In Defence of Children

Pro- and Anti-Natalist Arguments in Moral Philosophy and Karl Barth

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“A point of view…which considers fertility as an evil cannot be allowed to spread without contradiction.”

Declaration on Procured Abortion, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

Short Abstract

This dissertation defends a presumptive willingness to have children ('procreative fideism') through a critical dialogue with contemporary moral philosophy and Karl Barth's understanding of procreation in *Church Dogmatics.* The first chapter argues that neutrality between 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' accounts of procreative risk and rationality entail a *de facto* anti-natalism, and that otherwise attractive constructivist pro-natalisms that appeal to 'parenthood' as a non-derivative source of reasons struggle to explain why such an interest supplies a reason to procreate rather than adopt. Subsequent chapters attempt to overcome this gap. Chapter Two considers whether the peculiarities of procreative agency expressed by appealing to life's 'gifted' qualities supply distinctive benefits for parenthood, while Chapter Three considers the putative value of 'biological' or 'genetic' bonds as a reason to prefer procreative parenthood. While such accounts resonate with pre-existing intuitions about the value of procreating, I argue they ultimately fail to escape skeptical debunking arguments—which leaves the presumptive permissibility of procreation in the odd position of being widely acknowledged and even more widely enjoyed, but with dubious normative support.

The final two thirds of this dissertation critically examine Karl Barth's understanding of procreation in *Church Dogmatics*. Chapter Four takes a panoramic approach, evaluating Barth's defense of creation's status as 'benefit,' his corresponding rejection of 'optimism' and 'pessimism,' and the confidence in faith we can have in the world because of the covenant. While such a backdrop could establish a presumption in favor of procreating, Barth's complicated understanding of how the New Testament relativizes genealogy makes such an inference difficult. Chapter Five thus unpacks how Barth frames procreation within his doctrine of creation, and argues that the independence of procreation from marriage gives the latter an eschatological 'consecration' the former lacks. However, Barth does raise the possibility of founding a pro-natalist presumption based on a 'confidence in life grounded in faith.' I unpack this in Chapter Six, arguing that Barth's account of humanity's constitution seems to supply presumptive grounds for procreating (out of respect for humanity's reproductive powers). However, Barth's emphasis on the immediacy of an individual's origins in God brackets natural parenthood and paves the way for his relativization of procreation—while simultaneously intensifying life's value by establishing it as a definite, irrepeatable, once-for-all 'offer' from

God. Barth's account of life thus raises questions about natural parenthood's positive significance (if any). To address these on Christocentric terms, Chapter Seven turns to Barth's account of Mary and puts it in dialogue with his later special ethics of parents and children. I argue that Barth's later configuration of natural parenthood includes an eschatological intensification of their value akin to that which Barth had argued happens regarding 'life' when set at its limits. This enables reconstructing Mary as the first to respond to the announcement of the covenant's completion, which provides a richer theological basis for pro-natalism than is available on Barth's account. This reconstruction carries on into Chapter Eight, which develops Barth's account of 'honour' to explain the distinct value of Mary's agency—and human procreative agency more generally. I argue that this honour, which accrues to parents on the basis of their presence in action and suffering in procreating *and* vicariously redounds to them from their children, can reasonably animate a couple to procreate rather than adopt. My conclusion returns to the themes of philosophical optimism and pessimism, and argues that the Barthian 'procreative fideism' goes beyond moral philosophy's discussion toward establishing a presumptive pro-natalism.

Long Abstract

Introduction: Why Have Children?

This introduction considers whether procreation needs normative justification, and from whence such justification might be found. As the question is important not only for deliberating about whether to procreate or not, but for assessing the intelligibility of a host of moral issues surrounding procreation, I argue that denying the question '*Why have children?*' is an insufficient response to changing social conditions. Following Elizabeth Anscombe, I suggest the question draws us to the borderland between philosophy and theology. Where Protestant ethicists have addressed it, I argue they have not done so successfully and are often more interested in relativizing any putative value or interest in the biological attachments that form through procreation than normatively defending the practice. As this has also been accompanied by widespread critiques of moral philosophy's understanding of procreative ethics, I propose examining 'Why have children?' within a theological framework that attends to recent discussions and questions in moral philosophy.

Chapter One: Procreative Neutrality is Not Enough: Evaluating the Asymmetry and Skeptical Anti-Natalism

This chapter examines whether procreation is presumptively permissible through considering responses to 'The Asymmetry,' which moral philosophers think articulates fundamental intuitions about the relative force of procreative reasons. The Asymmetry suggests that there is a moral reason to *not* procreate a child whose life would be worth *not* living, but there is no moral reason to procreate a child whose life would be worth living. I argue that responses to this asymmetry fall along a spectrum: categorical procreative latitude, categorical anti-natalism, mitigating pro-natalism, and localized, skeptical anti-natalism. This chapter contends that accepting neutrality toward procreation as expressed by the second claim of The Asymmetry entails a *de facto* anti-natalism, which is strengthened if we adopt a pessimistic outlook about human well-being. However, I also consider constructivist 'mitigating' pro-natalisms, which accept a presumptive burden to justify procreation in the face of its risks, and appeal to the value of parenthood as the basis for doing so. While these are attractive, I argue they struggle to explain why parenthood justifies a reason to procreate rather than adopt, as their

weak account of the value of procreation seems unlikely to overcome concerns that we have (unfulfilled) pre-existing duties to third parties. On this basis, I suggest that neutrality between the value of procreation entails a *de facto* anti-natalism, and that we need a plausible account of procreative parenthood's distinctive value to overcome this burden.

Chapter Two: From Choice (Back) to Chance: Procreation and the Gift of Life

In this chapter I consider whether the "gift of life" might provide distinctive reasons to enter parenthood in a procreative way. I begin with Leon Kass' influential deployment of the 'gift analogy,' and argue that it both fails to specify a value to procreating beyond the givenness of our nature and introduces an untenable individualism into his outlook. I then consider Alex Pruss' association of the 'gift analogy' with the involuntariness inherent to the procreative process. I argued that both the involuntariness of and within ordinary procreation are necessary for the gift analogy, and that the oddities of (ordinary) procreative agency push procreation beyond an act that can be intended. These limits on intentional action within the process provide some grounds for the intuition that procreated children are 'gifts.' I then turn to Michael Sandel and Jürgen Habermas' respective attempts to specify why limits on procreative agency are worth preserving. While I am drawn to such accounts, I suggest the moral weight for procreating they offer is nebulous relative to the risks of harms. I thus consider the problem of natural embryo death, which generates anti-natalist implications for anyone who thinks the early embryo has moral status. I argue that the involuntariness of procreative agency plays a role in the intuitions that such deaths are licit, and that the force of the debunking argument from such deaths depends upon background commitments about 'nature.' As such, I suggest the 'gift analogy' seems to supply only weak normative justification to pursue procreative parenthood without further support.

Chapter Three: Parenthood and Procreative Bonds

Here I evaluate whether the benefits of a 'biological' relationship to the parent and child supply distinctive reasons to enter parenthood through procreation rather than adoption. Nearly every defense of such bonds attempts to avoid both genetic reductionism and establishing a disparity between adoptive and procreative parenthood. However, such accounts flounder upon the shoals of three objections: they either bottom out in convention or intuition, engender a

disparity between adoptive and procreative parenthood, or trivialize the value of procreative bonds. I argue this difficulty of specifying the putative value of procreative bonds is endemic to them: grounding their 'value' outside of biology *per se* while granting that such value is available in adoptive bonds undermines any appeal to biology or genetics as a distinctive reason to procreate. I gesture at an account that accepts a disparity between adoption and procreation but rejects an inequality between them. However, were such an approach successful it would do no more than argue procreative skeptics to a draw, leaving a philosophical defense of procreative optimism in the position of drawing upon the very pre-existing intuitions that skeptics are questioning. I conclude by suggesting that while procreative optimism seems attractive, it is an unstable basis for normatively justifying procreation in the face of skeptical and debunking concerns—even though such a practice is both widespread and widely accepted as licit.

Chapter Four: Neither Optimism nor Pessimism: Karl Barth Among the Moral Philosophers

This chapter makes a handbrake turn into Karl Barth's understanding of creation and procreation. I begin by evaluating Barth's argument that affirming creation's distinct interconnection with the covenant is necessary to escape philosophy's contest of intuitions about creation's goodness. Barth's Christological account of creation's goodness transcends both optimism and pessimism, and so takes the goods and bads within creation more seriously than they are able to. Yet it also affirms an asymmetrical prioritization of creation's light and shadow sides, so that the latter is transient and derivative in a way the former is not. I argue that this fideistic confidence in creation's goodness has an intrinsically ethical edge: neither Descartes, Schopenhauer, nor Leibniz can provide a confidence sufficient to live and die based upon it. The discord and resonance between Barth's understanding of creation and the procreative optimisms and pessimisms that marked the first part of this dissertation occupies the final movement of this chapter. While Barth's understanding of creation reshapes the background against which 'risks' are assessed, whether a presumptive pro-natalism follows from this maximal confidence in creation's goodness depends on Barth's understanding of procreation. It is to that question which Chapter Five turns.

Chapter Five: Creation, Covenant, and Blessing

This chapter evaluates Barth's understanding of procreation within his doctrine of creation. In his discussion of the first creation account in III/1, Barth distinguishes procreating from transmitting the *imago Dei*. Procreating on this understanding makes the *imago* and the continuity of genealogy physically possible, as creation makes the covenant 'technically possible.' But when Barth turns to the 'sacramental' understanding of the covenant as internal basis of creation, he argues that the fulfillment of the covenant is specifically marked by the abrogation of procreation and the consecration of marriage in the *imago Dei* of Christ and the church. I argue that this account allows Barth to frame procreation as predominately a burden within the Old Testament, such that the theme of 'blessing' within the first creation account functionally disappears from view. This relativization of procreation also structures Barth's anthropology in III/2, where the human *from* is derivative to the mutual origination that occurs within the I-Thou encounter of male and female. And it pervades Barth's special ethics of parents and children, which emphasizes the eschatological *consecration* of marriage (in Christ and the church) and corresponding *dissolution* of procreation and genealogy. Children are now 'free and optional' gifts of God who lie outside the reach of moral reasons for parents. Moreover, the alleviation of the 'burden' of procreation prompts Barth to suggest that procreation still happens as a sign of God's 'patience.' While procreation is a matter of serious responsibility, it thus has little theological significance beyond making the history of parenthood physically possible. Yet Barth also suggests that there is a 'confidence in life grounded in faith' which animates procreation, the exploration of which occupies Chapter Six.

Chapter Six: *Respect for Life as a Reason to Create*

This chapter considers Barth's understanding of humanity's constitution and time to determine whether his understanding of 'life' might animate a pro-natalist presumption. I first argue that on Barth's understanding our constitution is adapted for the covenant. Such a determination builds in an inherently ethical dimension to our constitution, which is a 'saving fact' that bears unwitting and unintentional witness to the covenant. I then turn to the limits of human life, and argue that the encounter with God at birth and death, rather than non-existence, heightens and intensifies the value of life between those limits by transforming it from a series of opportunities into an irrepeatable, once-for-all offer from God. However, Barth's depiction of baptism as the New Testament's answer to humanity's *Whence*? also eliminates natural

parenthood from the landscape, emphasizing the individual's origins in God alone as witnessed by the church. I then turn to Barth's special ethics of respect for life, and suggest that the scope of God's command into humanity's constitution is pervasive. However, this presumptive pro-natalism is hampered by Barth's ambiguity about whether human 'sexual impulses' are inherently reproductive, and by Barth's failure to apply the eschatological intensification of life to procreation. Additionally, I suggest Barth's understanding of 'life' founds an asymmetry between parents and children: the parents' standpoint is less theologically significant than the child's. Barth's understanding of 'life' thus raises questions about the positive significance of natural parenthood and child's organic preconditions. Such questions dominate the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Seven: Mary and the Eschatological Confirmation of Procreative Bonds

This chapter considers the putative value of procreative bonds through putting Barth's account of the Virgin Birth in I/2 in constructive dialogue with his later understanding of parents and children in III/4. Barth's early account is concerned to bracket Mary's agency from indicating any natural capacity for God and so opening the door to natural theology. However, keeping Mariology in a subordinate position to Christology in *this* way seems to simultaneously diminish Mary's agency and frame the Virgin Birth as a contradiction of ordinary procreation rather than an exceptional or highly unusual instance of it. In his concern to protect an independent Mariology from arising, Barth's account of the Virgin Birth prepares the way for his later relativization of procreation. I then revisit Barth's understanding of procreative bonds within III/4's discussion of parents and children. I argue that there Barth contends that the honour parents have is founded not upon their status as progenitors, but as God's representatives—a status they are not permitted to assert toward their children. Parental authority lies in an uneasy tension between divine and human action, where the decisive thing the child needs is not one parents can supply. This account, I suggest, relativizes biological kinship. However, I argue that Barth's account of the 'limiting case' also supplies reasons for thinking its eschatological dimensions establish procreative bonds, thus heightening their importance—much as Barth's understanding of life in its limits heightened its importance. Such an account, if accurate, raises the possibility that the Virgin Birth is not a contradiction of ordinary procreation but a complementary, eschatological confirmation of it. This also raises

the possibility for reconfiguring Mary's role as the first respondent to the announcement of the covenant's completion—which would offer procreation an 'eschatological consecration' that it otherwise lacks on Barth's view.

Chapter Eight: Honour, Agency, and Reasons to Procreate

This chapter carries forward the reconstruction of Barth's account of Mary, except here I pursue questions about the agency involved in procreating through Barth's understanding of honour. On the reading I advance, honour names the value that God ascribes to human nature and agency, which gives Barth's divine command theory a eudaemonist dimension. As such honour falls upon the creature from above, it is constrained by 'modesty.' Barth opens up the possibility, however, that honour could also be ascribed and accrue on the basis of vicarious action, e.g. toward parents on the basis of their children's lives. I evaluate Barth's understanding of the honour of procreative parenthood in this light, suggesting that it is constituted by an affirmation of the unique agency parents have in being present in 'action and suffering' for God's work in creating an individual in His image. However, Barth fails to deploy resources in his treatment of procreative agency from his account of marriage to explain how human action aims at what God alone can do. Such a gap obscures procreating's inherently theological quality as an act of faith, threatening to naturalize procreation by detaching it from having any theological significance. However, this understanding of honour and human agency requires a further reconfiguration of Mary for her position as a 'presupposition' to Christ's work. Finally, I argue the peculiar honour of procreative agency, and the vicarious honour of having a child whose life is lived well, supply strong reasons to enter procreative parenthood, provided that such honour remains bounded by the modesty that respects the limits of parental agency.

Conclusion

After recapitulating the argument of this dissertation, my conclusion gathers together the various threads that have emerged and describes the contours and limits of 'procreative fideism,' a presumptive willingness to procreate animated by faith in God's glad accompanying of creation. I suggest such an account inscribes procreative agency with a theological significance that it lacks on Barth's view: procreation is a proleptic disclosure of God's love in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Procreative agency is adapted for the disclosure of

the covenant: procreation is the type, and the cross and resurrection are the prototype. 'Procreative fideism' also supplies reasons to procreate that are more closely tied to an agent's well-being: prospective parents seek the honour of being present in action and suffering for the divine work of creating an irrepeatable, once-for-all offer of a human life. By remaining 'modest,' parents function as presuppositions for their child, whose life accrues to their own—albeit in a derivative and limited way. I then turn to how this account might intersect with the themes that emerged from within moral philosophy. Aspects of the argument resonate with that discipline's offerings, even if it goes beyond them by providing a surer footing for confident procreating than can be found there. Finally, I conclude the dissertation by offering a final aspect of procreative fideism, and a final emendation to Barth's procreative ethics: joy.

