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Student Name: Neil Messam

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Module tutor: Dr. R. Humphreys

Assignment title: Outline and analyse the Total View

Assignment due date: 10/9/2021

I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism.

Name Neil Messam.....

Assignment Mark

1 st Marker's Provisional mark	70
2 nd Marker's/Moderator's provisional mark	
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Final Mark	

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This is a very interesting piece of work on a difficult topic, but you have incorporated

For completion by Marker 1:

Comments: a range of important concepts & theories and done so in a way that reveals individuality & a subtle understanding of underlying issues. That said, the essay would be improved by considering consequentialism more generally & whether it's compatible with some of your conclusions - in particular whether it can stand the force of what you say. How might the consequentialist (of a

Marker 1 signature:

Date: non-preference kind) respond?

For completion by Marker 2 / Moderator:

Comments:

But, overall, this essay presents some well-argued for points, and does some by explaining issues clearly & by tackling difficulties in no topic head-on. (Well done for incorporating Leslie's work, too.)

Marker 2 / Moderator signature:

Date:

External Examiner's comments (if relevant):

For your next essay, try to integrate the quotations into the main text a bit more. I can explain this better in person. If you like, email me & we can meet via Teams so I can explain further.

External Examiner signature:

Date:

70%
RH

Outline and Analyse The Total View

I will argue in this essay for an interpretation of R.M.Hare's article *Possible Persons* that finds its way past the Total View's controversial Repugnant Conclusion. This interpretation is based on Hare's point about disutility in the transition, which shows that, though repugnant, Parfit's later worlds are not the conclusion. This appears to rescue the total view (from that particular difficulty only) but egalitarianism does not fare so well. 'Worthwhile lives' is a core concept in this discussion and my interpretation of Hare exposes a distinction within this concept: between what is considered worthwhile by the observer and the person living that life. The inflexibility of the total view in dealing with this and other problems highlights limits to its usefulness.

Possible Persons -
for articles in
books or jns,
remove
italics &
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Italics -
use for
titles of
books &
journals.

The Total View is defined by Robin Attfield as, "The normative consequentialist theory holding that agents should optimize the total (rather than the average) balance of whatever makes life worthwhile over whatever detracts from it, in terms of the full range of foreseeable consequences of action and inaction". (1)

And elsewhere he says, "it is sometimes argued that consequentialism requires perpetual additions to the human population of the planet with a view to maximizing the total of happiness, and that this would involve overpopulation, with predictable attendant evils such as environmental degradation." (2)

Derek Parfit places the utmost importance on this area of ethical theory.

"This is the most important part of our moral theory, since the next few centuries will be the most important in human history." (3)

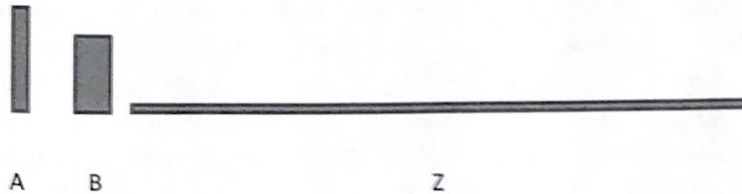
✓ He derives his famous Repugnant Conclusion from the non-identity problem and the total view. He gives us the following scenario to explain non-identity: "Suppose that I leave some broken glass in the undergrowth of a wood. A hundred years later this glass wounds a child. My act harms this child. If I had safely buried the glass, this child would have walked through the wood unharmed." (4) He then asks us, "Does it make a moral difference that the child whom I harm does not now exist?" (5). I'll return to Hare's answer to this practical moral problem.

To resolve this problem of non-identity Parfit seeks a "theory X" (6) which also answers the following questions: "How many people should there be? Can there be overpopulation, too many people?"

"In a complete moral theory, we cannot avoid this awesome question". (7)

In his book *Reasons and Persons* Parfitt formulates the problem as a thought experiment in which World A has a population of 10 Billion people, but the alternative World B (following greater population growth) has twice as many.

"... and these people are all worse off than everyone in A. But the lives of those in B, compared with those in A, are more than half as much worth living." (8)



"Since there are twice as many B-people, they together have more happiness than the A-people. (Two bottles more than half full contain more than a bottleful.)" (9)

He then repeats this experiment with further worlds, of ever-increasing populations of progressively more unhappy people.

