

## **Overconsumption and Procreation: Are they Morally Equivalent?**

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*ABSTRACT* I argue it is inconsistent to believe that overconsumption is wrong or bad yet believe that having children is morally permissible, insofar as they produce comparable environmental impacts, are voluntary choices, and arise from similar desires. This presents a dilemma for “mainstream environmentalists”: they do not want to abandon either of those fundamental beliefs, yet must give up one of them. I present an analogical argument supporting that conclusion. After examining four attempts to undermine the analogy, I conclude that none of them successfully locates a significant, relevant difference between procreation and eco-gluttony (roughly, consumption exceeding that of the average American). Thus, in order to be consistent, one must be in favour of both or opposed to both. Mainstream environmentalism, then, is not an option, and should be replaced by radical environmentalism, the view that both overconsumption and (in most cases) having children are morally problematic in an overcrowded world.

A popular view, let's call it “mainstream environmentalism,” is that waste and resource depletion from unsustainable consumption is morally wrong, bad (in some sense), or manifests a serious character flaw, yet having children is morally permissible, even praiseworthy. This view, I suggest, is untenable. For support I offer an analogical argument, concluding that one's value judgments about overconsumption (or eco-gluttony) and about procreation should be identical whenever those lifestyles are “comparable” — that is, are voluntary, arise from the same desires, and produce similar foreseeable, unintended environmental impacts. After examining four alleged differences between them, I conclude that none provides a basis for rejecting this analogical argument. Therefore, consistency dictates we select one of the following unattractive options: (1) believe that eco-gluttony at any level (no matter how extravagant) is all right and having any number of children is all right, or (2) believe that consumption beyond a certain level is wrong and having however many children it would take to exceed that level is wrong.

I close by supporting a radical version of option 2, namely, since having even just one child in an affluent household usually produces environmental impacts comparable to what mainstream environmentalists consider to be an intuitively unacceptable level of consumption, resource depletion, and waste, they should also oppose human reproduction (in most cases).

Before I defend this unsettling thesis, a few comments are in order. First, what follows is neither a satirical, Swiftian proposal nor motivated by a misanthropic or anti-natalist agenda. Rather, logical considerations alone convince me that the foundation of mainstream environmentalism is seriously flawed, that it rests on incompatible beliefs. Appealing to a fundamental value — consistency — I hope to show that overconsumption

and reproduction are (usually) morally equivalent: one should be opposed to both or in favour of both. I will not proceed by applying a moral theory to issues in the neglected areas of procreative liberty and sustainable consumption. The method pursued here, analogical reasoning, though not entirely theory-neutral, has the advantage of relying on a core intuition accepted by a variety of mainstream environmentalists, be they biocentrists, anthropocentrists, consequentialists, or rights-theorists: levels of consumption exceeding that of the average American are both unsustainable and undesirable.

Second, not all who oppose excessive consumption are mainstream environmentalists. What we might call “radical environmentalists” believe that it’s morally problematic to have children in an overpopulated world — obviously this analogical argument does not apply to them. Others, like Mark Sagoff, challenge one or more of the mainstream views regarding overconsumption: “The view that increasing consumption will inevitably lead to depletion and scarcity, as plausible as it may seem, is mistaken both in principle and in fact” [1]. Of course, a mainstream environmentalist could accept that claim yet still believe that overconsumption is bad for other reasons: bad because it will in all probability (though perhaps not inevitably) lead to depletion and scarcity, bad because of waste generated, bad because of its distorting effect on human values, and so on. Third, there are “technological optimists,” like Julian Simon, who are not alarmed by (what I am calling) overconsumption. My argument does not apply to them, either. Finally, though “more than 85 percent of current population growth is in the world’s poor countries of Africa, Latin America, and Asia,” on average “an American citizen exerts about fifty times the impact on the environment of someone living in India or China, and perhaps as high as 300 times that of a person in Uganda or Laos” [2]. Because of this disproportionate per capita impact I’ll focus on Americans, though my argument is not limited to them; it covers anyone in a position to “overconsume”, stipulatively defined as a level of consumption, waste, and resource depletion exceeding that of the average American. Whether or not that’s an acceptable definition is beside the point; the analogy defended here rests on the fact that a number of people (including mainstream environmentalists) obviously *accept* a definition similar to that, often using terms like “conspicuous” and “unsustainable” to describe prevailing levels of consumption.