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It is impossible to write about having children without expressing gratitude for my own parents, without whose 'confidence in life' I would not enjoy this irrepeatable offer from God. Their longsuffering has won them many crowns, and their love and support has justly won my earnest thanks. I hope my life, and this dissertation, bestow honour upon them; I know it is an honour to be their son. The rest of my family has been similarly supportive; it is a grand thing to be the uncle to so many spry and intelligent young ones, as it is a delightful burden to now be a

godfather. Life would not have its depth or richness without such bonds, nor would the attempt to theoretically reflect on *this* subject be as rewarding without them. My gratitude is immeasurable for the chance to be involved in so many lives.

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At last: *Sic transit gloria mundi. Soli Deo Gloria.*

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Introduction

Elizabeth Anscombe opens her vituperative essay 'Why Have Children' by observing that the "very title tells of the times we live in."[1] What follows is more lament than argument. The question, Anscombe contends, "simply didn't arise" in previous generations except for those who "were wicked enough to *not* want them and think of ways of preventing them from ever being conceived, or destroying them if they were." While it might be reasonable to ask why one would want children, Anscombe argues by way of such comparisons what a "weird distorted question" the inquiry is.[2] That we can and do ask it is a sign of our decay. Though more restrained, Anna Louise Poulson follows Anscombe's lead in her unpublished dissertation on contraception: it is not so much the absence of answers that is the problem, but "the fact that the question…is even being asked." The existence of such a question is "indicative of the fact we no longer understand having children to be constitutive of the human good."[3] The Christian response to such attitudes begins "with a refusal to accept this presupposition."[4] Similarly, Stanley Hauerwas noted in an early essay that in having children we are "carried along by the sheer vitality of life in a manner that makes the question of 'why' seem almost obscene."[5]

While the temptation to reject the question outright might indicate despair for a lost world, it is better to see it as a sign of how fundamental the question is—and subsequently how difficult it is to answer. For Anscombe, the question falls at the dividing line between theology and philosophy. To those who offer "hostility or mere indifference" toward the ongoing existence of the human race, Anscombe proposes that it may take "prophetical revelation or a blind belief in the care of God" to know "our dreadful race is not better all damned…or all abolished."[6] Stanley Hauerwas adopts a similar stance, albeit from an explicitly theological point of view. The waning of Christianity, he proposes, presents a "greater challenge for people who think themselves as secular" than it does for Christians. Such individuals must

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[1] G. E. M. Anscombe, "Why Have Children?," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 63 (1989): 48.
[2] Ibid., 52.
[3] Anna Louise Poulson, *An Examination of the Ethics of Contraception with Reference to Recent Protestant and Roman Catholic Thought* (PhD diss., King's College, 2006), 196.
[4] Ibid., 216. Poulson argues the question has benefits, and develops her own answer around the 'common good' of the couple. See pages 217-245. While her positive account has merits, her description of the *good* draws most of its power from the contrast Poulson draws with a liberal individualism.
[5] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 208.
[6] Anscombe, "Why," 50.

simultaneously disavow any cultural reliance upon Christianity while telling us why "it would make sense to make promises that last a lifetime or to bring children into a world that you think is without purpose."[7] Though his rhetorical register differs from Anscombe's, his point is the same: articulating why we have children raises fundamental questions that may not be answerable outside of revelation.

One reason for moral theologians to consider the question, though, is that the answer will matter for how we understand related moral issues. The 'why' rests upon the 'what': in Aristotelian language, the final cause depends upon the formal cause. Understanding *why* human beings generate new life through an act of sexual intercourse requires a description about *what* they are doing and how they are doing it. Answering why human beings want to undertake the task of procreating renders alternate means toward that end morally intelligible. Few have understood this better than Hauerwas—and unsurprisingly, as noted below, few have addressed the question to the extent he has.

Recent analytic moral philosophy has felt the question's burden more acutely than moral theology. Since Anscombe's 1989 essay, applied moral philosophers have devoted considerable resources to exploring fundamental questions about the value, nature, and limits of procreative parenthood. The angles from which this inquiry has been undertaken are many: overpopulation concerns have pressed on how many children one should have, genetic engineering has raised questions about what kind of child one should have, and what we might call 'theodicy concerns' have cast doubt on whether one should have a child at all. Protestant moral theologians have often noted the import of the question—but have not systematically or comprehensively pursued it. As close engagement with moral philosophy will occupy the first part of this dissertation, I here wish to address how Protestant moral theologians have addressed the question. Such a (brief) overview will help contextualize the work that follows, and my reasons for undertaking it.

Protestant Moral Theology on Having Children

In Michael Banner's recent *Ethics of Everyday Life,* he argues that close engagement with social anthropology reminds moral theology of 'kinship,' about which it has "seemed to have

[7] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 5.

very little to say"—captivated as it has been with being an ethics of 'hard cases.'[8] Two interrelated themes emerge from that discipline's presentation of infertility's social frame: the 'desperation of childlessness' and the interest in a 'child of one's own.' For Banner, moral theology will "deny the existence of (and repudiate the desire) [sic] for the child of one's own of supposed contemporary longing, but will also deny the tragedy of childlessness which that child is intended to relieve."[9] Christianity "preferred kinship that is made over kinship that is given."[10] The failure to renounce the interest in procreative parenthood means the Vatican's *Donum Vitae* remains in the same moral register as the UK's *Warnock Report*: both presume procreative kinship is the only form.[11] Childless couples are placed in a "double bind": they are denied the use of ARTs, and their desire for children is "left solemnly in place on its contemporary pedestal."[12] Banner is unsparing in his contention that natural kinship has no theological significance: the Church is a "community in which there are no biological ties."[13] Banner attempts, however, to prevent this unremitting rejection of an interest in biological parenthood from devolving into an anti-procreation stance. While Christianity is incompatible, he writes, with "certain 'pronatalisms,'…it doesn't follow that it will fall into step with antinatalism."[14] Children "belong to the happiness of paradise and are a blessing even outside of its boundaries." Banner revisits the ritual of the 'churching of women,' which he thinks incorporates procreation into the church without reducing it to an interest in a 'child of one's own.' In addition to its denials, then, Christianity asks us "to imagine and to enact…a kinship beyond biology, in which the child is received as gift."[15]

While Banner's final assertion is attractive, it is also discordant with his unqualified repudiation of the 'tragedy' of childlessness. One wonders why a childless couple must renounce their desire for the gift of a child and deny themselves a sense of tragedy? There is no sense in Banner's work that the Gospel might reframe and reinterpret the tragedy of childlessness, not by denying it but by explaining it—thereby providing childless couples language to articulate their lament properly. The absence, I suspect, stems from his decision to

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[8] Michael Banner, *The Ethics of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 37, 9.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 38.
[11] Ibid., 57.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 33.
[14] Ibid., 61.
[15] Ibid., 81.

let social anthropology frame the experience of infertility, rather than a theological source like the Old Testament. Having discovered that there are idolatrous interests in biological children, he proposes there is no such interest at all —before reasserting its existence on the miraculous basis of a "gift." Banner describes his approach as "radically, therapeutically, and evangelically" responding to social norms. It is radical, to be sure, but hardly therapeutic or evangelical.[16] Banner's "treatment" for the idolatry of the blood tie is to cut it off altogether. And he prefers a broadsword for the work to a scalpel.

Banner's antithesis between contemporary attitudes and moral theology and his subsequent affirmation of children as a gift pervade much of Protestant moral theology. Both Gilbert Meilaender and Brent Waters, for instance, have pursued the 'mystification' of the act of generation.[17] Meilaender's early work closely examines John Robertson's philosophical doctrine of 'procreative liberty,' which presents reproduction as an individual interest that treats persons as "largely isolated wills."[18] Against this, Meilaender proposes an account of bodiliness in which the child becomes the "natural fruition of [the couple's] shared love, not a chosen project." The child on this view is always a "gift," and even "a mystery."[19] Beneath this view lies a reconfiguration of the agency at work in procreation, and of the relationship of the person to their bodies. Our humanity is expressed not only in what we *accomplish,* but what we *do.* The body is the "locus of personal presence," which enables us to "discern the equal worth of the child who springs from the embrace of our bodies."[20] The bond that emerges through such an act is significant precisely because parents did *not* choose it: its involuntary dimension "mirrors a still greater mystery: that anything should exist at all." Procreation is not reproduction, because as an "act of love [it] is not governed simply by the rational will, but a passion that comes over us."[21] Lose this dimension, as John Robertson does, and the child "begins to resemble a product of our wills rather than the offspring of our passion."[22]

This mystification transposes the question of having children outside the key of *reasons* into the key of significance and meaning. In an exploration of how fertility interrelates with

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[16] Ibid., 37.
[17] Behind them stand two Protestant moral theologians whose views they variously adopt and adapt, namely Oliver O'Donovan and Paul Ramsey. I leave them aside for space considerations.
[18] Gilbert Meilaender, *Body, Soul and Bioethics* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1995), 76.
[19] Ibid., 80.
[20] Ibid., 84.
[21] Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 13.
[22] Ibid., 15.

transience, Meilaender directly addresses why we have children. Rather than follow Plato's solution of immortality, he prefers Aristotle, whose answer "focuses on the imperatives of our animal nature" and may even be a philosophical apprehension of the "divine blessing enunciated in Genesis 1." Yet the spontaneous overflow of animal impulses is not the only plane on which Meilaender thinks procreation operates. Acknowledging that Genesis 1 is a command as well as blessing, he suggests that there is a "meaning and significance" in the sequence of generations, which means we can "set aside a search for what motivates human beings to reproduce themselves" to ask instead what "deeper purposes in human life" procreating serves.[23] Turning to the theological virtues, Meilaender writes that the "generative life, the relation between the generations, is a school of virtue in which we learn grateful faithfulness to the gift of life we have received, generous hopefulness for those to whom we hand on the gift, and the love that freely gives what it has freely received."[24]

Meilaender's theological mystification of procreation is shared by Brent Waters. As Waters puts it, the advent of ARTs means "reproductive mystery is giving way to…reproductive management," in which procreation becomes a "series of discrete tasks."[25] Against this reductionism, Waters advances a "larger moral vision."[26] Waters also views John Robertson's 'procreative liberty' as *the* text for moral philosophy, suggesting that it serves as the "manifesto of [the] emerging pattern of procreation and child-rearing."[27] Such a liberal approach to procreative questions treats gametes and embryos as raw materials, while reducing parenthood to an "assertion of the will."[28] Much of Waters' focus, then, is on articulating and defending a normative framework of marital and family relationships that is distinct from the liberal framework of "individual interests and rights."[29]

As with Meilaender, this framework offers an alternative account of the nature of bodily life. Following Oliver O'Donovan, Waters affirms a Christologically-ordered 'natural ethic,' in which the cooperative powers of male and female are directed in conformity to God's commands and intentions.[30] He contends that the "orderly transmission of life requires

[23] Gilbert Meilaender, *Should We Live Forever?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 69.
[24] Ibid., 73.
[25] Brent Waters, *Reproductive Technology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 15.
[26] Ibid., 18.
[27] Ibid., 19.
[28] Ibid., 27.
[29] Ibid., 19.
[30] Ibid., 34.

procreative stewardship," but discriminates between pro-*natalist* and pro-*creative* attitudes.[31] The latter procreates on God's behalf: "If humans come to prefer sterility over fertility, they are no longer discharging the duties entrusted to them by God, because they will have rejected the life-giving end for which creation was called into being."[32] Procreation is to be firmly embedded within the family, a "place of mutual and timely belonging," a sphere of "expanding, unfolding and enfolding love."[33] Its operative category is the covenant, which binds parents and children together in a way that "transcends natural instinct" and avoids reducing children to "satisfactory outcomes of parental will, thereby negating any inherent bond between parents and offspring."[34] The family is the whole greater than the sum of all of its parts, and decisions to enter parenthood (or not) are only intelligible through grasping its teleological, providential, and eschatological ordering. Procreation is thus a subordinate category, the (moral) nature of which is only discernible on those terms: "A birth does not in itself connote any providential significance, for a birth does not automatically establish a place of mutual and timely belonging for the one born."[35] Every family presupposes a birth, and biology remains the "substructure" for which moral theology must account.[36] But procreating is governed by the *being* of the couple, rather than their choice or will. Parenthood is a "trusteeship whose duties are exercised within the *given* terms of the familial covenant," which means the parent-child relationship is not itself founded upon the choice of parents to love children. Children are brought into such a relationship through the "fully shared being of their parents," rather than their wills *per se.*[37]

Waters' expansive alternative to liberal individualism has much to commend it. Yet his account of why we procreate is wanting. Despite explicitly turning toward the question, he ends up emphasizing instead the relativization of procreation Christ's birth introduces, rather than its establishment. The birth of Christ means that the purpose of preparing "the time when the Word would be made flesh" has been "eliminated."[38] Waters thinks adoption is not a reproductive option, and that it honours the naturally reproductive nature of sexual intercourse. And unlike

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[31] Ibid., 36.
[32] Brent Waters, *The Family in Christian Social and Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 173.
[33] Waters, *Reproductive Technology,* 47.
[34] Waters, *Family,* 176.
[35] Waters, *Reproductive Technology,* 25.
[36] Waters, *Family,* 194.
[37] Ibid., 183.
[38] Waters, *Reproductive Technology*, 57.

Meilaender, he goes on to affirm *in vitro fertilization* on the grounds that it does not diminish the bodily character of procreation. Yet from what I can tell, despite acknowledging there is a question about why we have children, he says nothing positive in response.

The problem stems, I suspect, from the sharp dichotomy between *being* and *will* that underlies both Meilaender and Waters' approaches, a dichotomy animated in part by the antithesis between Christian accounts of the family and those 'liberal' understandings that John Robertson's 'procreative liberty' sums up. The liberal account introduces a "fundamental alienation and unfamiliarity" into the parent-child relationship, by founding it on will and choice.[39] This therapeutic expunging of deracinated understandings of family and procreation is valuable. But the possibility of adopting *rather than* procreating still raises pressing questions about the reasons a couple has within a covenantal, being-oriented theology of family to procreate. The elusiveness of such views is both their strength and weakness. The bifurcation between being and will, and between choice and gift, underscores philosophy's voluntaristic character. But it also untethers procreation from the *reasons* agents might have to prefer it—especially when other licit options of parenthood are possible. In that way, mystification efforts seem to rely upon and even exacerbate the very bifurcation in agency they are resisting, only from the other side of the divide. The mysticism of covenantal, bodily life cannot overcome the voluntarism of contemporary liberal philosophy; it can only contradict it.