"Just as B would be better than A, C would be better than B. And Z might be best. Z is some enormous population whose members have lives that are not much above the level where life ceases to be worth living" (10)

"The greatest mass of milk might be found in a heap of bottles each containing only a single drop." (11)

Parfitt then arrives at, "The Repugnant Conclusion: For any possible population of at least ten billion people, all with a very high quality of life, there must be some much larger imaginable population whose existence, if other things are equal, would be better, even though its members have lives that are barely worth living." (12)

A 2017 article in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy describes the repugnant conclusion as "one of the cardinal challenges of modern ethics" and "it has been surprisingly difficult to find a theory that avoids the repugnant conclusion without other equally counter intuitive conclusions". (13)

The article groups together responses to the problem of the repugnant conclusion in broadly eight answers, finding none of them completely satisfactory, "It seems then that the Repugnant Conclusion is very hard to get around". I will argue however that the Total View does not end with the repugnant conclusion, and that theory X is not needed in the utilitarian calculation in order to avoid the repugnant conclusion.

The Stanford Encyclopaedia article places Hare's answer in the 8th category ("accepting the repugnant conclusion"). For the purposes of this essay, Hare's most important point seems

Be explicit about what the RC actually is. More needed before you got to this point in the essay.

to be the disutility of the transition. This in itself appears to be sufficient criticism of Parfitt's repugnant conclusion. From this reading of Hare we can see that it remains repugnant (to us), but it is not the *conclusion*, as the argument was not fully followed through. The disutility in the transition should have been part of the calculation, which would have carried the argument past the repugnant stage. I will develop this point as we analyse Hare's paper *Possible People*.

Rebekah Humphreys says Hare's paper focuses on quality vs quantity of life, and the implications for an idea that relies on happiness or preference satisfaction. (14)

Hare proposes a solution to the non-identity problem, and here I will briefly allude to the arguments to bring out the practical intentions of Hare. His Kantian position of "universalizability of moral judgements" (15) is what makes him consider possible people. He says, "any attempt to discriminate morally between actual and possible cases runs counter to our linguistic intuitions". And further,

"If one makes a moral judgement about an actual case, one is committed to making the same judgement about a possible case having the same universal properties". (16) ✓

More details would have been helpful here. It is possible that Hare is affirming that we actually find in our linguistic intuitions Kantian universalizability, that Kant arrived there because of intuitions that needed to be understood and systematised.

For the purposes of this essay, these points about the problem of non-identity are brought out mainly to emphasise the practical intent that Hare has. He seems to be seeking practical solutions to the problems raised, as a universalisable moral proposal would allow us to go out into the world and put it into practice. I will argue later that the resolutely abstract nature of the total view undermines its usefulness.

Hare says population policy "will be the main subject of this paper" (17). He argues "where we have a choice between bringing someone into existence and not doing so, the interests of that possible person have to be considered" (18). He thinks that for utilitarians of "the older sort" the "interests of possible persons have to be considered as the total "sum of happiness" will be increased. He says there might be an argument that a more recent version of utilitarianism (preference satisfaction) sits uneasily within the concept of possible persons because people not yet born have no preferences. He will counter this argument. He says his position also indicates problems with Parfitt's approach that relies on intuitions, as Parfitt's argument can support two conclusions: not only the 'repugnant conclusion' but also alternatively Parfitt's argument could also be used as a "reductio ad absurdum of the intuitions themselves" (19). I will emphasise a third conclusion, which I suggest is to be found in Hare's paper, that the disutility in transition takes us beyond the repugnant conclusion.

✓ walk sand.

Hare says Parfitt raises the idea that there is a balance, a 'compensation' whereby general quality of life is spread more thinly across a greater population. Hare accepts the argument, which results in a "huge population" with life barely worth living. However, Hare adds what he calls the "counter intuitive conclusion": "It is, that we ought now to take steps to increase the population until the end state [...] is actually realised." (20)

Hare wants to argue for total utilitarianism and use Kantian ethical theory "which bids us ask what universal prescriptions we are prepared to assent to, or in other words what we prefer should happen universally, not giving particular attention to the role that we ourselves are actually to play in the resulting course of events" (21) A reader will detect the presence of Rawls' veil of ignorance, which amongst other things was an attempt at impartiality. ✓ Good.

Hare then asks a pertinent question: What about choosing whether I exist? He claims this boils down to the fear of dying or being killed. We might disagree – there is a fear of non-existence for ourselves as well as others (regardless of how they die- we fear life without our loved ones, and for ourselves we may, for instance, fear unfinished business). Hare goes on to say that we prefer existence to non-existence. This appears to be an intuitively stronger point than fear of dying.