## 1. The Analogy

Let us begin by supposing that the Greens are a childless couple, in their early thirties, who plan to have no children. They can be expected to live into their early eighties. Their environmental impact over the next fifty years of living together is that of an average two-person American household over that time span, call it E2. Precisely what E2 stands for and how it is calculated is irrelevant to the analogical argument, though the environmental impacts would include food, energy, and mineral consumption, waste generation, and ecosystem alteration.

The Grays are identical to the Greens in all respects except they plan to have two children. The children will be average Americans in terms of their environmental impact from birth to death. Having two children will result in a projected environmental impact of E5, compared to E2 for the Greens. Why E5? Since E1 represents fifty years of consumption and waste for the typical American, and each Gray parent can be

expected to live fifty years and each Gray child eighty years, the Gray family will generate 260 years of environmental impact, or, about E1 times five (250 years).

Mainstream environmentalists (by definition) would not morally condemn — or have a negative attitude toward — the Grays for choosing to have two children, or, put another way, for a lifestyle choice which more than doubles their environmental impact. However, if it is all right for the Grays to make a lifestyle choice which results in moving from E2 to E5, then consistency dictates that it is all right for the Greens to make a lifestyle choice which results in moving from E2 to E5. To reach E5 without having children, the Greens would have to multiply their environmental impact by 2.5! In short, they would have to adopt a lifestyle of “overconsumption” or “eco-gluttony,” terms defined as consumption, resource depletion, and waste exceeding that of the average American, which is to say, an environmental impact over E2 for a couple without children. Though these terms obviously have a negative connotation, this definition does not presuppose that one should disapprove of eco-gluttony; that is, one can acknowledge that the Greens (at E5) are eco-gluttons, yet not think that what they are doing is wrong or bad.

To appreciate the magnitude of increased consumption and waste involved in moving from E2 to E5, consider what each Gray child will produce in a lifetime:

. . . about one million kilograms of atmospheric wastes, 10 million kilograms of liquid wastes, and one million kilograms of solid wastes . . . [and] will consume 700,000 kilograms of minerals, and 24 billion BTUs of energy, which is equivalent to 4,000 barrels of oil . . . [and] will eat 25,000 kilograms of animal products, provided in part by slaughtering 2,000 animals. [3]

Each Gray offspring has about eighty years to generate these and other typical consumption and waste figures; each Gray adult and each Green has about fifty years left to do so. Thus, the Greens would have to more than double their environmental impact to match that of the Gray family [4].

The Gray scenario and the Green scenario are analogous in ways other than environmental impact, though that's the most significant. In both cases, the damage to the earth is a foreseeable but unintended result of a lifestyle choice. Also, both choices are often voluntary [5]. Further, as isolated acts, the Grays' having children and the Greens' eco-gluttony will contribute little to the overall deterioration of the planet — two more children and two more eco-gluttons in a world with over six billion people is insignificant; yet most agree that the cumulative effect of a number of people acting that way is, and will continue to be, disastrous for species diversity, ecosystem preservation, and future generations. Finally, the motives behind reproduction and overconsumption are often identical: cultural expectations, improved status, elevated self-esteem, increased happiness, or an altruistic desire to share with others.

In terms of the analogical argument, it does not matter how strongly one disapproves of eco-gluttony or whether that disapproval is expressed as a moral or a non-moral value judgment. The point remains: whatever negative judgment one makes, it also applies to having children whenever doing so produces a similar or greater environmental impact. Whether one says overconsumptive behaviour is “selfish,” “short-sighted,” “imprudent,” or “morally irresponsible,” consistency requires that we say the same thing about having children in an overpopulated world; and if we say that having children is

“morally permissible,” “desirable,” or “a good thing,” then we must say the same thing about comparable eco-gluttony [6].