Few moral theologians have understood the pervasive importance of the question of why we have children, though, as Stanley Hauerwas. The question appears in essays on disability, on the family, on abortion, on *in vitro fertilization,* and on marriage and singleness. Many of the themes he raises in response comport with the accounts offered above. Hauerwas does not rule out in principle the possibility of secular answers to the question, but he also highlights the fact that it is a puzzle for non-theological views. In a lament about moral philosophy's adherence to 'rights,' he suggests that we "lack a moral account of why we commit ourselves to having children."[40] The problem is endemic to liberal individualism, which reduces parents and children to "friendly strangers." The notion of autonomy that accompanies such a view renders the special relations of involuntary family bonds "ethically anomalous" and makes the family itself "morally irrational."[41] The reasons to have a child are thus either immoral or

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[39] Waters, *Family*, 184.
[40] Hauerwas, *Community*, 157.
[41] Ibid., 165, 172.

unintelligible; they either instrumentalize a child for the parents' self-satisfaction or treat the child as a "threat to my autonomy."[42] But Hauerwas is equally clear that the romanticized idealization of the family is equally unable to sustain the reasons to procreate: "familial kinship," he argues, cannot be "sustained on solely interpersonal and psychological grounds." There must instead be a set of "traditions and practices" that are passed on.[43] The "need for future generations" is too important to rest "on anything as fragile as the emotion of love."[44]

Positively, Hauerwas suggests that the question must be "placed in the context of some very substantive claims about the nature of the world and God's relation to it."[45] Hauerwas (unsurprisingly) locates the affirmative stance toward children primarily within the church. A "community's willingness to encourage children is a sign of its confidence in itself and its people," in that children are "symbols of our hope"—but *not* the object of hope, which would be "blasphemy."[46] On this basis, Hauerwas speaks of having children in terms of obligations and duties. The early Christians "were called to marriage and to having children as their obligation," as children were "their pledge to be a community formed by the conviction that…God rules this world."[47] Such an obligation binds the Church to time: our "commitment, indeed obligation, to have children is our pledge that our salvation is not ahistorical but takes place through the contingencies of history."[48]

As children are primarily members of the church, the family becomes predominately a historical institution in which traditions are passed down, not a biologically grounded or mediated institution. Some thirty years before Banner, Hauerwas notes that therapeutic IVF is animated by the idea that "biology has some extremely important role to play in parenting."[49] The claim that biology "makes children 'ours'" is a "pagan assumption."[50] While biology might "help us learn to be parents," we must also "be guided by a moral portrayal of parenting that cannot be biologically derived."[51] God has "not willed the church to be reproduced through

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[42] Ibid., 172.
[43] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 510.
[44] Hauerwas, *Community*, 164.
[45] Stanley Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 147.
[46] Hauerwas, *Community,* 209; Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 147.
[47] Hauerwas, *Community*, 210.
[48] Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 148.
[49] Ibid., 145.
[50] Hauerwas, *Reader*, 515.
[51] Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 152.

biology but through witness and conversion."[52] Parenting itself is an "office of a community, rather than a description of a biological process."[53] While intimacy and care are important, "equally important is the initiation of children into moral beliefs and institutions we value."[54] Against liberal individualism, the language of 'choice' for children should be "qualified and controlled by the more fundamental metaphor of gift."[55]

Meilaender has argued that Hauerwas' view of marriage and children represents a "de-mystification" of the bond, which cuts him off from the language of human love to explain God's love. Hauerwas "seldom emphasizes the natural affinities in which the bond of parents and children is grounded." He has "thinned out" the meaning of the unitive good of marriage. Such an approach ostensibly demonstrates the marks of Hauerwas' (infamous) ecclesiastically centered, over-realized eschatology, which does not do justice to creation.[56] In a remark that illuminates his approach as much as Hauerwas', Meilaender objects that Hauerwas does not "bring a sacramental imagination into thinking about the sexual relationship."[57]

Whether Hauerwas is inattentive to natural affinities or not, I suspect the Hauerwasian rejoinder would be something like: what "nature," and which "grounds" for parenthood? In other words, does Meilaender's argument present a critique or an alternative, one that Hauerwas' framework considers and rejects? Meilaender's misreading of Hauerwas' account of how parents and children relate indicates something has gone awry: he suggests that while it is true Christians "understand the presence of the child as God's gift," this does "not mean that mother and father receive that child as they would a stranger." On Meilaender's view, the child "*springs from*" the marriage, which holds the unitive and procreative dimensions of sex together. But if Hauerwas downplays the interrelation of the unitive and procreative dimensions of the sexual act, he *nowhere* reduces the 'gifted' quality of the child to a relationship of strangers. It is just such an effect from liberal individualism that Hauerwas' account of the family everywhere *rejects.* The office of parenthood is distinct. That it can be fulfilled by anyone within the church does not reduce its content or quality to the Christian's relationship to

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[52] Hauerwas, *Reader*, 512.
[53] Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 149.
[54] Hauerwas, *Community*, 173.
[55] Stanley Hauerwas, Richard Bondi, and David B. Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 150.
[56] Gilbert Meilaender, "Time for Love: The Place of Marriage and Children in the Thought of Stanley Hauerwas," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 40, no. 2 (2012): 255.
[57] Ibid., 259.

strangers, so much as provide the grounds for the Christian community to treat that established relation as *parental*.

Still, that qualification does not mean Hauerwas has sufficiently explained how the Church's relativization of biological parenthood is commensurate with its obligation to procreate. Hauerwas has, in his own way, answered why Christians should have children. As with the interlocutors above, there is something worthwhile about the deconstructive critique of liberalism and the maximal inflation of the Christian alternative. It is a helpful purgative, which clarifies certain elements of the Christian family and provides an intelligibility to certain practices. But by rendering parenthood as an office of the church and undertaking a serious polemic against biology, he undermines the force of his own argument for why Christians should have children. The combination of those two competing movements seems to make it *harder* for the Christian to justify having children—not obligate them to do so. Meilaender's critique underscores the intense paradox of Hauerwas' account: he speaks of having children by way of procreation as a duty or obligation while simultaneously polemicizing against biology as the basis for the parent-child relationship. The two are not obviously incommensurate, but neither is it clear how they hold together.

Additionally, Hauerwas' ecclesiastically-oriented account of why Christians procreate places them under an obligation to do so (if married) by virtue of their presence within the community. Yet if the office of parenthood in the church can be filled without loss or diminution through non-procreative means, questions arise about how couples within the church are to weigh procreative parenthood *vis a vis* adoption. That adoption is an *option* for couples makes the language of 'choice,' rather than 'gift,' far more intuitive. In a context where the Church is presenting couples with a decision to adopt or procreate, an equivalent need for reasons to help parents make decisions arises. Even if the gift terminology remains, it leaves an open question about why a couple might pursue the gift of procreative rather than adoptive parenthood.

Hauerwas' ecclesiastically centered understanding of the family also risks leaving prospective parents without reasons to procreate that are tethered to their well-being. The worry is close to, but distinct from Meilaender's: where Meilaender is worried about demystification and the position of those 'natural affinities,' my concern is that Hauerwas' approach contains a whiff of procreating for the sake of the kingdom of God, leaving underdeveloped what distinct

or unique goods procreative parenthood might supply for the parents. The significance of children as 'symbols of hope' seems distinct from the reason why a couple might or should undertake procreation as an aim. By failing to integrate procreation with the office of parenthood, the interest in children is untethered from the rational agency of the parents, such that the 'gift' becomes a mysterious irruption—a sign of hope that makes the parents glad, to be sure, but which also leaves indeterminate why those who could adopt would reasonably choose to procreate.

It is striking, though, how far Protestant moral theologians in this area have retreated from close interaction with moral philosophy. Banner's polemic against the discipline is the latest in a long line of critiques—and while Meilaender and Waters are not rigid in their rejection, they overemphasize John Robertson's role in setting 'procreative liberty' as a guiding principle for the field. Construing moral philosophy as pervasively captive to liberal autonomy effectively heightens the contrast between the disciplines, rendering it easier to prove theology the victor: but it also exonerates theologians from the task of listening to anything further the discipline might have to say. It may have been true in 1983 that we "lack a moral account of why we commit ourselves to having children."[58] But it is not so today, even if the accounts are still wanting. Moral philosophy has plied its hand to the task of providing what Hauerwas thinks is the duty of the secular, namely, to explain why we should go on having children. Whether they are doing so successfully is an open question— but it is one to which the moral theologian should remain attentive to.

At the same time, the disinterest in philosophy is understandable: the above thinkers are all theologians, and all committed to developing ethics based on the witness of Christ's love within the church. Such a starting point makes it all the more striking that their descriptions of the theological bases for procreating have had virtually nothing to say about *Mary* or *Joseph.* It was Oliver O'Donovan who deployed the Christological formula 'begotten, not made' in response to the emerging reproductive technologies and the reconfiguration of the family they made possible.[59] Such a description brought contemporary moral debates into close contact with Christology. Yet the One who was begotten and not made from His Father before all worlds was also born in time from the Virgin Mary. That Christ is born on earth is inextricable from the

[58] Hauerwas, *Community*, 157.
[59] Oliver O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

fact that He is raised from the dead: if He sets the paradigm in which Christians go on having children, then it seems His being born has something to do with our giving birth. The aversion to considering the Holy Family in such a context is understandable, as it seems like using the obscure and miraculous in order to explain the ordinary and natural. Yet is there a better model to help Protestant theologians attain their aim of destabilizing biological bonds without undermining the value of procreation? Jesus is simultaneously adopted and born, and His parents are a progenitor—in some sense—and steward. If the above theologians are right that the value of procreation is discernible only within the prior context of the family or parenthood as an office of the church, then assessing the significance of Christ's life for ethics requires locating it within the familial and 'ecclesiastical' conditions that stand before and beneath it. Both of those meet in Mary.

Where We Go From Here

My project, then, is an exploration of procreation's normative grounds within moral philosophy and the theology of Karl Barth. Barth has rarely, if ever, been put in direct dialogue with analytic, applied moral philosophy. And no wonder: he is best known to non-Barth scholars for the strength of his repudiation of natural theology, which is often assimilated into a broader hostility toward philosophy. This latter reading is a caricature: as we shall see, Barth frequently engaged in close, immanent critiques of philosophical interlocutors. The witness of Christianity need not justify itself at the bar of philosophy. Yet by removing the anxiety about Christianity's truth claims, theology is also freed for dialogue with other disciplines.

Anscombe's question about whether philosophy has anything to say in the face of the judgment that procreation is an evil remains a real question. My aim in listening to philosophy is not to expose the discipline (again!) for its insufficient starting points. Critiques of analytic philosophy's de-narrativized method and pervasive individualism have long carried the day in moral theology, often leaving the discipline bereft of the close, concise argumentation moral philosophers value—and leaving moral philosophy without reminders of how the intuitions they call upon were formed. The divorce has been an unhappy one, for both fields. Other forms of moral philosophy might be more amenable to theological concerns than that which predominates in Anglo-American philosophical circles. Yet there is real value for clarifying

one's own commitments by contrasting them with a discourse that has very different and in some ways incompatible starting points from one's own, as contemporary applied analytic moral philosophy *vis a vis* moral theology.[60] The argument that follows is critical of moral philosophy, and ends up concurring with Anscombe's judgment—but does so through finding moments of resonance between the two disciplines.

I suspect this approach will leave no one satisfied: moral theologians may wonder why I bothered with moral philosophy at all, while moral philosophers will blanch at entering the radically different moral universe Karl Barth represents. My aim is not necessarily to persuade moral philosophers to leave their discipline behind and affirm the value of revelation in order to save their intuitions, or their souls—though were that to happen I would certainly not object. But the argument is not an apologetic in that sense. It is in the first place an inquiry, an investigation into the conditions and presuppositions—theological or otherwise—that must be in place to make sense of a practice as basic as procreating.

This method helps explain my choice of Karl Barth, because he is by no means an obvious interlocutor for one looking to justify procreating. Somewhere behind the Protestant moral theologians stands Barth's towering, complicated legacy—and his argument that any obligation to procreate has been dissolved by the birth of Christ. Such an emphasis went hand-in-glove with the relativization of biological bonds, a natural move for someone whose context included the racial ethnonationalism of the Nazis. Yet it also makes Barth a curious choice for an investigation into why Christians have children.

It is probably too Pickwickian to simply invert the terms and propose that what appears as vice is actually a virtue: but that is my path. Barth's work is valuable for this project precisely *because* the grain of his thought runs against the obligation to have children. Whereas other theological approaches might take an affirmative stance toward procreating for granted, within Barth it can be a *question.* Moreover, the doctrinal context in which that question emerges is expansive: there are a variety of threads that go into his complicated understanding of procreation, which allow for a richly textured account. Those threads include an awareness of the role Mary and the Virgin Birth might play in a Christian ethic of marriage and procreation, even if the connection is undeveloped.

[60] Throughout this dissertation I use 'moral philosophy' as shorthand for 'contemporary analytic, applied moral philosophy.'

However, such emphases mean that the attempt to develop a theologically motivated pro-natalism might have to leave Barth's thought behind and become only— though perhaps not *merely*—Barthian. The term could apply to this dissertation in two possible senses. The first sense clearly fits: the final two chapters undertake a critical reconstruction of Barth's Mariology with resources from within his own thought. Such an approach is Barthian in at least the sense that it takes Christology as the controlling element for ethics—even if such Christology folds the presuppositions of Christ's birth into its purview. However, it is possible this reconstruction bends Barth's theology beyond its breaking point. I leave the question to better students of his thought. The second sense of 'Barthian' is, I hope, less applicable: it is possible that my interpretation of Barth's thought is merely 'Barthian' in the sense that it has correctly identified the outline of his thought while butchering the details. It is a possibility I cannot dismiss out of hand, as I have avoided excavating Barth through a genealogical or historical lens, a tendency perhaps influenced by spending time in the radically decontextualized world of analytic moral philosophy (and thus proving critics of that discipline right). However, I think this is not the case, and I take my stands on matters of controversy in the literature when appropriate in the footnotes. I mention the two problems here mainly to note my agreement with the Barthian maxim that what comes first in presentation is second in priority: My fundamental interest is not *Barth's* ethics *per se,* but the conditions that must be in place in order to articulate and defend why Christians do and should give birth to children.

That is not to say I am uninterested in Barth or the details of exegesis. My aim here includes accurately and faithfully articulating his view. Given the scope of Barth's thought and writings, any effort to do this can only be partial, and even fragmentary. I have limited my focus to Volume III of the *Church Dogmatics,* and even then have only been able to nod toward III/3. (When I write variations of 'Barth thinks,' these qualifiers should be kept in mind.) I have done so to situate Barth's understanding of procreation as formally presented in §54.2, "Parents and Children," inside the broader doctrinal and ethical context that surrounds it. My reading of 'Parents and Children' thus requires moving in two directions: back into Barth's doctrine of creation and theological anthropology in III/1 and III/2, and forward into §55's discussion of "Freedom for Life" and §56's treatment of "Freedom in Limitation." Methodologically, I am convinced that the full force of Barth's understanding of procreation's value (or lack thereof) cannot be understood without appreciating how it opens up into those complementary aspects of

his ethics. §54.2 is one of the few aspects of Barth's special ethics that has received sustained, sustained treatment within the secondary literature in Gary Deddo's *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations.* But his presentation is marred in several ways through its failure to do just this.[61]

The narrow focus on Barth's account, however, stunts the investigation's value for theological ethics in one unforgivable way: it neglects what Scripture says about the question. The matter is not irrelevant to how we understand Barth's argument. He is, after all, animated by exegetical concerns—and argues that the New and Old Testaments come apart on this matter. The argument in what follows stays almost exclusively within the realm of doctrine and ethics, though I occasionally note points where Barth's interpretation of Scripture's witness on sex and procreation distorts emphases I think are clearly present. Still, there is more exegetical work to be done on the precise role procreation and natural parenthood play in the New Testament if Barth's account is to be answered and overcome in full.