Hare says "if" we are seeking "universal prescriptions" then we are bound to take possible people into account and he says we have to "disregard entirely the fact that we ourselves occupy the roles that we do" (22).

We might identify that a potential difficulty is the impartiality required as part of the calculation, as humanity is not so easily fixed in Gradgrind's attempts. One answer to this first difficulty may be simple: the principle of the veil of ignorance relies on an initial state of total self-interest (23). Paradoxically, since this self-interest requires a highly developed empathy with all imaginable people in all imaginable scenarios, it leads to the conclusion of equality and fairness. The calculation of Gradgrind is re-envisioned in this understanding of the method because this kind of empathy is simply looking at it through your own understanding. We might ask of ourselves "would I want that for me, regardless of who I would be or what my preferences are?" On this view, it's not so much a calculation as a consideration. John O'Neill says "Rawls ensures impersonality and impartiality in justice" (24) ✓ However I will return to questioning the success of the attempt by proponents of the total view to be impartial.

✓ Hare goes on to describe the world where overall utility is greater but individual lives are barely worth living, as compared with a world with lower population where individual lives are better, but as there are fewer people then, overall, utility is less (to punctuate that clause differently: then overall utility is less – i.e. total utility. This is what is meant by the total view).

For a reader this might show where utilitarianism is a failure as an environmental ethic, as a world already populated 2.5 times beyond its consumable means is heading for cataclysm. That this world is also considering massively increasing population where each individual is just a little better than miserable would seem a road to disaster. Of course, our wild places, our oceans, our air, our flora and fauna would be devastated. Humphreys makes a related point in her lecture series:

"Moreover, saying that the total view advocates overpopulation or implies the repugnant conclusion omits an argument about our dependence for a worthwhile life on intact ecosystems—ecosystems which would be undermined by overpopulation—and also fails to take into account the value of nonhuman future beings whose habitats would be destroyed by human population. The ecological stress would be huge; so huge as to be unjustifiable. Indeed, consequentialists are free to take into account the impacts of population increases on nonhuman beings, habitats, and ecosystems." (25)

We'll return to this after going further into the interpretation of Hare.

Hare has some particular credibility in his analysis of the repugnant conclusion. It is compelling to hear an argument from someone who has experienced a life barely worth living himself. His account of his experiences as a prisoner of war is brief, but demonstrates that he knows for sure that he prefers a miserable existence over non-existence and his sparse account of this creates a strong argument, although he does accept that others who experienced the same conditions may have suffered even more. For us, the small things that get us through a hard day are nothing compared to the life he suffered. But nevertheless, life was worth living.

He says, "Now it might come to be the case, and probably will" that all food is grown in factories and the resulting "enormous increase in population will become possible". In this scenario, he thinks that "existence would not be worth having" (26). He says the proponent of the counter intuitive conclusion needs to convince an opponent "that life really will be worth living in world z. And it is difficult to see how he is going to do this". Even with his life experience he feels, "There is a limit below which non-existence becomes preferable" (27)

He next makes the point that supports a core argument of my essay (28) about the transition between states. He expresses it in philosophical terms but it is a solid practical or political point too. We could characterise it as: "Yes, total utilitarianism is consistent, but only if the transition is included in the calculation, and this transition will produce too much disutility, therefore massive population in world z is not utilitarian".

Each individual has their own preference levels. As we've seen, Hare alludes very briefly to this in saying that some people didn't get on as well as he did as a prisoner of war. John Leslie has a more light-hearted example, "Today, some people's idea of supreme self-fulfilment is lying motionless in the sun like crocodiles." (29)

Sketches
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here
could you use
this later
instead,
as a
response to
the RC?

5

Different preferences feed into Hare's point: how do we transition without the level of disutility cancelling out utility?

Hare argues that this transition can't be made easier by making it longer. He says people will be able to "compare their state with the golden age several generations before" (30). We can add examples to bring this out - the Fado tradition in Portugal, which mourns the loss of wealth from empire, and the Greek children I taught in 1997 who felt the sting and expressed righteous anger about Agia Sophia being taken by the Ottoman empire in 1453.

Hare also decries the lack of variety that would result from us all having a similar amount of wealth. This appears at first to be less convincing, as variety exists along economic strata and it's difficult to understand how this point doesn't assume what it sets out to prove (namely that 'variety' is actually 'variety of lifestyles according to income'). He also says that we need wealth to 'practise and support the arts' but we might ask, do more equal societies have less art, and is there less art in poverty?