If one fails to disapprove of the Greens moving from E2 to E5, perhaps contemplating a leap to E8 or E10 would arouse a sense of disapproval. E8 represents the environmental impact the Greens would need to match the Gray family should the Grays have four children, and E10 (five times their current level of consumption and waste!) should they have six children. Of course if one doesn't object to overconsumption at level E5 (E8, E10, or higher) and doesn't object to having two (four, six or more) children, then at least one has consistent attitudes on these matters and the analogical argument presents no dilemma. Most likely, though, a person can imagine a level of overconsumption that would elicit disapproval; if so, he or she should also condemn having however many children it would take to produce a similar environmental impact.

This analogical argument is no doubt disturbing to mainstreams who have, or plan to have, children; if they cannot find a significant flaw in the analogy, they must conclude that procreation is wrong or that eco-gluttony (at a level producing a similar environmental impact) is acceptable. It is also disturbing to childless couples who sacrifice to minimize consumption, resource depletion, and waste. To clarify, let's assume (for this paragraph) that E2 represents a dramatically reduced, more environmentally responsible lifestyle than that of the average two-person American household; in other words, the Greens voluntarily limit consumption and waste, though they would enjoy and could afford a more luxurious lifestyle. They often walk, bicycle, or car pool; avoid overpackaged products; limit intake of intensively reared meat; buy local produce; wear heavy clothes indoors in winter; maintain a modest lawn, without herbicides, pesticides, or excessive watering; resist superfluous electrical gadgets, like can openers; take brief showers; and so on. Now, if the Greens believe that it is not irresponsible to have two children (and thereby move from E2 to E5), then they must acknowledge that it would not be irresponsible for them to go from E2 to E5 by increasing their level of consumption and waste. In short, why should they continue to sacrifice? From the point of view of consistency, sacrifice is rational or morally required only if they believe that having children is wrong.

## 2. Possible Differences

Can mainstream environmentalism — the view that having children is all right but eco-gluttony is wrong — be salvaged? Continuing to focus on a two-child scenario, is there a relevant dissimilarity between moving from E2 to E5 by having children and by eco-gluttony, such that it would be consistent to oppose the latter but not the former? I'll examine four alleged differences, any of which, if relevant, would undermine the analogy.

A. Decisions to procreate are usually less selfish (however defined) than lifestyle choices involving eco-gluttony.

First, even when procreative choices are partially based on altruistic motives, the same could be said for some instances of eco-gluttony; the Greens might have a dozen jet-skies, six jacuzzies, three bars, and an indoor tennis court so guests will enjoy themselves. And when childbirth and overconsumption are based on equally selfish

motives, if the respective environmental impacts are similar, the conclusion of the analogical argument I'm defending is that we should adopt similar attitudes toward those cases. Second, the claim that a consumer lifestyle exceeding that of the average American is usually more selfish than raising a family must be successfully defended, which is unlikely. Clearly, many people have children for primarily selfish reasons: to continue genetic lines, to gain an illusory sense of immortality, to revive a marriage, to minimize loneliness in old age, to feel profoundly wanted, and so on. However, even if the above claim could be defended, it would not constitute a significant difference between the two cases.

This can be shown without examining the weight, if any, that should be given to motives when forming moral judgments. Suppose both Jones and Smith are commercial fishermen who routinely violate daily possession limits, and that Jones' motives for doing so are less selfish than Smith's (say, some of the extra money Jones makes goes to charity). Surely this fact about motives would not lead one to conclude that Jones' actions are all right whereas Smith's actions are wrong.