It is an indicator of procreation's central importance that the beginnings of an adequate exploration of why we procreate requires exploring as many avenues as I undertake here. The doctrine of creation, the moral value of human organic life, the interrelation of grace and nature, the relationship between the resurrection and the moral life, the presuppositions of Christ's birth—all these weave together to explain both the theological significance of procreation and provide reasons why giving birth is a form of God's blessing that married Christians should desire. While such doctrinal dimensions depend on revelation, their significance is by no means limited to that revelation—even on Barth's own understanding. As we shall see, Barth thinks human organic life bears secret witness to the ways and works of God, regardless of whether we attend to it or not. In that way, the theological explanation for why we do and should have children is meant not to be a negation of the philosophical effort to answer the same, but its illumination: my hope is to signal a path that moral philosophy might follow, on its own terms and in its own ways. The church sometimes, Barth writes, has a duty to "awaken either a people or section of a people which has grown tired of life and despairs of the future, to the conscientious realisation that to avoid arbitrary decay they should make use of this merciful divine permission and seriously try to maintain the race."[62] Yet that proclamation requires

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[61] I note my substantive disagreements with Deddo at a number of points—and hasten to add that there are many aspects of his account that I agree with and have learned from.
[62] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/4, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 268-269.

understanding both its own reasons for procreating and the reasons being set forth by those who are ‘tired of life’ to justify their anti-natalism. Once the question has been asked, it cannot be unasked: once the option is presented, it cannot but be reasoned about. The only path Christian moral theology can take is through the question into its own inner logic, to hear the world’s reasons and lay bare its own. In so doing the church will make clear why the office of parenthood takes a unique and irreplaceable form through the act of procreation, and make clear to the world the basis and grounds for the glad confidence it shows in welcoming new individuals into God’s good and fallen world.

Chapter One

(Procreative) Neutrality is Not Enough: Evaluating the Asymmetry and Skeptical Anti-Natalism

Two intuitions govern moral philosophy's approach to the ethics of creation.[1] First, the reasonable expectation that an individual would have a miserable life supplies a moral reason *to not* create them.[2] Second, the reasonable expectation that an individual would have a very happy life supplies *no* moral reason to create them.[3] Moral philosophers consider these propositions—The Asymmetry—a feature of 'common sense morality.' Yet justifying one side of The Asymmetry seems to require modifying or giving up the other. Jeff McMahan concludes from this difficulty that problems "in the morality of causing people to exist seem…to pose the greatest challenge to realism in ethics."[4]

This chapter considers whether the 'procreative neutrality' expressed by the second half of The Asymmetry is sufficiently strong to overcome the 'procreative skepticism' embedded within the first half. The Asymmetry suggests that the expected harms within a life supply moral reasons against creating them, but the expected benefits supply no moral reason to create them. Given that every life will experience at least some suffering, it would seem the asymmetrical force of harms and benefits that The Asymmetry presupposes gives us a presumptive reason to not create anyone. In that way, the 'neutrality' of the second half seems to engender a presumptive anti-natalism. However, affirming that there are moral reasons to create happy people and so adopting a symmetry creates difficulties of its own. This chapter elaborates on this puzzle by evaluating responses to The Asymmetry in order to determine whether what I call 'procreative neutrality' is a *de facto* or presumptive anti-natalism.

[1] As noted in the introduction, I use 'moral philosophy' throughout this dissertation as shorthand for contemporary, applied, analytic moral philosophy.
[2] Discussions in moral philosophy about The Asymmetry and about generating human life more broadly rarely differentiate between the means of 'creation' or the nature of the agency at work in bringing human beings into the world. As such, I here adopt their custom of using 'create,' deferring questions about the nature of procreative agency until later in this work.
[3] Whether such 'miserable lives' actually exist is controversial.
[4] Jeff McMahan, "Causing People to Exist and Saving People's Lives," *Journal of Ethics* 17, no. 1–2 (2013): 34.

Reasons to create are puzzling, as most moral choices bear on previously existing individuals. But if nobody is born, nobody is harmed or benefited.[5] Attempts to explain how such reasons function turn on a number of axes. For one, they entangle us in complicated judgments about the nature of 'harms' and 'benefits,' and whether they apply in procreative decisions.[6] Additionally, they raise fundamental questions about assessing well-being, and how we identify lives 'worth living' from those that are (putatively) 'worth not living.'[7] And they raise questions about whether moral reasons are person-affecting or impersonal: do moral reasons only arise in response to the interests of a concrete, particular individual, or does the individual supply no part of the act's explanation?[8]

Every axis has bearing on the discussion in this chapter, but the last will be especially prominent. Person-affecting views must explain *which* persons count: only existing individuals, existing and future individuals, possible individuals, or everyone—regardless of whether they exist? Dilemmas emerge regardless of which option we choose. If only existing individuals count, the child created seems to be instrumentalized for the sake of reasons and interests extrinsic to their identity. If existing and future people count, but not possible people, it is difficult to explain *who* benefits if we do not create miserable individuals. If possible people count, it seems like we act for the sake of individuals who will never exist. However, impersonal accounts of reasons also face challenges. As most of the impersonal approaches on offer are consequentialist, there are persuasive independent reasons to reject them.[9] Such approaches require complex, comprehensive judgments about expected well-being. Their depiction of procreators as abstract causes of benefits gives their approach a bureaucratic atmosphere. And the individual created has no role in explaining the badness of creating a

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[5] David Benatar and David Wasserman, *Debating Procreation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 135.
[6] Space considerations do not allow me to undertake a full discussion of the nature of harms and benefits. For an overview, see Fiona Woollard and Frances Howard-Snyder, "Doing vs. Allowing Harm," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/doing-allowing/.
[7] Such views generally divide between 'zero point' accounts, in which an individual need only have a life that is barely worth living in order to be permissibly created, and 'threshold' accounts, which require the benefits of a life to exceed the harms by a certain degree. See Dominic Wilkinson, "A Life Worth Giving?," *American Journal of Bioethics* 11, no. 2 (2011): 20–32.
[8] Reasons grounded in the well-being of putative individuals are impersonal, since they apply to *anyone,* regardless of their individual interests or concerns. See Jeff McMahan, "Asymmetries in the Morality of Causing People to Exist," in *Harming Future Persons*, ed. Melinda A. Roberts and David T. Wasserman, vol. 35 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 49–68.
[9] I am broadly sympathetic with Bernard Williams' critiques of utilitarianism. See J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

miserable person. Given that the individual created is significantly affected by the decision, such an implication is counterintuitive. Because of these challenges, I also consider an approach to procreative reasons that attempts to rescue the intuitions beneath both person-affecting and impersonal accounts. Rivka Weinberg and David Wasserman both defend *wide* person-affecting accounts, which take the form of a Kantian constructivism. Because of this, they are more appropriately named person-*regarding* rather than person-*affecting* views. I will suggest that such an approach to procreative reasons is attractive, but that their account of procreation is too thin to overcome the presumptive skepticism toward procreating they adopt.

We proceed as follows: First, I evaluate David Heyd's defense of a person-affecting symmetry, which accepts the neutrality of The Asymmetry's second clause but denies that the expected misery of an individual life supplies a moral reason to not create. Heyd's procreative latitude sets one edge of the spectrum of procreative permissibility. David Benatar's categorical anti-natalism sets the other edge. Benatar's person-affecting approach explains The Asymmetry by arguing that there is an asymmetry of harms and benefits. Benatar's unbounded, skeptical pessimism about well-being reinforces the force of his axiological asymmetry, and leads him to the conclusion that procreation is both categorically wrong and seriously harmful to those created. As both these views fail, a question arises as to whether The Asymmetry can be saved. I consider Jeff McMahan's attempt to rescue The Asymmetry from its anti-natalist implications by allowing that there might be impersonal reasons to procreate. Because that path leads to other bad implications, McMahan ends his account in aporia. But his discussion helpfully identifies the costs affirming the possibility of moral reasons to create. I then consider whether Weinberg and Wasserman's person-regarding approach satisfactorily escapes McMahan's difficulties. Their defense of the parent-child relationship as the source of procreative reasons is promising, and might even rescue The Asymmetry. However, their view offers only weak justification for *procreative* parent-child relationships. I briefly raise a number of modest, localized skeptical arguments against procreation, and suggest Weinberg and Wasserman's weak commitment to procreative interests is not sufficient to overcome them. We are thus left floundering on the shoals between pessimism and its attendant skepticism, and an optimism that animates procreative permissibility. Neutrality toward the value of creating a happy life is not sufficient to avoid a *de facto* anti-natalism. I conclude by considering what paths such constructivist accounts of reasons might take toward sufficiently describing the value of

procreative parenthood, such that their approaches might plausibly overcome procreative skepticism.

1.1 David Heyd and Procreative Latitude

Which persons' interests count for person-affecting views? For David Heyd, only *actual* people count. Morally 'actual' individuals will exist regardless of what anyone decides. The existence—future or present—of a morally actual person is a "given fact" for an agent.[10] This means the interests of the prospective child do *not* matter to those deciding whether to create, as until the decision is made the child's existence is only 'possible.' Heyd marries this actualism to a thoroughgoing egoism. Decisions to create "can and should be guided exclusively by reference to the interests, welfare, ideals, rights and duties of those making the choice."[11] This moves procreation outside the sphere of moral reasoning. Procreative choices "resist any kind of ethical treatment" and "lie beyond the borders of ethics." The practical result of this is startling: no principle can "rule out the willful conception of a defective child," or prohibit the "total extinction of the human race by a voluntary act of collective suicide."[12]

Heyd's 'actualism' means existence does not matter for moral reasoning. Heyd is a Protagorean about value: it is "always *for* human beings; it has to do with what they—in the broad sense—want or need."[13] Human beings are the measure of value, but are not valuable as such.[14] On this view, "existence is not a moral predicate." An individual is "only of value if it satisfies the volitions of someone."[15] However, this extreme voluntarism about human value and existence creates something of an abyss between moral reasons: those who necessarily have existence, now or in the future, count for our moral reasoning *because* they are valuing individuals. But those for whom existence is conditional on our choice do not count; that they might exist as valuing creatures supplies no reason to create.

While the moral actualism that determines creative choices is theoretically unbounded, it is also constrained by empirical realities. We make creative choices in contexts where we have

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[10] David Heyd, *Genethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 103.
[11] Ibid., 96.
[12] Ibid., 193.
[13] Ibid., 84.
[14] Ibid., 85.
[15] Ibid., 117.

obligations to other ‘actual’ people, whose existence is not contingent upon our choice. Heyd’s egoism is not solipsism. Such empirical considerations explain why we have children. It is “universal cultural fact” that “human beings desire to have children and that they raise them more or less ‘in their own image.’”[16] There are no *reasons* behind this desire, of course. Instead, procreation is an ideal that extends beyond reasons. Any attempt to defend its intrinsic worth illegitimately seeks to “transcend the strict limits of ethics by a metaphysical shift.”[17] Procreation thus becomes a form of “self-transcendence,” in which humans do not respond to or add value to the world by creating new individuals, but rather make “the world a place in which value is at all applicable.”[18] Continuing the species “transcend[s] the senselessness of the valuing activity by making it last beyond their own existence.”[19] The game of life has meaning only through its indefinite perpetuation. However, nothing in these empirical considerations would *reasonably* justify optimism against the radical pessimism of embracing species-cide. The most we can justify is neutrality between affirming humanity’s goodness and welcoming its demise. If we attempt to discover a non-evaluative ground for value that would tip the balance, we may discover (with Kant) a “metaphysical perspective through which man is elevated to the sublime status of the final end of creation.” Or such a conclusion “may *equally* give rise to the image of human life as no more than ‘a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.’”[20]

Most philosophers view the impossibility of moral wrongdoing in creating as a *reductio* against Heyd’s view.[21] But there are other reasons to question Heyd’s approach. For one, Heyd’s ‘actualism’ entails the wildly implausible conclusion that the *more* control we have over procreation, the *less* responsibility we bear for our choices. As Jeff McMahan argues, when a state introduces policies governing reproduction, “future children are considered potential by the state"—which releases the state from any duty to them.[22] That is bizarre, though: the contingency of future generations upon our choices should not free us from responsibility for

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[16] Ibid., 199.
[17] Ibid., 211.
[18] Ibid., 213.
[19] Ibid., 216.
[20] Ibid., 228.
[21] McMahan’s judgment of Heyd’s account is representative: “A view that implies that there is no moral reason not to cause an individual to exist whose life would be filled with intrinsically bad states, uncompensated for by intrinsically good states, cannot be true.” See McMahan, “Asymmetries,” 60.
[22] Heyd, *Genethics,* 217.

those choices. Additionally, we might draw the opposite conclusion from Heyd's (undefended) claim that value is secured by indefinite extension: games are only valuable *because* they end.[23] Furthermore, Heyd's egoistic Protagoreanism cannot explain why humans have an interest in *their* perpetuation. Transhuman replication "does not preserve the minimal conditions of identity which make the outcome a continuant of the origin."[24] Yet the human being for Heyd is only a presupposition of valuing, rather than intrinsically valuable. If valuing survives without valuers, on what basis can we object? Heyd's appeal to the 'minimal conditions of identity' for the indefinite perpetuation of valuing slips in a non-evaluative basis for valuing, a move his approach to ethics disallows.

We should be wary of Heyd's neutrality about humanity's existence. Its refusal to assess the value of being human from an independent, external point of view has a degree of honesty about it. But removing procreation from the realm of reason leaves us bereft of a plausible explanation for why we should carry on rather than quit the (often burdensome!) 'game' of life. Heyd's theoretical stance is a serious departure from our clear practical (empirical) commitment to perpetuating the species. Such a gap raises the question of why we should not rather start from a pro-natalist presumption that is in line with these empirical dimensions, and then constrain its deployment accordingly. Otherwise, there is little in Heyd's theoretical neutrality about procreating to keep it from becoming a *de facto* anti-natalism.

1.2 David Benatar's Person-Affecting, Categorical Anti-natalism

If Heyd's account stands at one end of the spectrum of procreative permissibility, David Benatar's categorical anti-natalism stands at the other. Benatar's argument that being created is a harm takes two forms. First, he defends a (complicated) axiological asymmetry between harming and benefiting, in which harms within existence count while benefits do not. Second, Benatar argues life is worse than it seems. Our optimism about the world and well-being (the "Pollyanna Principle"), which stands beneath our pro-natalist outlook, is unreliable. Benatar

[23] My point is not to defend the value of death; rather, it is to suggest that Heyd has failed to demonstrate what I take to be a central contention for his view.
[24] Ibid., 217.

contends these two arguments are independent routes to the same end, namely, that procreation is categorically harmful.[25] However, as we shall see, they share similar properties.

