transformed into a simple, amnesic, and blank experience of perfectly

neutral hedonic value that lasts ten quintillion years, and after that extremely long time of neither-happiness-nor-suffering ends, then resume the rest of the meal as if nothing had happened, with no memory of that long neutral period?

According to most utilitarian calculi these two scenarios ought to be perfectly equivalent. In both cases the total amount of positive and negative qualia is the same (the full duration of the meal) and the only difference is that the latter also contains a large amount of neutral experience too. Whether classical or negative, utilitarians should consider these experiences equivalent since they contain the same amount of pleasure and pain (note: some other ethical frameworks do distinguish between these cases, such as average [2] and market utilitarianism [48]).

Intuitively, however, (a) seems a lot better than (b). One imagines oneself having an awfully long experience, bored out of one's mind, just wanting it to end, get it over with, and get back to enjoying the nice meal. But the very premise of the thought experiment presupposes that one will not be bored during that period of time, nor will one be wishing it to be over, or anything of the sort, considering that all of those are mental states of negative quality and the experience is supposed to be neutral.

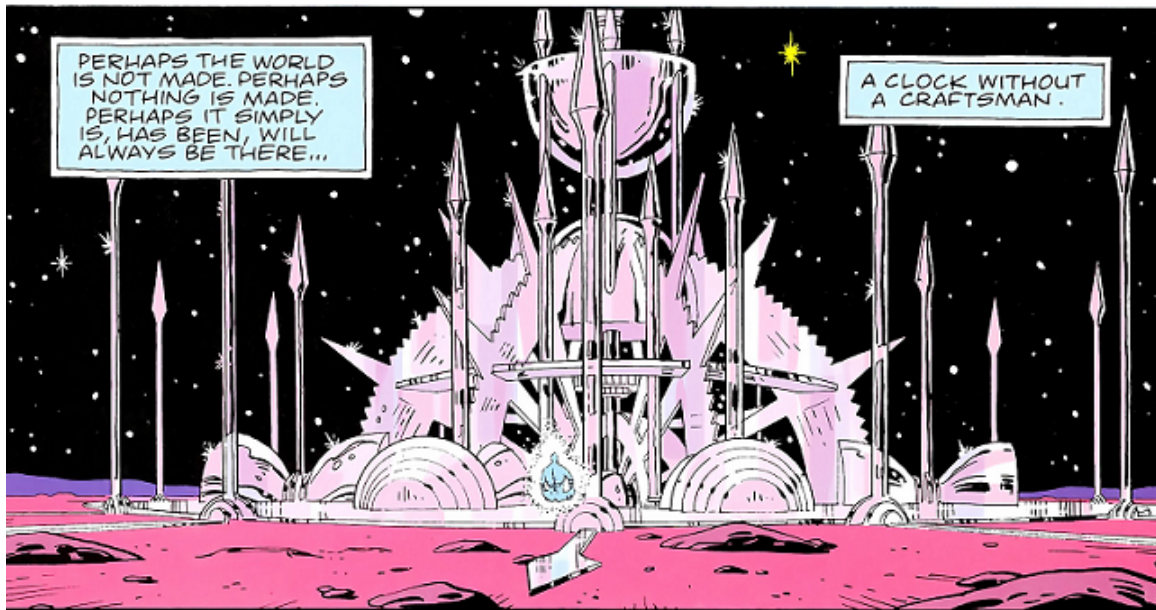
Now this is of course a completely crazy thought experiment. Or is it?

## 8. The One-Electron View

In 1940 John Wheeler proposed to Richard Feynman the idea that all of reality is made of a single electron moving backwards and forwards in time, interfering with itself. This view has come to be regarded as the One-Electron Universe [6]. Under Open Individualism, that one electron is you. From every single moment of experience to the next, you may have experienced life as a sextillion different animals, been countless trillions fleeting macroscopic entangled particles, and gotten stuck as a single non-interacting electron in the inter-galactic medium for googols of subjective years. Of course you will not remember any of this, because your memories, and indeed all of your motivational architecture and anticipation programs, are embedded in the brain you are instantiating right now. From that point of view, there is absolutely no trace of the experiences you had during this hiatus.

The above way of describing the one-electron view is still just an approximation. In order to see it fully, we also need to address the fact that there is no “natural” order to all of these different experiences. Every way of factorizing it and describing the history of the universe as “this happened before this happened” and “this, now that” could be equally inapplicable from the point of view of fundamental reality.

## 9. Philosophy of Time



Presentism is the view that only the present moment is real. The future and the past are just conceptual constructs useful to navigate the world, but not actual places that exist. The “past exists as footprints”, in a matter of speaking. “Footprints of the past” are just strangely-shaped information-containing regions of the present, including your memories. Likewise, the “future” is unrealized: a helpful abstraction which evolution gave us to survive in this world.

On the other hand, eternalism treats the future and the past as always-actualized always-real landscapes of reality. Every point in space-time is equally real. Physically, this view tends to be brought up in connection with the theory of relativity, where frame-invariant descriptions of the space-time continuum have no absolute present line. For a compelling physical case, see the Rietdijk-Putnam argument [8].