B. Since having children, for most couples, is a greater source of happiness than an affluent lifestyle, and abstaining from having children on environmental grounds is a much greater sacrifice than abstaining from eco-gluttony on those grounds, a thorough cost-benefit analysis would demonstrate — even when the environmental impact of each lifestyle is comparable — that the former produces greater expected net utility than the latter. Given this dissimilarity, it is consistent to believe that eco-gluttony is wrong and having children is all right.

Notice that this attempt to locate a relevant difference between the two is not based on an intrinsic feature which one has and the other lacks, but on alleged differences in net utility; in other words, having children is likely to produce more good (or less bad) than an overconsumptive lifestyle, all things considered. In response, one could argue that the utilitarian theory upon which it is based is indefensible; therefore, though this may be a difference between the two, it is not a relevant difference. Obviously that response would satisfy non-consequentialists. Pursuing it, however, is not possible here, nor is it necessary; we can assume that some version of utilitarianism is defensible and still show that strategy B fails to locate a relevant difference.

There are reasons for doubting that moving from E2 to E5 by having children will produce greater good (however defined) than moving from E2 to E5 by eco-gluttony [7]. Social scientists, as far as I know, have not proven that couples with children are — on the average — happier over the course of a lifetime than couples without children, or that offspring will experience or create more joy than sorrow in their lifetimes. (I readily acknowledge the difficulty of confirming or disconfirming such a hypothesis; the burden, nonetheless, is on those who support it.) Further, some eco-gluttons seem to be quite happy; overconsumption (as defined) doesn't necessarily produce diminishing returns as far as the consumer's happiness is concerned. An opulent lifestyle undoubtedly can be quite rewarding (in the absence of guilt) — say, a 4,000 square foot vacation home, redwood paneling, a four car garage, and a two acre lawn. The "law of diminishing returns," it seems to me, is more likely to apply to excess in the areas of eating, drinking, sexual activity, and accumulating redundant items, like 40 pair of shoes or 100 drill bits.

Further, reproduction (combined with increased longevity) worsens population density, producing a variety of frustrations due to diminishing space, for example, overcrowded lakes, hiking trails, roadways, shopping malls, and backcountry; eco-gluttony does not cause — at least to this degree — offences and harms associated with overcrowding. Finally, and of great importance, we must keep in mind that the environmental impact of the Grays' (or any couple's) having children will be much greater than the Greens' (or any childless couple's) being excessive consumers (no matter how outrageous); this is so because many of those children will reproduce (and many of them, etc.), resulting in an environmental impact far greater than what a childless couple could generate via eco-gluttony.

To conclude, even if one accepts key utilitarian assumptions, there are strong reasons for doubting that strategy B has located a relevant difference between overconsumption and procreation.

C. Procreation is a fundamental moral right, whereas eco-gluttony is merely a "privilege" (or, possibly, a derivative right); thus, one can — without inconsistency — oppose the latter and tolerate (or embrace) the former.

For philosophers who believe that rights-talk is "nonsense on stilts," this is not a significant difference. Nor is it for those who take rights-talk seriously, like Laura Purdy, but remind us that "the right to reproduce is one of those moral rights that has been more assumed than argued for," and that it can "be traced back to earlier days when human existence was more threatened by underpopulation than overpopulation" [8]. Of those believing that procreation is a moral right, nearly all acknowledge theoretical limits. Surely this (like any right) is not absolute, thus situations develop in which it is wrong to have children, ranging perhaps from conditions of high genetic risk to extreme (desert island) scarcity and overcrowding. Some of them — crisis environmentalists — believe that additional humans increasingly threaten significant rights of both existing humans and nonhumans, and that the moral right to procreate is now outweighed by other (mostly environmental and humanitarian) considerations. For them it is a "trumped" right, and does not mark a relevant difference between procreation and eco-gluttony. Finally, for those who believe that human procreation is a basic moral right, that it outweighs any property or liberty rights inherent in eco-gluttony, that nonhumans lack rights, and that crisis environmentalists are mistaken, this analogy does not present a dilemma (unless, of course, one or more of the above beliefs is abandoned).