On Benatar's first argument, the harms of existence count while its goods do not. Benatar insists his construal is person-affecting, though it requires evaluating harms and benefits across both the existence and non-existence of the person. For Benatar, the *existence* of harms and benefits are morally symmetrical: (1) the presence of a harm is bad, and (2) the presence of a benefit is good. However, the *nonexistence* of harms and benefits is *asymmetrical*: (3) the absence of a harm is a good, even if no one exists for whom it is good, but (4) the absence of a benefit is 'not bad,' unless someone is deprived of it.[26] The moral significance of the *absence* of harms is thus untethered from whether anyone exists: no harm is good, regardless of whether anyone exists or not. The moral significance of the absence of *benefits,* though, is tied to existence: their presence is good *if* one exists, but if no one exists their absence is *not bad.* Such an account of harm might seem *im*personal, since no one exists for whom the absence of harms is good. But Benatar insists he means it in person-affecting terms.[27] We don't know the possible individual, but we can judge the reasons to create "in terms of his or her potential interests."[28] This allows us to say it is 'good for' an individual *not* to exist, a sense of 'good for' that is "obviously loose."[29]

Benatar's next move is even more complex. He argues that in procreating we weigh the expected goods and bads of existence against the person's non-existence, *rather* than against each other. That is, we compare 1 with 3 (above), and 2 with 4. On the first comparison, it is clearly better to have the good of non-existent harms (3) than the bad of existing ones (1). The second comparison, though, is neutral. The existence of benefits (2) is *not* better than the non-existence of benefits (4), as their non-existence is "not bad" unless an individual exists who is deprived. Because the non-existence of benefits is 'not worse' than their existence, their existence is "not an advantage over absent pleasures that do not deprive."[30] The comparison of

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[25] David Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). See also Benatar's responses to his (many) critics in "Still Better Never to Have Been," *Journal of Ethics* 17, no. 1–2 (2013): 121–51, and "Every Conceivable Harm," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 31, no. 1 (2012): 128–164.
[26] Benatar uses pleasures and pains, but only as instances of harms and losses. See Benatar, *Better,* 30 ff.
[27] Benatar, "Still Better," 125.
[28] Benatar, *Better,* 31.
[29] Benatar's notion of harm is comparative. 'Good for' is equivalent to 'better for,' where the relevant comparison is a counterfactual. The badness of absent harms is not an "intrinsic badness," nor is the absence of benefits an "intrinsic 'not-badness'—neutrality." Ibid., 42.
[30] Ibid., 35n.

harms makes the non-existence of the individual preferable. And the comparison of benefits is neutral between the existence or non-existence of the individual. Consequently, the non-existence of the individual is preferable and being brought into existence is always a harm—*even if the expected benefits of a life significantly exceed its harms.*

Benatar defends this counterintuitive conclusion by arguing his axiological asymmetry explains a variety of 'common sense' asymmetries, including The Asymmetry. Yet it is not clear why we should accept his radically counterintuitive anti-natalism rather than give up the (allegedly) 'common sense' asymmetries. One such asymmetry involves regret: we cannot regret absent benefits *for the sake* of non-existent individuals, but we can regret present harms *for the sake* of existing people. Similarly, we regret the suffering of distant existing individuals, but do not regret the "absent [benefits] of those who could have existed."[31] Unless we adopt his axiological asymmetry, these "common moral judgments" go away, and we would be required to view the absent benefits to non-existent people as 'bad' rather than 'not good.'[32] This does not seem like a hard bullet to bite, though. If we say in an 'obviously loose' sense that the non-existence of miserable individuals is 'better for' them, it's special pleading to reject regret for non-existent happy people.[33] Additionally, Benatar's categorical anti-natalism requires giving up intuitions like: procreation is generally permissible, individuals with extremely happy lives are not harmed by them, and humanity's extinction would be bad. Benatar (rightly) contends that moral theory shouldn't bottom out in intuitions, but he offers no non-arbitrary way of deciding which intuitions to keep.[34] Given the intuitions Benatar's view undermines, accepting that we can regret the non-existence of happy individuals seems like a very low cost to a pro-natalist outlook.

Benatar's second argument for his categorical anti-natalism takes a more empirical turn, yet rests upon similar intuitions as his first. Our self-assessments of well-being, Benatar argues, are infected by a "tendency toward optimism" known as the "Pollyanna Principle." The idea life is generally worth living is unreliable.[35] Rather than squarely facing our misery, we adapt our

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[31] Ibid.

[32] If the absence of benefits is *bad,* rather than *not good,* we should "have to regret, for X's sake, that X did not come into existence. But it is not regrettable." Ibid., 39. But then neither should we be glad at the good of absent harms to non-existent people, as Benatar's view seems to entail.

[33] See Christine Overall, *Why Have Children?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 98ff.

[34] Benatar, *Better,* 202 ff.

[35] Ibid., 64 ff.

preferences to preserve our happiness. Benatar carries out this debunking argument against ‘objective list’ theories of well-being, which critically assess well-being relative to a species-norm. Benatar grants that many individuals have happy lives relative to others, but he shifts the comparison class: *sub specie aeternitatis,* human life is much worse than it *could* be. Any unwillingness to assess the ‘objective’ well-being of humanity in a supra-human context in which “pain and frustration,” death, and other limitations are removed is simply a “failure of imagination.”[36] Benatar buttresses this unmitigated pessimism by developing a ‘catalogue of misery.’ While a very lucky few might escape some of the worst human suffering, no one escapes it all. Because “those (relatively) high-quality lives are exceedingly uncommon,” procreation is presumptively bad.[37] Such a pessimistic outlook means the “optimist surely bears the burden of justifying this procreational Russian roulette.” Such a burden goes up when the pessimistic outlook is combined with Benatar’s first argument, which claims there are “no real advantages over never existing for those who are brought into existence.” The two together reveal that those who procreate “play Russian roulette with a *fully* loaded gun—aimed, of course, not at their own heads, but at those of their future offspring.”[38]

While Benatar’s two routes to anti-natalism might seem independent, they supply an unyielding perfectionism about well-being. Benatar’s first argument entails that a life with a single harm should not be created regardless of how many benefits it might contain. The procreative neutrality of The Asymmetry entails that expected benefits do not have ‘reason-giving’ weight for procreators. But as Jeff McMahan points out, Benatar’s axiological asymmetry does not allow benefits even ‘canceling weight.’ That is, the expected benefits do not cancel out any of the expected harms—which means a single harm outweighs infinite benefits, even if the harm is as minor as a pinprick. The debunking strategy of Benatar’s second, pessimistic argument works similarly. His reduction of our disposition to happiness to the “Pollyanna principle” means the harms of existence count for assessments of well-being, while benefits fall under skeptical scrutiny. Moreover, Benatar’s suggestion that objective well-being must be measured *sub specie aeternitatis,* and his corresponding rejection of a species-norm, raises the threshold of acceptable well-being so that no one but an endlessly happy deity can

[36] Ibid., 84.
[37] Ibid., 92.
[38] Ibid.

attain it. Both arguments fail to address whether we should be perfectionists this way: our life might be *better* without any harms, but it can still be *good enough* with them.[39]

Benatar and Heyd both offer person-affecting accounts, but they adopt very different thresholds for permissible procreation. While Heyd's view is (theoretically) categorically permissive, Benatar's makes procreation categorically harmful. Rejecting both accounts, though, leaves open the possibility that procreation is *presumptively* impermissible, if categorically permissible. A modest skepticism seems more plausible than Benatar's shrieks against the universe. This modest skepticism could still adopt the most plausible dimension of Benatar's approach, namely the asymmetry in the weight of benefits and harms. Even if optimistic and pessimistic accounts of well-being were equally justified, disproportionately weighting harms would generate a presumptive anti-natalism, raising the justificatory threshold for permissible procreation. But if we accept that we have moral reasons to procreate to overcome such a presumptive anti-natalism, other problems emerge. Jeff McMahan's analysis of The Asymmetry argues in this direction. It is to his discussion that we now turn.

1.3 Jeff McMahan on The Asymmetry

For most moral philosophers, procreating is only permissible if the expected benefits of a life *at least* cancel its harms. However, the principle of procreative neutrality (in the second half of The Asymmetry) entails that such benefits cannot supply reasons to create. While it is tempting to grant both goods and bads equal reason-giving weight, McMahan argues troubling implications follow if we do.[40] McMahan grants the intuitive force of the axiological asymmetry Benatar draws upon, suggesting that we generally think "harming is worse than not benefiting."[41] Such a disparity explains why it is worse to create a miserable person than to not create a happy person. However, allowing that harms have a disproportionate reason-giving weight only generates a *Weak* Asymmetry. Whereas The Asymmetry presumes there is *no* moral reason to cause a happy person to exist, the *Weak* Asymmetry "discounts the reason-

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[39] Robert Adams defends an imperfectionist standard for creating in "Must God Create the Best?," *Philosophical Review* 81, no. 3 (1972): 317-332. Alternatively, Julian Savulescu's "principle of procreative beneficence" requires parents select the best possible child. See "Procreative Beneficence," *Bioethics* 15, no. 5-6 (2001): 413–426.
[40] See McMahan, "Asymmetries," 49.
[41] Ibid., 56.

giving weight potential goods have in procreative choices" relative to the potential harms, though "not all the way to zero."[42] Unlike The Asymmetry—and Benatar's anti-natalism—the Weak Asymmetry entails avoiding harms is more weighty than bestowing benefits, but still acknowledges that benefits have some reason-giving weight.

McMahan's contention, though, is that allowing benefits *any* reason-giving weight both undermines The Asymmetry's procreative neutrality and has unwelcome implications. If benefits and harms were equally weighted (an 'impersonal symmetry'), one would have as much reason to create happy people as one has to bestow the equivalent benefits on existing people. Moreover, if actively preventing a good life is worse than failing to create one, early abortion would be worse than failing to create a happy person—even if the embryo is not a person.[43] Less extreme implications follow from the Weak Asymmetry, for the same reasons. If benefits have a (discounted) reason-giving weight, (a) cases arise in which there is reason to create new happy people rather than bestow lesser or equivalent benefits on existing people, (b) abortion is presumptively bad if it prevents the existence of a happy person, and (c) there is some number of happy people that makes it more reasonable to create them than save the life of an existing person. McMahan suggests these claims are "not impossible to accept," but are "very difficult to believe."[44] While we might want to reject abortion rather than the Weak Asymmetry, the difficulty of reconciling reasons to create with reasons to bestow 'equivalent benefits' on existing individuals is clearly a problem. If granting that there are (moral) reasons to create means we should procreate *rather than* fulfill obligations to existing individuals, that would be a difficult result indeed.

McMahan's second attempt to explain The Asymmetry appeals to an asymmetry in the moral weight of the *types of benefits* we bestow, rather than to the asymmetry between benefits and harms. On this construal, we discount 'existential benefits,' which are bestowed through causing a person to exist, against the 'ordinary benefits' we bestow upon existing individuals. In other words, we think it is better to bestow benefits on an existing person than by creating a new one. However, McMahan suggests this *ad hoc* attempt to save The Asymmetry fails to explain why ordinary benefits count more. One possible reason is that our coexistence in time with

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[42] Ibid., 57.
[43] McMahan lists other implications. However, he suggests that some of them can be mitigated by distinctions between doing and not doing. Ibid., 66.
[44] Ibid., 67.

others gives us a special reason for concern, which we do not have with possible people.[45] McMahan rejects this, though, as it stretches "the notion of a *special relation* to the point of vacuity." Proximity in space and time do not make a moral difference.[46] Additionally, McMahan argues that assessing the relative weight of existential and ordinary benefits is impossible, as the 'default'—what would happen without any intervention—for existential benefits is the individual's nonexistence. In a choice to extend a life 20 years to age 80, the 'default' is that the person would live to 60. But in a choice to create either a 60-year life or none at all, the default is the individual's nonexistence. We thus cannot compare the relative weights of existential and ordinary benefits, since we cannot evaluate the latter in such a way that an "existing person never exists."[47]

This failure leads to one final attempt to explain The Asymmetry, by arguing that the asymmetry is between benefits with a comparative dimension and those without—regardless of whether they are existential or ordinary.[48] A choice between a happy 60-year life and happy 80-year life bestows an 'existential benefit.' But that benefit has a comparative dimension: the person's "getting the 60-year life is *worse for* him than getting the 80-year life would have been."[49] Benefits where the 'default' is the individual's nonexistence lack this comparative dimension, as in choices between bestowing existential benefits *rather than* not creating. This will be the situation for most procreative decisions.[50] As benefits to existing individuals have this comparative dimension, weighing such benefits more heavily would explain why it is better to benefit existing individuals rather than create new ones.[51]

Distinguishing between 'comparative' and 'non-comparative' benefits can only preserve The Asymmetry, though, if noncomparative (existential) benefits have canceling-weight, but not reason-giving weight. If they have canceling weight without reason-giving weight, then procreating is almost always permissible, but the only moral reasons to do so attach to the

[45] McMahan, "Causing People," 5–35, 14-15.
[46] While McMahan allows that our intuitions are in part determined by the gap between existing and future people, we are "reluctant to endorse the view that existing people matter more than future people." Ibid., 15.
[47] Ibid., 17.
[48] Ibid., 15.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Embryo selection is one instance of an 'existential benefit with a comparative dimension,' as it is a choice between embryos based on their respective qualities. Most choices, though, will be between the individual's existence and non-existence.
[51] Ibid., 17.

interests of the creators.[52] If they do not have canceling-weight, then anti-natalism emerges. But if such benefits have reason-giving weight, then The Asymmetry's principle of procreative neutrality disappears. There is reason, though, to think that such benefits have reason-giving weight. In a case where the default of either person is non-existence, and parents choose between a less-happy or more-happy life, the benefits are noncomparative (since the default is the non-existence of the individual). However, the benefit seems to have reason-giving weight.[53] There is a reason to create the happy 80-year life rather than the happy 60-year life, even if neither would exist otherwise. The noncomparative benefits thus have at least *some* reason-giving weight, even if that weight is discounted relative to comparative benefits. Moreover, McMahan argues that non-comparative benefits seem to supply reasons for creators in a wide range of situations, not only those in which we choose between two lives. Granting non-comparative benefits reason-giving weight only in cases where we choose *between* two lives and their respective non-existence makes their weight conditional upon the prior, potentially arbitrary decision to create. It is odd, he argues, to think "a decision made simply on a whim" can "create a *reason* that did not exist antecedently." If noncomparative benefits *only* matter when we have previously decided to "confer *some* benefit," then creation seems like it stands outside moral assessment—a strange congruence with Heyd's account. Additionally, this approach gets the order of reasons backward. If "one had *no* reason to pick apples, one would have no reason to pick better rather than worse apples."[54] It is because we have a reason to create a happy person in the first place that we can engage in comparative assessments about *how* happy a person we should create. Noncomparative benefits, then, seem to have at least some weight in every procreative context, and not only in choices between happier and less-happy lives: one has a reason to create an individual when the 'default' would be their non-existence. Such an approach also has the advantage of justifying our intuitions about the badness of human extinction.[55]

Granting noncomparative benefits some reason-giving weight, though, throws us back on the problems it was supposed to solve. If noncomparative benefits have reason-giving weight,

[52] This McMahan calls the 'common sense view.' Ibid., 21.
[53] While the locution here is odd, noncomparative benefits are set against the default of nonexistence. In this case, the choice is not between two individuals where the default is that one will exist regardless, but the choice between two individuals where neither will exist if nothing is chosen.
[54] Ibid., 25.
[55] Ibid., 26.

situations can still arise when it is "better to cause a person to exist" than benefit an existing one.[56] If we can add two years to a life or create a person who will live to 80, we should do the latter. Additionally, this entails there "must also be a significant reason to save the life of a fetus" and an "even more significant reason not to kill a fetus via abortion."[57] And the stance seems to imply Derek Parfit's "Repugnant Conclusion," in which we have reason to create more individuals whose lives are barely worth living.[58] As such, the "implications of the claim that noncomparative benefits have reason-giving weight in choices between some and none include some that virtually everyone will find counterintuitive."[59] This judgment prompts McMahan's suggestion that problems in the ethics of creation "seem to me to pose the greatest challenge to realism in ethics."[60] While the final two worries may be unpersuasive to some moral theologians, the first presents an interesting dilemma. Despite ending in aporia, McMahan's discussion seems to reveal a fundamental conflict between the reasons to *create* and the reasons to *care.* The puzzle is this: overcoming the presumption of anti-natalism within The Asymmetry requires granting benefits 'canceling' weight. To be consistent, we should also grant them 'reason-giving' weight. If we do, though, conflicts between the reasons to benefit existing individuals and to create new ones arise. We lose The Asymmetry to consistently overcome anti-natalism, but then are thrown into an intractable conflict between obligations to existing individuals and reasons to create new ones.