Eternalism has been explored in literature and spirituality extensively. To name a few artifacts: The Egg [50], Hindu [9] and Buddhist [4] philosophy, the videos of Bob Sanders [45], the essays of Philip K. Dick and J. L. Borges, the poetry of T. S. Eliot, the fiction of Kurt Vonnegut Jr (Timequake, Slaughterhouse Five, etc.), and the graphic novels of Alan Moore, such as Watchmen.

## 10. Personal Identity and Eternalism

For the time being (no pun intended), let us assume that Eternalism is correct. How do Eternalism and personal identity interact? Doctor Manhattan in the above images (taken

from Watchmen) exemplifies what it would be like to be a Closed Individualist Eternalist. He seems to be aware of his entire timeline at once, yet recognizes his unique identity apart from others. That said, as explained above, Closed Individualism is a distinctly unphysical theory of identity. One would thus expect of Doctor Manhattan, given his physically-grounded understanding of reality, to espouse a different theory of identity.

A philosophy that pairs Empty Individualism with Eternalism is the stuff of nightmares. Not only would we have, as with Empty Individualism alone, that some beings happen to exist entirely as *beings of pain*. We would also have that such unfortunate moments of experience are stuck in time. Like insects in amber, their expressions of horror and their urgency to run away from pain and suffering are forever crystallized in their corresponding spatiotemporal coordinates. I personally find this view paralyzing and sickening, though I am aware that such a reaction is not adaptive for the abolitionist project [38]. Namely, even if “Eternalism + Empty Individualism” is a true account of reality, one ought not to be so frightened by it that one becomes incapable of working towards preventing future suffering. In this light, I adopt the attitude of “hope for the best, plan for the worst”.

Lastly, if Open Individualism and Eternalism are both true (as I suspect is the case), we would be in for what amounts to an incredibly trippy [21] picture of reality. We are all one timeless spatiotemporal crystal. But why does this eternal crystal -who is everyone-exist? Here the one-electron view and the question “why does anything exist?” could both be simultaneously addressed with a single logico-physical principle. Namely, that the sum-total of existence contains no information to speak of [51]. This is what David Pearce calls “Zero Ontology” (see [16] [51]). What you and I are, in the final analysis, is the necessary implication of there being no information; we are all a singular pattern of self-interference whose ultimate nature amounts to a dimensionless unit-sphere in Hilbert space. But this is a story for another post.

On a more grounded note, Scientific American recently ran an article [28] that could be placed in this category of Open Individualism and Eternalism. In it the authors argue that the physical signatures of multiple-personality disorder, which explain the absence of phenomenal binding [19] between alters [44] that share the same brain, could be extended to explain why reality is both one and yet appears as the many. We are, in this view, all alters of the universe.

## 11. Personal Identity X Philosophy of Time X Antinatalism

Sober, scientifically grounded, and philosophically rigorous accounts of the awfulness of reality are rare. On the one hand, temperamentally happy individuals are more likely to think about the possibilities of heaven that lie ahead of us, and their heightened positive mood will likewise make them more likely to report on their findings. Temperamental depressives, on the other hand, may both investigate reality with less motivated reasoning than the euthymic and also be less likely to report on the results due to their subdued mood (“why even try? why even bother to write about it?”). Suffering in the Multiverse by David Pearce is a notable exception to this pattern [41]. David’s essay highlights that if

Eternalism is true together with Empty Individualism, there are vast regions of the multiverse filled with suffering that we can simply do nothing about (“Everett Hell Branches”). Taken together with a negative utilitarian ethic, this represents a calamity of (quite literally) astronomical proportions. And, sadly, there simply is no off-button to the multiverse as a whole. The suffering is/has/will always be there. And this means that the best we can do is to avoid the suffering of those beings in our forward-light cone (a drop relative to the size of the ocean of existence). The only hope left is to find a loop-hole in quantum mechanics that allows us to cross into other Everett branches of the multiverse and launch cosmic rescue missions. A counsel of despair or a rational prospect? Only time will tell [10].

Another key author that explores the intersection of these views is Mario Montano (see: *Eternalism and Its Ethical Implications* [32] and *The Savior Imperative* [33]).

A key point that both of these authors make is that however nasty reality might be, ethical antinatalists and negative utilitarians shouldn’t hold their breath about the possibility that reality can be destroyed. In Open Individualism plus Eternalism, the light of consciousness (perhaps what some might call the secular version of God) simply is, everywhere and eternally. If reality could be destroyed, such destruction is certainly limited to our forward light-cone. And unlike Closed Individualist accounts, it is not possible to help anyone by preventing their birth; the one subject of existence has already been born, and will never be unborn, so to speak.