Lastly, why limit the right to procreate to members of our species? Many biocentrists believe such a move is arbitrary, that non-humans have a right to procreate — perhaps of equal weight to our own. If so, since adding more humans to the biomass (possibly a doubling by 2040) will reduce both species diversity and the number of individuals within most species, it follows that when humans exercise their reproductive right they limit the reproductive rights of others.

D. A side-effect of procreation, absent in overconsumption, is the creation of an entity with inherent value. Since it is good to increase inherent value in the world by increasing the number of people with inherent value, it's better, in economic terms, to add a worker to the system than use the same resources for additional consumption. It follows, then, that if the Greens and the Grays produce identical environmental

impacts, say E5, the former via excessive consumption and the latter via procreation, there is, nonetheless, an important metaphysical difference: the Grays brought inherent value into the world, the Greens did not.

A full treatment of this issue, of course, is not possible here. So I'll sketch four theories of inherent value to see which, if any, support strategy D. Though not much rides on the definition of "inherent value," typically it is seen as an objective property of an entity, a value "independent of awareness, interest, or appreciation of it by any conscious being" [9].

i. Some argue that inherent value is a myth. (Numerous reasons are given for reaching this conclusion. One might doubt that value can exist apart from and independent of a valuer; or, on a relational theory of value — where value requires the presence of a valuer — one might claim that the requisite properties are absent.) These axiological issues, obviously, are avoidable, since strategy D is irrelevant to anyone who denies that inherent value exists.

ii. Nor is it a relevant difference for biocentrists who believe that adding humans to an overpopulated planet significantly reduces both biodiversity and individual numbers within (most) species. If non-humans, and perhaps natural objects, have inherent value equal to that of humans, then human births (loci of inherent value) reduce other sources of inherent value — perhaps not inevitably, but certainly in today's world where consumption is inextricably mixed with resource depletion, habitat loss, exploitation, and pollution. Thus, from a biocentric point of view, other things being equal, it doesn't matter whether a couple reaches E4, E6, or E10 as a result of overconsumption or of procreation.

iii. Anthropocentric theories of value, if defensible, support dissimilarity D, whether extreme versions claiming all and only members of our species have inherent value or modified versions granting inherent value to most (but not all) members of our species. But is anthropocentrism justified? Secular and religious defences of the extreme view have been thoroughly discredited in the literature. Modified views, pitching the standard of inherent value just high enough for most members of our species to be included while excluding all of nature, don't fare much better. What property or set of properties do most humans possess which all non-humans lack? The familiar problem here is that whatever trait(s) one selects — such as language or self-consciousness — it, or they will be present in some non-human animals as well (or be pitched so high that many humans are excluded!); thus, it is extremely difficult to locate a non-arbitrary characteristic which most members of our species possess and all non-human animals lack.

iv. On a sentientist theory, certain lives have inherent value because they are capable of experiencing pleasure and pain. The problem is: can we increase the number of humans without making other (human and non-human sentient) beings worse off? Since this view reduces inherent value to the capacity to experience pleasure or pain (what some call "intrinsic value"), a defender of dissimilarity D must show that adding human beings to the planet, all things considered, produces more good overall than significantly limiting human reproduction thereby allowing other sentient life to flourish. This approach leads back to dissimilarity B, the claim that overconsumption has worse consequences than procreation (even when their environmental impacts are identical).

### 3. Which Option is Morally Preferable?

Thus far I have argued, since there is no relevant difference between the Grays' moving from E2 to E5 (E8, or more) by having children and the Greens' moving from E2 to E5 (E8, or more) by eco-gluttony, consistency dictates we select one of the following options: (1) believe that eco-gluttony at any level is all right and that having any number of children is all right, or (2) believe that consumption beyond a certain level is wrong and having however many children it would take to exceed that level is wrong.