McMahan's discussion does not so much as supply us with reasons to procreate as clarify the possible costs of thinking there are any. We might mitigate its deconstructive force by putting the same question about intuitions that emerged in the discussion of Benatar to his view. McMahan's test-cases bring one set of intuitions to the surface, only to set their implications against other intuitive judgments. Yet if Benatar leaves us without a non-arbitrary way of deciding which intuitions to preserve, McMahan's argument raises the specter that consistency in intuitions is impossible. One possibility is that we should simply accept The Asymmetry as a basic postulate of procreative ethics, which has no deeper, normative justification. Yet this

[56] Ibid., 31.
[57] Ibid., 33.
[58] As Derek Parfit put it, "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." Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 388.
[59] McMahan, "Causing People," 34.
[60] Ibid., 34.

would be surprising, especially since the 'intuitions' beneath it seem to be contingent upon social circumstances. McMahan contends the neutrality clause of The Asymmetry, which claims there is no moral reason to create a happy person, is "deeply intuitive and probably impossible to dislodge."[61] Yet it is plausible such intuitions are recent phenomena, and that previous generations would think such a possibility does supply a strong reason to create.

McMahan's discussion also raises interesting questions about the role non-existence plays in procreative ethics. On the one hand, McMahan contends that we cannot compare existential and ordinary benefits, since we cannot evaluate the latter in such a way that an "existing person never exists."[62] On the other hand, McMahan suggests the 'default'—or what would happen without a person's intervention—"determines the nature of one's agency."[63] In almost every procreative case, the 'default' is the individual's non-existence. The weight of the noncomparative benefits is subsequently discounted relative to benefits bestowed when the default is the individual's prior existence. In this way, the contingency of the individual's existence seems to make the reasons supplied by the benefits less weighty. But this also changes the structure of accountability between the created and creators. McMahan contends that the default of one's non-existence blocks 'bitter thoughts' against one's creator, while the default of a *better* existence justifies such a complaint. The default of non-existence thus seems to function as an imperfectionist principle: if one is happy, one has a justified complaint *only if* one's creator could have made one happier and didn't.[64]

One way to defend the primacy of caring for existing individuals over creating new ones while still granting the latter 'reason-giving' weight would be to accept coexistence as a special relation. While McMahan allows that is intuitive to think that the generations immediately following ours matter more than distant ones, he does not think differences in space and time are morally salient. When so abstractly framed, it is hard to disagree. Yet when 'space and time' are indexed by our *agency,* then the moral landscape seems to shift. For instance, we 'cause' the existence of non-overlapping individuals only through the mediation of other people's actions, which do not follow necessarily from our acts but also from choices by others. McMahan allows

[61] Jeff McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 300.
[62] Ibid., 17.
[63] McMahan, "Causing People," 16.
[64] McMahan rejects Parfit's "No Difference" view on these grounds. See Ibid., 17.

that the nature of one's agency "affects the morality of the action."[65] Yet he tends to frame procreative agency as 'causing existence' or bestowing 'benefits and harms.'[66] This flattens out our agency, though, which allows the thought experiments McMahan deploys to arise. An account of procreative rationality that avoids the reduction of action to 'cause' and 'effect' might also clarify why nearness in space and time matters morally—a stance that seems deeply intuitive.

One other advantage of allowing procreative agency to account for space and time is that it would allow structures of accountability to unfold. Having a 'bitter thought' against one's great, great-great-grandparents for their bad moral choice seems less reasonable than having a complaint against one's parents. Beyond the question of proximity in space and time, parenthood is a partial, bilateral, and reciprocal moral relationship that 'cause existence' obscures. It is thus worth considering constructivist accounts of procreative reasons, as they attempt to explain procreative norms through the *respect* owed to the (impersonal) well-being of any individual we create, but within the irreducible partiality and particularity of special attachments. In that way, they attempt to hold on to intuitions beneath both the impersonal and person-affecting accounts. Whether they successfully identify reasons to procreate without establishing conflicts with reasons to care, however, is a separate question. It is to such views I turn next.

1.4 Relational Reasons to Procreate

For Rivka Weinberg and David Wasserman, permissible reasons for action are constrained by what the individual affected has reason to reject.[67] These accounts are not person-*affecting,* as the harms or benefits the individual receives are not the basis for the moral reason. Neither do they claim to be impersonal accounts, in which the individual affected plays no part of act's explanation. One possibility is to call such accounts 'wide person-affecting' views. As Wasserman suggests, while we cannot create a child for his own sake, "we can create him for

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[65] Ibid., 16.
[66] Ibid., 7.
[67] For Weinberg's view, see: Rivka Weinberg, *The Risk of a Lifetime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). For Wasserman's, see: Benatar and Wasserman, *Debating Procreation*.

reasons that include his own good."[68] While that might seem like an impersonal reason, it is the individual's good and nobody else's that is at stake. As such, I will refer to such views as constructivist, person-*regarding* accounts. Their question is whether the reasons, intentions, and actions of progenitors are sufficiently respectful to the individuals created.[69] Such a question cannot be answered without accounting for the harms and benefits within a relationship, but it is not reducible to considerations of well-being.

Weinberg and Wasserman defend the (deceptively) simple claim that we have children to become a parent. As Weinberg argues, family life supplies a "mutually beneficial and respectful" reason that affords "unique and valuable" goods to *both* parent and child.[70] Such an approach moves considerations of well-being to a secondary position, as the norms for procreative reasons depend upon the intentions and aims parents have in entering a parent-child relationship.[71] In Thomas Scanlon's parlance, the parent-child relationship is a "nonderivative source of reasons."[72] It is the stopping point for explaining why we bring human life into the world. Well-being is still relevant, though. Weinberg and Wasserman both grant the presumptive force of anti-natalist skeptical concerns, before articulating constraints on the parent-child relationship that would overcome such worries. For both, the risks and stakes of procreation mean progenitors *must* have reasons to create. As Wasserman puts it, the child is "entitled to a respectful reason for having been brought into a world where she is exposed to the harms and risks so vividly described by the anti-natalists."[73] Absent exculpating reasons, the

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[68] David T. Wasserman, "The Nonidentity Problem, Disability, and the Role Morality of Prospective Parents," *Ethics* 116, no. 1 (October 2005): 147.

[69] For Wasserman, reasons are justified within the relationship of accountability between parents and children. For Weinberg, justification is more explicitly Rawlsian, in that one considers what one could reasonably accept as conditions for one's own birth, and universalizes accordingly. Mianna Lotz's "reasons-relevance thesis" is a closely related view. She differs from them by grounding the constraints on such reasons in collectivist terms. Parents must do what they can to assuage the concerns of their community about the 'message' they might send in procreating. See Mianna Lotz, "Procreative Reasons-Relevance," *Bioethics* 23, no. 5 (2009): 293.

[70] Weinberg, *Risk*, 37. Wasserman follows Christine Overall, who writes: "The best reason to have a child is simply the creation of the mutually enriching, mutually enhancing love that is the parent-child relationship." See Overall, *Why,* 217.

[71] For Wasserman, well-being is relevant "mainly in an indirect way." Benatar and Wasserman, *Debating Procreation*, 248.

[72] Thomas Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2010), 92.

[73] Benatar and Wasserman, *Debating Procreation*, 200. See also Wasserman, "Nonidentity Problem," 136. On Wasserman's view, if procreators have a sufficiently respectful reason to choose a child with a lower quality of life, such a choice is justified, provided that child's life is above a certain threshold of well-being. See Benatar and Wasserman, *Debating Procreation*, 246.

force of the anti-natalist assessment of such risks would seem to entail that procreation is *prima facie* unjustified.[74]

The reasons to procreate, however, are prudential rather than moral. As Wasserman writes, individuals have a moral reason determined by a relationship "only if they form such a relationship." And "they have no moral reason to form such relationships rather than forming other kinds of relationships or conferring other kinds of goods."[75] In that sense, moral reasons only arise when agents decide to enter a procreative relationship. However, this does not entail that agents can enter a parent-child relationship for just *any* reason. Wasserman contends that the reasons one has at the beginning of a relationship determine its quality. If a person enters a romantic relationship strictly to win a bet, they disrespect the other person.[76] Similarly for procreation. If agents become parents so they can harvest the infant's organs for a sibling, they illegitimately instrumentalize their relationship and the child. The internal content of the parent-child relationship sets the criterion for respectful reasons to enter such a relationship. In that way, it functions as a non-derivative source of (licit) reasons to procreate.

One possible advantage of constructivist accounts is that they side-step profoundly difficult questions about the role existence and non-existence play in procreative ethics, by attaching procreative reasons to the parent-child *relationship*. On their view, existence is not morally special, which means Derek Parfit's non-identity problem and its attendant difficulties never arise.[77] Similarly, there is no role in procreative reasoning for a comparison to non-existence, as "never existing is not an option for any real person because all real people exist."[78] Procreative reasons are peculiar precisely because they are not determined by a relationship with an existing individual, but by the question of whether such a relationship should begin in and through the creation of such an individual. Though they do not develop their understanding of the 'person,' Weinberg and Wasserman's understanding of reasons and respect seems incommensurate with the radical moral individualism of the narrow person-affecting approach. Constructivist reasons are inherently relational: if entering a parent-child relationship is a

[74] Both Weinberg and Wasserman think that norms of respect require parents to expect their child to have a quality of life significantly above the threshold of a minimally decent life.
[75] Benatar and Wasserman, *Debating Procreation*, 198.
[76] Ibid., 204.
[77] Essentially, Parfit's puzzle is that a change to the conditions in which a person comes into existence creates a *different* person than would have existed otherwise. A 13-year-old girl who waits until she is 18 to have a child will have a different child than the child she is deliberating having at age 13. See Parfit, *Reasons,* 363.
[78] Weinberg, *Risk,* 86.

respectful reason to create a person*,* then it seems like extrinsic, relational properties such as 'the child of' might be a constitutive feature of the child's personal identity. Such a description would supply a reason to create that would apply to *any* person created, yet in a way that would still respect the particulars of their individuality.

Additionally, these views seem to provide a framework of reasons that satisfies the two sides of The Asymmetry. On the one side, the 'sufficiently respectful' reason to create only applies above a threshold of well-being, such that one has a moral reason to not create a life which is 'worth not living.' On the other side, the parent-child relationship is a non-derivative source of reasons, the contents of which norms the respect parents owe their children. But the reasons to enter such a relationship are themselves not moral, as *moral* reasons only arise within the bilateral accountability structure of parent and child. In that way, the expected well-being of an individual supplies no moral reason to create—just as the parent-child relationship on its own supplies no moral reason to create.[79]

However, neither Wasserman nor Weinberg has anything meaningful to say about why the parent-child relationship should be entered into by way of procreation rather than adoption. Weinberg critiques adoption as "not ideal" because of its cost-prohibitive nature, and affirms that there are "biological joys and [a] biological connection…that is often an aspect of biological procreativity."[80] However, she never specifies precisely what these 'biological joys' are such that they supply a weighty enough reason to procreate, leaving the impression that they are little more than an *ad hoc* assertion. For his part, Wasserman explicitly acknowledges that the reasons to enter a parent-child relationship "could equally motivate prospective adoptive parents."[81]

The weak justification for *procreative* parenthood makes such views vulnerable to objections based on the morality of risk imposition. If life's risks are so serious that one can permissibly procreate only with sufficient reasons, then it seems presumptively wrong to impose those risks *if* the parent-child relationship can be had without loss through non-procreative means. One way to mitigate the force of this would be to argue that the moral

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[79] For the full argument to this effect, see Johann Frick, *"Making People Happy, Not Making Happy People"* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014).
[80] Weinberg, *Risk,* 43.
[81] Benatar and Wasserman, *Debating Procreation*, 187.

hazards of adoption are on a par with procreating.[82] But even if they are, fulfilling a putative duty to rescue through adoption is more transparently justifiable than imposing the risks of existence on a person. If existence is not 'morally special,' then the asymmetrical gratitude of adoptive and procreative children may supply a further reason to adopt. As Wasserman argues, adopted children are likely to be "extremely grateful for their rescue," but biological children "are unlikely to be grateful to anyone for having been rescued from the limbo of nonexistence."[83] Unsurprisingly, he recognizes that parity between adoption and procreation means there may be strong reasons to prioritize adoption instead.[84]

I suspect Weinberg and Wasserman's failure to specify the distinctive significance of procreative bonds is tied to their thin account of procreative agency. While they are right to think the reasons and intentions of procreators are relevant to the assessment of procreation, their approach otherwise seems to reduce procreators to those who cause existence. For Weinberg, particularly, procreation might be "biologically fascinating," but metaphysically we "create persons much as we create paintings."[85] Such an account, though, seems false on its face. Among other differences, we do not gestate paintings inside human bodies. Neither do we necessarily create them in an interpersonal context. The relational good of 'parenthood' constructivist accounts emphasize might require a correspondingly relational construal of creating life in order to specify the 'biological joys' of doing so. Framing procreative rationality around 'imposing risk' has the tinges of bureaucracy that beset impersonal accounts.

Finally, neither account addresses whether the possible extinction of humanity could transform procreation into a duty. Moreover, the fact that such accounts frame their pro-natalist arguments within the presumption of procreative skepticism entails that the bar for permissible procreation *goes up* as the population *declines* below a certain threshold. The badness of human extinction is often justified on grounds that it would be burdensome on the final generations.[86] If a population enters a death spiral, the likelihood of well-being for future generations goes

[82] It might be argued that they are, in fact, worse than procreation. But this seems implausible. Additionally, if duties to rescue *do* have primacy over prudential aspirations, and adoption is one form such rescue takes, then the hazards would have to be *significantly* worse than the risks of procreating. This seems even more unlikely.
[83] Ibid., 195.
[84] Ibid., 289.
[85] Weinberg, *Risk,* 31.
[86] Benatar even allows that problems on the path to extinction "poses a greater challenge…than extinction itself." See *Better,* 183.

down—and the threshold for exculpatory reasons to procreate goes up. This problem will activate sooner for accounts that set the threshold for permissible procreation well above a 'minimally decent life.' The Last Adam and Eve would *not* have a duty to procreate, and would very likely have a duty to *not* procreate, given the expected unhappiness of their isolated child(ren).