There are suggestions by other writers about what would be lost in each step:

"For instance, as Parfit has suggested, the first step from A to B involves the loss of Mozart's music; in the move from B to C Haydn's music is lost; in the move to D Venice is destroyed; and so on down the alphabet. All that is left in the final move to Z is "muzak and potatoes"." (31) ✓

However, these details and our questions above do not appear to affect the gist of Hare's position on the theory of world Z, as it is simply the worst possible circumstance other than death.

Hare then surprises us when he states that the massive increase in population in U.K, U.S.A. and Australia "would simply be what any moderate egalitarian who wanted to make the best use of resources would wish us to do". (32) — Yes. Say why this is surprising that he says this.

His final point is that the counter-intuitive conclusion is a not a very powerful argument against total utilitarianism.

The counter intuitive conclusion is "that we ought now to take steps to increase the population until the end state is actually realised" (33). Hare says this is conceivable but not practicable because of the disutility that would occur- people would not be willing to reduce their consumption, or they would be unhappy if they did. I read this as saying that the total view is suitable because it can absorb the difficulties without losing anything, because the total view includes the utility in the transition. The total view doesn't end up with the repugnant conclusion, it concludes further along the argument. The conclusion is that world B is not preferable to world A.

This interpretation of Hare's argument finds his a strong argument, a consistent line that he has taken through utilitarian principles and followed it through fully. The calculation has to

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include the disutility which is so large it cannot happen (for utilitarian and practical reasons) and shouldn't happen. This might satisfy the utilitarian side, but to move on to the second part of my essay, does it satisfy the egalitarian parts of the argument, and does it achieve the aim of being an impartial and practicable ethic?

We might begin to answer this by returning to the disutility in transition, which is also a practical point. A population in world B of twenty billion people would result in such economic and environmental devastation, totalitarian government, strife, terrorism and war that it would be resisted by many people. If this is the case with world B, then it follows that world Z is not practicable.

Our planet is already said to be buckling under the weight of our current resource use. Attfield says, "In the real world, however, space and resources are restricted. Where space and resources are in short supply, and there are already people whose basic needs are not satisfied and who are thus unable to develop their essential human capacities (as there are in the world as it is), population increases are likely to increase the number of people in this sorry plight". (34)

This leads us to the suggestion that many of us are already in the equivalent *personal* World B, C, or Z. If humans flourish best with access to wilderness, abundant natural resources, peace, freedom, basics like shelter and food, clean air and water, and the time for the arts then billions of people are living sub-optimal existences. The rest of us (in relative wealth) fear descent into those lives. World Z (or even world B) is a repugnant conclusion to us because we are the lucky ones. However, hundreds of millions of people have nothing to fear from world Z.

Let's return to Humphreys point about "our dependence for a worthwhile life on intact ecosystems"

Attfield makes a related biocentrist point "Once it is recognised that other species have moral standing, this preferability [of planet z] has to be understood as conditional on the happiness of the larger population not being outweighed by harm done to other creatures" (35). Anthropocentrists may prefer to adjust this and Humphreys' point in line with their world view and see the ecosystems as of instrumental value to humans. Importantly for this essay, both Attfield's and Humphreys' points seem to question whether the total view is really total, as there appear too many vital elements on the outside of the calculation. This is an intuitively appealing line: a total view without an environment is peculiarly abstract and possibly of little practicable credibility.

I share the view about a need for both the continuing existence of (and further, I feel, contact with) intact ecosystems, but I will now make the argument that my intuition goes wide of the mark as it is based on assumptions about the future that are based on the understanding of our (relatively wealthy) present. I will use poverty as an analogue for unhappy lives, whilst seeing of course that there are happy lives in poverty and unhappy lives in wealth. A life of pain for example could equally be representative of an unhappy life.

Hare is basing his thoughts on a detached philosophical view that at the same time takes into account practical experience and practical objectives. The practical experience is the misery of his experience in Burma, some of which was tolerable, though admittedly only temporarily so. We move now on to our next step: No acceptable or practicable kind of population control has yet been proposed, therefore population will continue to rise. We are heading for overcrowding; in fact millions of us are already there. There are currently hundreds of millions of people living in dire poverty who consider their lives worthwhile.