Beginning with option 2, let's distinguish two levels at which one could draw a line between permissible and impermissible consumption. The strong version (option 2a) is that consumption above E2 is wrong, therefore having children is almost always wrong (because doing so will almost always involve exceeding E2). The weak version (option 2b) is that only eco-gluttony above E5 is wrong, therefore it is all right to have one or two children. In closing, I support option 2a as the lesser of two evils. My remarks will be brief, for my main concern was to expose a bedrock inconsistency in mainstream environmentalism, not to defend a particular option (that is, a particular set of consistent beliefs).

Option 1 requires believing that eco-gluttony at any level is all right. Obviously no mainstream environmentalist accepts that view. Not only is it counterintuitive, but virtually all moral theories entail that beyond some level eco-gluttony is wrong. Option 2b states that eco-gluttony above E5 is wrong. Again, most moral theories — and all mainstreams — would condemn that level of overconsumption, resource depletion and waste (at least two and a half times that of an average American).

Option 2a states that having children is almost always wrong. That is, under one unlikely (and heroic) scenario it is consistent to believe that eco-gluttony above E2 is wrong and having children is all right; namely, the Greens and Grays are each at E2, one believes that there is nothing wrong with being at E2, the Grays have two children, and the four of them keep their collective environmental impact at E2. In this case one could consistently hold that the Greens' level of consumption and waste is all right and the Grays' having children is all right. Though in theory this scenario is possible, in practice it rarely occurs. To see why, let's look at just one facet of consumption and waste. The average American consumes 4,000 barrels of oil in his or her lifetime (about eighty years), or 50 barrels a year. Assuming that each Green will live fifty more years, together they will use 5,000 more barrels. To produce the same environmental impact as the Greens, the Gray parents and their two children must collectively limit themselves to 5,000 barrels; since the Gray parents will each live fifty more years and each child eighty years, for a total of 260 years, that amounts to less than twenty barrels a year for each Gray, compared to fifty barrels a year for each Green. Thus, for the Grays to remain at E2 after having two children, the environmental impact of each Gray would have to be 2.5 times less than that of each Green! The same logic applies to food intake, sewage waste, CO<sub>2</sub> generation, fossil fuel consumption, mineral use, landfill deposits, and so on. In short, a mainstream couple must sacrifice significantly to justify having two children.

Supporting option 2a, then, means that in most situations mainstream (like radical) environmentalists must be opposed to a couple's having two or more children. But what if a couple has only one? To remain at E2 after having one child, each Gray

would have to consume and waste 1.8 times less than each Green [10]. For instance, twenty-eight barrels of oil a year for each Gray compared to fifty for each Green. Clearly, having just one child would make it extremely difficult to remain at E2; one's standard of living would be cut nearly in half. Since most couples fail to make the kind of sacrifice required to remain at or anywhere near E2 after having children, the defender of option 2a believes that in most actual cases having children is wrong.

Let us briefly consider two *reductio ad absurdum*s of option 2a. First, one might argue that it's insane to believe that having children is a bad thing, because if everyone (or nearly everyone) stopped having children — until a goal, such as sustainable reproduction, were reached — the consequences would be catastrophic. Huge demographic gaps would exist, resulting in a depleted military, few contributors to valuable social programmes (like Medicare), less scientific and artistic achievement, threats to economic growth, and so on.

The obvious response is that not everyone will refrain from producing offspring. Many births will result from carelessness and contraceptive failure. And of those who confront this analogical argument, many will decide to have children anyway because they believe it is a poor argument, or they do not care about consistency, or they see nothing wrong with eco-gluttony. Further, even if most people stop having children for a few generations, one could reasonably argue that the bad consequences of so doing would be outweighed by the good consequences of curbing population growth.

Second, the idea that eco-gluttony above E2 is wrong leads to the absurd conclusion that any voluntary activity with a significant foreseeable but unintended environmental impact is wrong, such as industrial production.