Weinberg and Wasserman's constructivist accounts have the advantages of rescuing certain intuitions, including those that make up The Asymmetry. They offer an elegant, attractive explanation for why we procreate, namely, to enter into the joy of family life. Yet such an explanation may not be weighty enough to justify procreation in the face of skeptical, anti-natalist presumptions. The weakness of their case for prioritizing procreative over adoptive relationships means their approaches are vulnerable to considerations such as the need for adoption, considerations that arise wherever adoption is an option. If parenthood can be entered through adoption without diminution, loss, or alteration, then the parent-child relation seems to need additional clarification to justify entering it through procreating.

1.5 Procreative Skepticism

If reasons to procreate are grounded in parent-child relationships, two questions arise: how reliable are assessments of existence's risks, and how weighty are the reasons to procreate relative to other moral duties? Constructivist accounts are vulnerable to pessimistic anti-natalist concerns, precisely because of their thin account of the value of procreative parenthood. While Weinberg and Wasserman reject Benatar's categorical anti-natalism, they cede the force of a more moderate skepticism and offer mitigating defense of procreation on that presumption. Such a starting point creates a feedback loop that severely limits the strength of their pro-natalisms: given procreation's weak justification, the reliability of our assessments of well-being becomes more important. It is thus worth considering the reasons for a moderate procreative skepticism more closely, to determine whether presuming such a skeptical, pessimistic stance is warranted. Such debunking arguments broadly fall into three classes: epistemic arguments, arguments grounded in pessimistic judgments, and arguments from third-party considerations. While considering the details of such arguments would take us well beyond our space constraints, their general features merit attention.

In the first place, worries about the unreliability and uncertainty of our ability to assess well-being animate some skeptical approaches to procreative reasons.[87] David DeGrazia argues procreation is *pro tanto* impermissible, and can be justified only if there is "good reason to expect that the individual to be created will come to appreciate and enjoy her life, feeling glad to be alive, without her judgment being deluded."[88] Jason Marsh sidesteps efforts to identify when expected well-being crosses a threshold that renders procreation reasonable to thrust pro-natalists into a dilemma. Because many individuals will have a quality of life that is "either highly inscrutable or highly mediocre," it is nearly impossible to determine whether procreation is permissible.[89] As the high-stakes nature of procreating raises the threshold for justification, such uncertainties become a reason to adopt a modest anti-natalism.[90]

The second debunking argument defends a more modest pessimism than Benatar's, but for similar reasons. Marsh notes that questions about procreative rationality track theodicy problems—except that we are "notably more pessimistic about the basic goodness of the world when reasoning about the problem of evil than we are when reasoning about human procreation."[91] If we think evil poses a problem for theists, a *pro tanto* anti-natalism is warranted. Marsh critiques the medieval doctrine that existence is "inherently good and is indeed to be identified with goodness" as "highly dubious," given that it would allow creating lives worth not living. We could defend an optimism that mitigates this 'theodicy' problem. However, The Asymmetry indicates that optimistic arguments have less force than pessimistic ones. As such, a modest procreative skepticism is warranted.[92]

Third, a number of philosophers argue duties to adopt trump any putative interest in procreation. Tina Rulli contends there is a *pro tanto* duty to adopt, which is grounded in the magnitude of the orphan crisis. While this duty is generally not defeated by the interest in having a biological child, she makes one exception for a woman "who strongly desires the

[87] These are distinct concerns: well-being assessments can be reliable, yet still face ambiguities which render judgments appropriately uncertain.
[88] David DeGrazia, *Creation Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 160.
[89] Jason Marsh, "Quality of Life Assessments, Cognitive Reliability, and Procreative Responsibility," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 89, no. 2 (2014): 452 ff.
[90] Ibid., 459.
[91] Jason Marsh, "Procreative Ethics and the Problem of Evil," in *Permissible Progeny?,* ed. Sarah Hannan, Samantha Brennan, and Richard Vernon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 71.
[92] See Ibid., 73 ff.

pregnancy experience."[93] Similarly, Daniel Freidrich argues we have a moral duty to assist those in need when we can with very little cost to ourselves.[94] Because beginning a relationship through alleviating need "does not rule out forming a relationship rich in affection and mutual concern," considerations about intimacy do not grant parents immunity from such a duty.[95] Travis Rieder adopts the opposite conclusion, contending that the "radical intimacy involved in forming a family" blocks a *pro tanto* duty to adopt. But he then contends that most procreation is still blameworthy, as most people lack the reasons necessary to trump the duty to adopt. His conclusion is that "morality…judges us harshly for our pro-natal bias."[96]

These debunking arguments on the basis of third-party considerations reinforce the idea that if optimism and pessimism are on a par, procreative skepticism and a *de facto* anti-natalism is warranted.[97] Comparing duties to rescue with prudential desires for a parent-child relationship tips the scale against procreating. If we try to preserve procreative neutrality, on which there are *no* moral reasons to procreate, procreation seems dubious when we have unfulfilled, existing obligations to others. The discussion of the relative weight of procreation *vis a vis* a duty to adopt thus reiterates the dilemma that emerged in the discussion of McMahan, albeit in less quantified form. Even if we could defend the moral neutrality of procreation *in principle,* in practice pre-existing moral obligations would justify procreative skepticism. This suggests procreative neutrality is a *de facto* anti-natalism.

However, the force of such debunking arguments is not necessarily *additive,* given that they require conflicting judgments about the reliability of our assessments of well-being. Marsh's first debunking argument uses the ambiguities of well-being and the unreliability of our judgments to animate procreative skepticism. However, debunking arguments based on pessimistic judgements or on existing duties to adopt *require* reliable and extremely complicated assessments of individual and aggregate well-being. It seems like one can appeal to *either* epistemic arguments or pessimistic and third-party concerns, but *not both.* However,

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[93] Tina Rulli, "Preferring a Genetically-Related Child," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 13 (2014): 28. See also "The Ethics of Procreation and Adoption," *Philosophy Compass* 11, no. 6 (2016): 305–315.

[94] Daniel Friedrich, "A Duty to Adopt?," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (2013): 25–39.

[95] Ibid., 27. Compare with Wasserman's account of the origins of parent-child relationships, and how the reasons those beginning them might structure their development.

[96] Travis N. Rieder, "Procreation, Adoption and the Contours of Obligation," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 32, no. 3 (2015): 309.

[97] Procreative skepticism, as I have used it, names the heightened epistemic threshold pro-natalist accounts must overcome. Anti-natalism expresses a normative judgment that most or all procreation is morally bad.

against this problem the debunker might add an *epistemic* asymmetry between harms and benefits, to match the axiological asymmetry that seems to be widely accepted. Such a move would have to show that we have grounds for stronger confidence in assessments of bads or harms than we do about goods or benefits. In other words, just as harms count more than benefits, so they are more epistemically transparent than benefits. Such a view seems to stand beneath procreative debunking arguments, and has a great deal of intuitive force. It is easy to believe that cases of suffering are epistemically veridical, while instances of happiness are (probably) deluded.

I suspect the conflict between duties to existing individuals and procreative interests is intractable. As procreating creates a dependent to whom one owes support, it inherently creates new burdens on existing individuals. As such, it invariably comes with an opportunity cost: the new obligations procreation imposes upon us inevitably conflict with the old. Procreative skepticism forces us to explain why we are justified in adding more obligations when it seems like we are already failing to fulfill those already upon us. To overcome these worries, one must either argue our existing obligations are fewer than the argument presumes, articulate the distinctive value of procreative bonds *vis a vis* the parent-child relationship, or (preferably) both. However, if the asymmetry between harms and benefits holds (whether that is epistemic, axiological, or both), then optimistic pro-natalist accounts will struggle to reach the justificatory threshold. Such an asymmetry seems to stand behind the claim that there is a *pro tanto* duty to adopt, given the extent of the suffering of so many orphaned children. Mitigating pro-natalist defenses might try to diminish the force of the *pro tanto* duty to adopt by localizing it or pointing out the moral hazards of adoption, as we saw in Weinberg's approach. Or they might try to defend an optimism about well-being, and the reliability of our assessments of it. But such optimistic attempts seem unlikely to succeed: if 'theodicy problems' are problems, there is a correspondingly difficult problem with procreating. Though I have not considered the internal claims of each argument, it is doubtful that procreative optimism can do anything more than fight pessimism to a draw. And if that is the best that can be done, the stakes seem to entail skepticism and *de facto* anti-natalism are warranted.

1.6 Conclusion

The 'procreative neutrality' embedded within The Asymmetry is more difficult to justify than it might seem. If there are no moral reasons to create happy individuals, then the unreliability of our assessments of well-being, the suffering that animates theodicy problems, and the duties to existing individuals all trump whatever reasons we might have to procreate. The most successful paths toward reconciling the two claims of The Asymmetry above—Weinberg and Wasserman's—offer such weak defenses of procreation's value *vis a vis* the parent-child relationship that they provide little relief from such debunking pressures. But before we pronounce moral philosophy's justifications for procreating bankrupt, we should look closer at the internal logic of this discussion, to discern what levers a pro-natalist account must pull to succeed.

The preceding discussion marks out what I take to be four normative stances toward the permissibility of procreation: (A) categorical procreative latitude, in which procreation in principle is not morally evaluable (Heyd); (B) categorical anti-natalism, in which procreation is always harmful (Benatar); (C) mitigating pro-natalism, which grants the presumptive force of skeptical worries attempts to justify procreating against them (Wasserman and Weinberg); and (D) moderate, localized procreative skepticism and anti-natalism (Marsh *et al*.). For McMahan, The Asymmetry is basic and unjustifiable. His discussion exposed the need for moral reasons to procreate to overcome a *de facto* anti-natalism, and the problems that arise if we say there are. The difficulty of reconciling reasons to create with reasons to care for existing individuals was confirmed in the subsequent discussion on the contractualist pro-natalisms failure to overcome the moderate, localized procreative skepticism.

Several crucial questions emerged in the preceding discussion, which set the conditions for a successful defense of pro-natalism. First, the preceding discussion demonstrated the limits of neutrality. On David Heyd's account, it is just as reasonable to prefer the extinction of the species as its indefinite prolongation. Optimism and pessimism are on an equal plane. Heyd's inability to unequivocally endorse human existence is wrapped up with his unwillingness to step outside humanity's evaluative dimension and affirm the intrinsic goodness of human beings themselves. Yet while his neutrality is shocking, the same problem emerged elsewhere. The discussion of McMahan indicated that affirming procreative neutrality leads to a *de facto* anti-

natalism, as giving noncomparative reasons canceling weight seemed to require also giving them reason-giving weight. McMahan rejects that possibility, though, because it generates conflicts between reasons to create and reasons to care for existing individuals. The final discussion of procreative skepticism indicated that adopting a (highly intuitive) axiological asymmetry, in which there is stronger reason to not harm than to benefit, means that a pro-natalist approach needs to be non-neutral with respect to the balance of reasons for optimism and pessimism. If harms count more, then pessimistic concerns count more—and anti-natalism is presumptively warranted. Whatever way we turn, procreative neutrality seems to entail a *de facto* anti-natalism.

A second difficulty that emerged is the question of *thresholds* for permissible creation. Beneath both of David Benatar's arguments for categorical anti-natalism lurks a perfectionism, which suggests even the slightest harm makes a life wrongful, thereby setting an impossibly high threshold for well-being. Weinberg and Wasserman defend a more reasonable standard, which is tied to norms of respectful treatment and the reasons parents have as procreators for their action. Yet while their views might escape Benatar's categorical anti-natalism, they raise the justificatory bar for procreating where the social conditions diminish the possible child's expected well-being. Individuals in the final generations would (counterintuitively) have an obligation to *not* procreate. Those who live in economically disadvantaged communities may as well.

A third consideration that arose is the salience of the comparison to nonexistence for assessing the weight of procreative reasons and effects. For Heyd, the choice between causing and not causing a person to exist grants the chooser immunity from moral scrutiny. For Benatar, the moral weight of the benefits and harms of creating is explained by the comparison to the nonexistence of their recipient. His approach raises questions about whether we can regret or be glad at the plights of nonexistent individuals. McMahan's discussion raises similar questions about existence. While he rejects the moral salience of coexistence, preserving it could explain our intuition that we have special reasons to care for existing individuals rather than create new ones—even if, as Weinberg and Wasserman argue, treating existence as special creates other problems. Their constructivist accounts contend that existence does not make any moral difference, but that it is simply the presupposition or grounds for other moral reasons.

The problem of how reasons relate to existence is closely related to the difficulties of harmonizing reasons to create with reasons to save. If moral reasons only arise when the individuals affected exist, an abyss seems to form between reasons to procreate and reasons to care, such that what animates the latter cannot explain the former—or vice versa. This 'existence abyss' appeared in McMahan's argument that grounding moral reasons in existence would mean an arbitrary, whim-like decision to cause existence would generate moral reasons out of nowhere. But if moral reasons *do* span the existence gap, conflicts between causing new people and benefiting existing individuals emerge. For Weinberg and Wasserman, moral reasons are conditional upon the decision to enter a parent-child relationship, rather than existence. The parent-child relationship functions as a non-derivative source of reasons which *explains* the existence of one of its members, rather than being grounded by it. But their view suffers from the problem McMahan identified: they have a thin account of why procreative parenthood is special *vis a vis* adoption, and so are susceptible to arguments that duties to existing third parties should trump prudential interests in making new human beings. Their view might need to explain when prudential reasons can trump moral reasons, which they do not. As such, the 'existence abyss' seems to beset constructivist accounts as well, leaving them without resources to justify creating a human being as part of entering a parent-child relationship.

Such are the faultlines in the discussion surrounding The Asymmetry. The strength of contemporary moral philosophy is that it highlights the deep conflicts in our intuitions, and the oddities that emerge when we consider how reasons intersect with the fundamental contingency of those we create. However, it is reasonable to wonder whether moral philosophy is equipped to identify stable, normative answers to the questions it poses. The difficulties of doing so are, as we saw, enough to prompt Jeff McMahan to cast a shadow over moral realism, which would be an extraordinary cost for preserving The Asymmetry. If we reject The Asymmetry, however, we are locked within a contest of intuitions, from which there is no escape. Using one set of intuitions to clarify how we are thinking about others is a helpful exercise. But the discussion indicates that whatever bullet we bite, the normative foundations for procreating will only be as strong as our strongest intuition. Given the stakes, such a foundation seems less stable than we might desire—especially if we consider the etiology of such intuitions. The emergence of the *question* of whether we should have children seems like a recent and even local phenomenon.

While it is tempting to suggest procreative neutrality marks our progress, that simply begs the question.

The difficulty of securing a philosophical pro-natalism extends to how we weigh optimistic and pessimistic accounts of the world. Even if the optimistic rejoinder to pessimism and its corresponding procreative skepticism were to triumph, the victory would hardly be secure. Heyd's suggestion that an external, independent point of view could go either way has real merit: from within the internal point of view, our lives are invariably mixed. If nothing else, the best of lives all die, which at least casts a shadow over the most optimistic of assessments of the world. It is even plausible to think death's badness is *worse* as the particular life is happier, as we would especially want such a life to continue. Such a puzzle leaves us, at best, stranded on the shoals of optimism and pessimism—and therefore with a *de facto* anti-natalism.