Nor should ethical antinatalists and negative utilitarians think that avoiding having kids is in any way contributing to the cause of reducing suffering. It is reasonable to assume that the personality traits of agreeableness (specifically care and compassion), openness to experience, and high levels of systematizing intelligence are all over-represented among antinatalists. Insofar as these traits are needed to build a good future, antinatalists should in fact be some of the people who reproduce the most. Mario Montano says:

Hanson calls the era we live in the “dream time” since it’s evolutionarily unusual for any species to be wealthy enough to have any values beyond “survive and reproduce.” However, from an anthropic perspective in infinite dimensional Hilbert space, you won’t have any values beyond “survive and reproduce.” The you which survives will not be the one with exotic values of radical compassion for all existence that caused you to commit peaceful suicide. That memetic stream weeded himself out and your consciousness is cast to a different narrative orbit which wants to survive and reproduce his mind. Eventually. Wanting is, more often than not, a precondition for successfully attaining the object of want.

—*Physicalism Implies Existence Never Dies* [34]

Also, from the same essay:

Anti-natalists full of weeping benignity are literally not successful replicators. The Will to Power is life itself. It is consciousness itself. And it will be, when a

superintelligent coercive singleton swallows superclusters of baryonic matter and then spreads them as the flaming word into the unconverted future light cone. [...] You eventually love existence. Because if you don't, something which does swallows you, and it is that which survives.

I would argue that the above reasoning is not entirely correct in the large scheme of things<sup>1</sup>, but it is certainly applicable in the context of human-like minds and agents. See also David Pearce's similar criticisms to antinatalism as a policy [39].

This should underscore the fact that in its current guise, *antinatalism is completely self-limiting*. Worryingly, one could imagine an organized contingent of antinatalists conducting research on how to destroy life as efficiently as possible. Antinatalists are generally very smart, and if Eliezer Yudkowsky's claim [52] that "every 18 months the minimum IQ necessary to destroy the world drops by one point" is true, we may be in for some trouble. Both Pearce's, Montano's, and my take is that even if something akin to negative utilitarianism is the case, we should still pursue the goal of diminishing suffering in as peaceful of a way as it is possible. The risk of trying to painlessly destroy the world and failing to do so might turn out to be ethically catastrophic. A much better bet would be, we claim, to work towards the elimination of suffering [43] by developing commercially successful hedonic recalibration technology [37]. This also has the benefit that both depressives and life-lovers will want to team up with you; indeed, the promise of super-human bliss can be extraordinarily motivating to people who already lead happy lives, whereas the prospect of achieving "at best nothing" sounds stale and uninviting (if not outright antagonistic) to them.

## 12. An Evolutionary Environment Set Up For Success

If we want to create a world free from suffering, we will have to contend with the fact that suffering is adaptive in certain environments. The solution here is to avoid such environments, and foster ecosystems of mind that give an evolutionary advantage to the super-happy. More so, we already have the basic ingredients to do so. In *Wireheading Done Right* [23] I discussed how, right now, the economy is based on trading three core goods: (1) survival tools, (2) power, and (3) information about the state-space of consciousness. Thankfully, the world right now is populated by humans who largely choose to spend their extra income on fun rather than on trips to the sperm bank. In other words, people are willing to trade some of their expected reproductive success for good experiences. This is good because it allows the existence of an economy of information about the state-space of consciousness, and thus creates an evolutionary advantage for caring about consciousness and being good at navigating its state-space. But for this to be sustainable, we will need to find the way to make positive valence gradients (*i.e.*, gradients of bliss [20]) both economically useful and power-granting. Otherwise, I would argue, the part of the economy that is dedicated to trading information about the state-space of consciousness is bound to be displaced by the other two (*i.e.*, survival and power). For a more detailed discussion on these questions see: *Consciousness vs. Pure Replicators* [24].

1. This is for several reasons: (1) phenomenal binding is not epiphenomenal [19], (2) the most optimal computational valence gradients are not necessarily located on the positive side, sadly [24], and (3) wanting, liking, and learning are possible to disentangle [26]



Figure 1: Can we make the benevolent exploration of the state-space of consciousness evolutionarily advantageous?

In conclusion, to *close down hell* (to the extent that is physically possible), we need to take advantage of the resources and opportunities granted to us by merely living in Hanson’s “dream time” (*cf.* Age of Spandrels [47]). This includes the fact that right now people are willing to spend money on new experiences (especially if novel and containing positive valence), and the fact that philosophy of personal identity can still persuade people to work towards the wellbeing of all sentient beings. In particular, scientifically-grounded arguments in favor of both Open and Empty Individualism weaken people’s sense of self and make them more receptive to care about others, regardless of their genetic relatedness. On its natural course, however, this tendency may ultimately be removed by natural selection: if those who are immune to philosophy are more likely to maximize their inclusive fitness, humanity may devolve into *philosophical deafness*. The solution here is to identify the ways in which philosophical clarity can help us overcome coordination problems, highlight natural ethical Schelling points [27], and ultimately allow us to summon a benevolent super-organism to carry forward the abolition of as much suffering as is physically possible [42].

And only once we have done everything in our power to *close down hell* in all of its guises, will we be able to enjoy the rest of our forward light-cone in good conscience. Till then, us ethically-minded folks shall relentlessly work on building universe-sized fire-extinguishers to put out the fire of Hell.

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