But there are relevant differences between industry and eco-gluttony. The former creates jobs and goods which may justify some environmental damage; though eco-gluttony sustains or creates jobs, it does not produce goods for society in this way. Despite the fact that producing goods often fouls the earth for marginal returns, nearly everyone agrees that some instances of production are desirable, all things considered. In short, the benefits of having some environmentally responsible industrial production outweigh the costs in the long run, which is not the case with eco-gluttony. The concept of sustainable production makes sense, the concept of sustainable eco-gluttony is wishful thinking.

To conclude, mainstream environmentalists should select option 2a over either option 1 or option 2b (thus becoming radical environmentalists). Condemning both eco-gluttony above E2 and having one or more children (thereby exceeding E2) will produce far better results than tolerating or encouraging those lifestyles. From a biocentric point of view, less consumption and fewer children would be beneficial for species-diversity and ecosystem-preservation; and from an anthropocentric view, taking option 2a seriously would arguably increase the probability of a good life for future generations. Whichever option one chooses, however, the conclusion of the analogical argument I have defended is that — in order to be consistent — one must have similar attitudes and beliefs regarding overconsumption and procreation.

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## NOTES

- [1] MARK SAGOFF (1998) Do we consume too much? In LAURA WESTRA & PATRICIA H. WERHANE (eds.) *The Business of Consumption: Environmental ethics and the global economy* (Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), p. 272. Though Sagoff rejects some of the tenets of mainstream environmentalism, he believes that overconsumption is bad insofar as it inhibits one's spiritual growth.
- [2] ANNE WHYTE (1995) The human context in HAROLD COWARD (ed.) *Population, Consumption, and the Environment: Religious and secular responses* (Albany, State University of New York Press), p. 45. I believe the analogical argument defended here applies to poor people with large families in third world countries insofar as their environmental impact is comparable to overconsumption, even if they are not in a position to overconsume (as defined). I will not pursue that, however, because — unlike most Americans — their decision to have a large family is based partially on “safety net” factors, such as being taken care of when elderly, disabled, or unemployed; these reasons complicate the picture considerably.
- [3] CHARLES A. S. HALL, et al. (1995) The environmental consequences of having a baby in the United States, *Wild Earth*, 5, 1, p. 80.
- [4] These projections and those which follow are extremely conservative, for they assume that the Gray children will have no children of their own. If we assume (plausibly) that each will have two children, and (less plausibly) that those children will not reproduce, the Greens would have to move from E2 to E12 to damage the earth as badly as the Grays! More specifically, the six offspring can be expected to live a total of 480 years and the Gray parents a total of 100 years; 580 years divided by 50 years (which is what E1 stands for), results in an astounding environmental impact of about E12. For mathematical simplicity, however, as well as to avoid issues like responsibility for probable but remote consequences, I assume throughout the paper that the environmental consequences flowing from the Grays' decision to have two children end with those children.
- [5] For purposes of this analogy I am assuming that both eco-gluttony and having children are voluntary choices. I will not attempt to construct an analogy in the case of unplanned children.
- [6] Two procedural points: (1) Whenever having children and eco-gluttony are compared without specifying a level, such as E5, assume that the environmental impacts are identical; (2) I will be deliberately vague when using normative terms such as “wrong” and “all right,” indicating that for purposes of this analogy it does not matter whether one's disapproval or approval is moral or non-moral.
- [7] The theory of intrinsic value one adopts is irrelevant to my response. In what follows, I simply define “good” as “happiness.”
- [8] LAURA PURDY (2000) Loving future people in ELISABETH BOETZKES & WILFRID J. WALUCHOW (eds.) *Readings in Health Care Ethics* (Ontario, Broadview Press), p. 313.
- [9] TOM REGAN (1981) The nature and possibility of an environmental ethic, *Environmental Ethics*, 3, 1, p. 19.
- [10] If the Grays can each be expected to live fifty more years and the child eighty years, that will result in 180 years of environmental impact compared to 100 for the Greens, or, 1.8 times more. For a defence of having one child, see BILL MCKIBBON (1998) *Maybe One: A personal and environmental argument for single-child families* (New York, Simon & Schuster).