Another practical point that arises from this (that many of us are already there) is the environmental damage that has already been done (permanent species and wilderness loss for example, and radioactive waste stored effectively forever). Many of us are already living in that future. My intuitive affinity with the idea of dependence for a worthwhile life on intact ecosystems omits the lives of those of us already living in that future, the millions living in shanty towns for example, or inner city slums or favela.

Humphreys' point is not specifically about contact with, but rather reliance on, ecosystems and it would be stretching her point too far to fit it into my next stage of argument. Nevertheless, discussions about the total view hinge around a concept of worthwhile lives, and this does bring out something that is telling about a lot of us - we would often not consider someone else's life to be desirable to us.

However that does not mean it is not worth living.

My next step borrows from Hare's practical experience and begins with the assumption that the ultimate test of whether a life is worth living is ending of that life (I would much prefer a less bleak test, and space here does not allow for an analysis of that assumption). Building on this assumption, the next move is to assume the people living in dreadful situations consider their lives worth living even if they hate their lives. We would not want their lives. Hundreds of millions of us live entire lives without any contact with intact ecosystems, but their *lives are considered worthwhile* by them, even though they may dream of a different life. These are the people with nothing to fear from the loss of Mozart, Haydn and Venice.

Yes -
maybe
these
are
bad
examples.

I emphasise this to return to defend an interpretation of Hare, as he appears to have thought through the inevitable process of egalitarianism, and come to the conclusions he has. If we wish to remain egalitarians, we can't assume there will be the natural ecosystems that those of us who are relatively wealthy have access to. We are talking about a levelling off in the context of an inevitably increasing population. This is addressing the elephant in the room: is our egalitarianism genuine? Or is it actually inconceivable to those of us who have the wealth and power in the world? An average UK income may be more than double an average worldwide income, on current measures, let alone World B. My interpretation of Hare is asking us to consider how much levelling off we would accept. Are we, the wealthy consumers (who cause most of the environmental damage), truly willing to accept the consequences of our liberal ideological objectives? This point does not only ask us to view

Not
direct
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be a
dependence.

financial wealth, but also natural resources, flora and fauna (however conceived, whether of instrumental or intrinsic value) and contact with ecosystems. ✓

There are further challenges arising from the core concept of worthwhile lives. Following my argument above suggests a paradox implicit in John Leslie's thought experiment of the window-less huts, intended to demonstrate our intuitions about the good of adding happy people (36). He shows that in an imaginary planet, where everyone is happy, with one sole person inside a ('philosophically') window-less hut living a life that is not worthwhile, our feeling is that this planet should be populated. In other words, he argues that the existence of a life that is not worthwhile is no reason not to add other happy lives. ✓ *Good.*

Taking Leslie's thought experiment into my argument; the apparent paradox arises in that lives barely worth living are considered worthwhile. This is only a paradox, however, where the life barely worth living inside the window-less hut is assumed to be not worthwhile to those of us outside the hut. The paradox is resolved when we shift our perspective. Maybe we should invite the person inside the hut to take part in the discussion. If Hare had been asked when he was a P.O.W. he would have affirmed that his life was worthwhile, but would have suggested improvements to it.

Furthermore, in the real world, there is not one person but hundreds of millions. With numbers of this magnitude we are forced to step away from thought experiments and consider whether talk of overall happiness (or, possibly worse, majority happiness) is somewhat too distant and inhumane.

Under the total view it is possible to affirm happiness is high whilst ignoring the plight of hundreds of millions of people. The detachment of this view appears inflexible, with even such massive numbers unable to impinge on it. This undermines its intuitive plausibility and shows its failure to produce a practical ethic. It is possible to make the argument about lives worth living, when what we mean is that we wouldn't want to live like that. But there are millions who's entire experience (one could argue their entire world) is world B, C or even Z. (this differs from R.I. Sikora's point in that world Z is *their* world not *the* world (37)). *but would consequentialism permit this?*

In conclusion, I have argued that world Z is repugnant, but not the conclusion of the total view, and that the total view survives Parfit's problem. However, it is not clear that the total view meets the real-world challenges, nor that egalitarianism is not dented by our discussion. As a result the great difficulties of population policy remain, with world B, C or Z a current reality (their 'world') for millions of people. There is a distinction arising within the concept of 'worthwhile lives' which is possibly blurred when we who consider our lives 'more worthwhile' opine about the 'less worthwhile' without their input in the discussion. Despite aiming at impartiality, the total view is therefore partial in two senses: incomplete and not impartial.

I have also looked at the notes you attached in your email. Thanks for sending along.