Constructivist defenses of procreation on the basis of parenthood are promising. They preserve The Asymmetry, and their use of parenthood to ground procreation fits with the actual reasons many progenitors have. They make the reasons and intentions of procreators relevant to moral assessment. And their relational-account of reasons seems to presuppose an understanding of the person as socially embedded, avoiding the individualism that pervades much of moral philosophy. Yet such views fail to establish that procreation is presumptively permissible in the face of skeptical and pessimistic challenges. The reasons for this failure I have already articulated. Yet before theologians turn their backs on moral philosophy for it, we should consider whether there the discipline might offer stronger defenses of the distinct and irreplaceable values of procreative parenthood, so that it is reasonable to procreate despite putative moral reasons to adopt. Such a defense might appeal to two separate, interrelated considerations, which I take up respectively in the two subsequent chapters.

First, one might consider whether the peculiarities of procreative agency supply distinctive reasons to procreate rather than adopt. Despite their emphasis on the reasons and intentions of procreators, constructivist depictions of procreative agency tend to be stunted. The peculiarities of the procreative process might constrain the intentions and reasons of progenitors in ways that actually make procreation appear uniquely attractive. I take up this question in the next chapter through considering whether describing procreation as a 'gift' can plausibly be defended, such that the agency expressed within it is distinct from 'creating a painting' in interesting ways. Such terminology raises questions about the risks of being caused to exist

similar to those that emerged in this chapter. To shed light on the difficulties of defending a gift-based account of procreative agency, and to provide more specificity to anti-natalist concerns from suffering, I also consider objections to procreating on the basis of natural embryo loss.

Second, one might look beyond the act of procreating toward the value of procreative bonds for a parent-child relationship. As the value of 'biological ties' have received ample consideration within moral philosophy, I will consider whether and how strong such a benefit might be to parents and children, and what kind of weight they might supply for the interest in procreating *vis a vis* adoption. Many philosophers express anxieties about defending disparities between adoptive and procreative relationships, particularly when both are present within the same family. Because of this, I will consider whether doing so establishes an unjust inequality or priority. As my interest (for now) is in moral philosophy's answer to the question of why we procreate, I remain within its confines before turning to explicitly theological considerations in Chapter Four.

Chapter Two

From Choice to Chance: Luck, the Involuntary, and the "Gift of Life"

This chapter takes up one reason to pursue 'parenthood' through procreative means, namely, that life is a "gift." Moral philosophers rarely offer more than drive-by critiques of the 'gift analogy.'[1] Rivka Weinberg, for instance, summarily dismisses the idea: recipients do not exist prior to the gift, life is "often literally one hell of a gift," and existence often seems more like a job.[2] Life is "an odd sort of gift," on David Velleman's view. At most, it is a "benefit that prospective parents toss into the void in the hope that someone will turn out to have snagged it, to his own surprise as much as anyone's." Yet the stakes are too high to view this "so-called gift" as anything more than equivocal.[3] Christine Mills argues that "gift" implies a giver, and thus is either theologically grounded or an empty metaphor.[4]

Moral philosophers have opted instead for less inherently evaluative descriptions of what happens when life is created. Velleman suggests progenitors throw their child "into a predicament" and confront it "with a challenge in which the stakes are high, both for good and for ill."[5] Weinberg's description varies according to her purpose. To avoid metaphysical puzzles, she contends that we "create persons much as we create paintings."[6] While rejecting the language of "imposing existence" on grounds that there is no one (yet) to be imposed upon, she does suggest we "impose risk" on those we procreate.[7] David DeGrazia rejects the language of imposition, arguing instead that the "procreative act is better characterized as *exposing* a child to harm."[8] McMahan folds generation under the expansive if neutral and bureaucratic phrase "causing people to exist."[9]

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[1] My aim here is not to simply parrot the re-mystification of agency with Meilaender and Waters, but to examine how a broader account of agency transforms the reasons one has to procreate.
[2] Weinberg, *Risk*, 17-18.
[3] J. David Velleman, "II. The Gift of Life," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 36, no. 3 (2008): 245, 250.
[4] Catherine Mills, *Futures of Reproduction* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 88.
[5] Velleman, "Gift," 251.
[6] Weinberg, *Risk,* 31.
[7] Ibid., 20.
[8] DeGrazia, *Creation Ethics,* 153.
[9] Jeff McMahan. "Causing Disabled People to Exist and Causing People to Be Disabled," *Ethics* 116, no. 1 (2005): 77–99.

However, the few moral philosophers who find the analogy plausible deploy it in more subtle ways than the objections above might suggest. Most prominently, the analogy emphasizes the involuntariness and givenness that structures how humans procreate. The limits on what humans can do in ordinary procreation are peculiar, given the stakes of their actions. As understanding how the 'gift' of life might supply reasons to procreate rather than adopt requires assessing the distinctiveness of ordinary procreative means, this chapter will contrast generative intercourse with homologous *in vitro* fertilization. My interest is not in the licitness of various means of creating, but rather how the agency depicted in each renders the reasons to procreate intelligible or not. At the same time, the 'gift analogy' bumps up against similar 'theodicy problems' to those which emerged in the previous chapter. Anyone who rejects the shift from "chance to choice," as the authors of one influential book put it, must explain how the luck and lottery of procreation is a benefit or good.[10] To clarify the relative value of the 'gift of life,' this chapter thus considers a theme that has received scant attention from moral philosophers and almost no attention from theologians: natural embryo death.

First, then, this chapter considers Leon Kass' construal of gift analogy, which grounds procreative norms within a teleological metaphysical biology—that is, within 'nature.' I argue Kass' division between the means and results of the gift generates problems for his view. I then consider the role involuntariness plays in procreation through a critical dialogue with Alex Pruss' work. I then consider Michael Sandel and Jurgen Häbermas' respective attempts to articulate the virtues and benefits that preserving such an involuntary dimension within creating human life secures. Finally, I weigh the 'gift of life' against John Harris' anti-natalist objection from natural embryo wastage. Such an account helps clarify the moral significance of involuntary dimensions of procreative agency. I conclude by summarizing this chapter and evaluating whether the 'gift analogy' provides sufficient resources to overcome skeptical debunking challenges to procreating.

2.1 Leon Kass on the Giftedness *of Life*

In a 2003 defense of mortality, Leon Kass identifies two distinct ways of construing the givenness of human life. On the one hand, the 'given' names that which is bestowed as a gift.

[10] Allen Buchanan et al., *From Chance to Choice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

On the other hand, it names that which is "definitely fixed and specified," like the axioms of math or the "species-specified natures" that make us the kinds of beings we are. The 'given' names the limits that structure human life. In that essay, Kass argues that neither sense of the term suffices for ethics. Instead, the 'given' only serves as a norm if there is "something precious" in it "beyond the mere fact of its giftedness." It is the good of humanity that supplies norms for action, rather than the content of "human nature."[11] Whether this account is consistent with Kass' early arguments about how the 'gift of life' structures procreative ethics, though, is an open question.

One central question for the 'gift analogy' is *to whom* the benefit of life is given. In Kass' early work, the 'gift of life' is a "benefit to a child-to-be."[12] While Kass had originally thought (following Paul Ramsey) the prospective harms IVF posed to the child rendered it impermissible, he argues that when IVF is framed altruistically, not egoistically, the goods within the child's life justifies IVF when the risks of harm are equivalent to ordinary procreation. As I understand Kass' argument, the risks of harm must be weighed against the prospective benefits. Such risks must be proportionate to the benefits or goods that accrue.[13] The risks of harms to the prospective child are more morally weighty on the prior that procreation is an egoistic aspiration than on the prior that procreation is for the child's sake. Whatever prior one adopts will thus make a profound difference in how those risks are morally assessed.[14]

Kass' criterion for the permissibility of *in vitro* fertilization is that the risks should be on a par with natural procreation. This parity extends to the embryo death involved in each process. For Kass, that IVF incurs the death of embryos is not a reason to oppose it, as such deaths are analogous to the loss of embryos in normal "*in vivo* attempts to generate a child."[15] Kass suggests that in ordinary reproductive activity, over fifty percent of fertilized eggs either fail to implant or naturally abort in other ways. Any couple trying to conceive "tacitly accepts the sad fact of such embryonic wastage as the perfectly tolerable price to be paid for the birth of a

[11] Leon R. Kass, "Ageless Bodies, Happy Souls," *The New Atlantis* 1 (2003): 9–28.
[12] Leon R. Kass, *Toward a More Natural Science* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 55.
[13] This account preceded Rivka Weinberg's construal of procreative activity as a 'risk worth taking' by some 30 years.
[14] This is an issue to which we shall return below, in considering Alex Pruss' view.
[15] Leon R. Kass, *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002), 92.

(usually) healthy child."[16] Here, again, the reference for assessing whether risks of harm are proportionate to the benefits is the child's existence, rather than the satisfaction of the parental interests.

Kass also deploys the 'gift of life' in a parent-centric way—yet even this supplies no principle objection to IVF. The interest in having a child of 'one's own,' Kass contends, is "a couple's desire to embody, out of the conjugal union of their separate bodies, a child who is flesh of their separate flesh made one." Procreation within marriage means parents have a new branch of their family tree, and the child has "solid and unambiguous roots." These "natural ties" supply reasons against creating children for the sake of relinquishing them for adoption—but they do not supply an objection to IVF. Like any other would-be parents, married couples who pursue IVF "celebrate…their self-identification with their own bodies" and "acknowledge the meaning of the living human body by following its pointings to its own perpetuation." They affirm "the gift of their embodied life" and "show their gratitude by passing on that gift to their children."[17] Whether through IVF or ordinary means, then, the procreating couple strikes "a blow for the enduring goodness of the life in which they participate,"[18] and affirms "the importance of lineage and connectedness."[19]

Kass thus contextualizes the 'gift of life' within claims both about generational continuity and bodily integration. First, he contends that our self-understanding can only be understood generationally. The "perception of one's place in the line of generations" is "crucial to the development of genuine sociability and culture." In being born we inherit a civilization, and so are indebted to those who came before. "We can pay this debt, if at all, only by our transmission of life and teachings to those who come after."[20] In this way, the "gift of life" is rendered intelligible by the gratitude that parents have for their own lives. Second, this reception and fulfillment of our debts is inscribed upon the body itself, and so constrained by our mortality: "In the navel," Kass writes, "are one's forebears, in the genitalia our descendants." The human body thus sits within the dual horizons of perishability and perpetuation: it both dies and bears the "leanings toward, and capacities for procreation."[21] These two dimensions of our bodiliness

[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 99-100.
[18] Ibid., 100.
[19] Ibid., 97.
[20] Kass, *Toward,* 293.
[21] Kass, *Life,* 271.

come together, and are mutually explanatory. In procreation we are "saying yes to our own mortality, making of our perishable bodies the instruments of ever-renewable human life and possibility." Mortality thus becomes a benefit, a limit that establishes a "lifespan" that animates the pursuit of children. Kass' dual commitment to the virtues of mortality and to the interest in perpetuating ourselves means the 'transcendence' we aim at comes through reproduction, rather than the indefinite prolongation of our own lives.[22] Kass repudiates transhumanist aspirations in part because they generate an anti-natalism: Any coveting of an endless life is "in principle hostile to children, because children, those who come after, are those who will take one's place."[23] The 'gift of life' that the child receives is bounded by the mortality of both recipients, and by their respective willingness to return to non-existence so that they can be replaced within the chain of generations. "To reproduce means voting with your feet for your own demise," Kass writes.[24] The egoism that animates our interest in our own indefinite perpetuation is in an irreconcilable tension with the "urge to reproduce."[25]

Kass buttresses this understanding of the 'gift of life' by developing a metaphysical biology that provides independent reasons why we should follow the body's "pointings" toward its own reproduction. Kass' renegade biology contends that organisms are inherently purposeful, that they have an "inner 'striving' toward a goal, both in their coming to be and in many of their activities." Kass owns his vitalism: Any of the 'higher' forms of life, like human beings, "must have been 'present' potentially in reanimate matter." Matter "has character; matter has possibility; matter is prefiguratively alive."[26] A Darwinian account of evolution entails that the immanent purposes of organisms cannot be globalized; we cannot say 'nature' as a whole has a purpose. But the absence of a global purpose for nature does not undermine the immanent teleology of organisms within it: once faculties and powers emerge for the sake of living, they seem to "continue to flourish for the sake of living well."[27]

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[22] Against David Heyd's argument that indefinite life extension is necessary to secure its meaning, Kass contends that it is "probably no accident that it is a generation whose intelligentsia proclaim the death of God and the meaningless of life that embarks on life's indefinite prolongation and that seeks to cure the emptiness of life by extending it forever." Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 297.
[25] Ibid. Gilbert Meilaender's account clearly has much in common with Kass.
[26] Kass, *Toward,* 275.
[27] Ibid., 274.

Even at this stage of his work, however, Kass does not so straightforwardly derive the norm for action from what constitutes nature, human or otherwise. He argues that the natural might provide *some* guidance for how we might live, through revealing the "beautiful or the noble," and by demonstrating the "natural sociality" which is given "articulate regulation by the 'rational animal, political animal.'"[28] Nature matters for ethics, even if it is insufficient. Kass situates his account of what nature supplies for ethics between those who suggest that the natural way is "best, because natural," and those who think "that the natural has no moral force."[29] Metaphysical biology establishes the boundaries within which the good that grounds norms is discerned. It is thus a kind of necessary presupposition to ethical reasoning, such that if its contents are altered, the norms are altered as well.

It is on the level of human nature's contents—rather than the 'benefit' of the 'gift of life'—that Kass thus finds reasons to oppose *in vitro* fertilization. IVF is a 'depersonalized' or 'dehumanized' way of creating human beings, which transforms the "natural process of generating" into the "artificial process of making." This loss of the distinction between 'begetting' and 'making' reshapes, "at its very root, the nature of man himself." Infertile couples who pursue IVF affirm the goodness of their own bodily strivings, even if their frustration prompts them to "generate beyond [the body's] confines." In that way, his argument exempts the infertile couples from IVF's moral badness. "Life in the laboratory also allows *other people,*" he suggests, to treat the body as a "mere tool, ideally an instrument of the conscious will, the sole repository of human dignity."[30]

Kass does worry, though, about the role IVF plays within a couple's (married) life. Kass raises the possibility that IVF disrupts the couple's relationship by obscuring their "bodily natures as male and female, as both gendered and engendering." Sexuality allows us a means of "transcending [bodily] separateness through the children born of sexual union." Our identity as male and female derives its "deepest meaning" in the "gender-mated prospects for generation through union." Kass offers no definitive arguments that IVF necessarily overturns this gendered identity or the possibility of overcoming separateness: instead, he hesitantly wonders

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[28] Ibid., 347.
[29] Kass, *Life,* 93.
[30] Ibid., 100. Emphasis mine. The referent of 'other people' presumably includes lab workers, but Kass also expands it to anyone who would either contribute to the blurring of generational lines (like sperm donors and surrogates), or who simply think that creating human life in the lab would be optimal.

whether these gendered aspects of our bodily, sexual natures can "be fulfilled through the rationalized techniques of laboratory sexuality and fertilization?" "Does not," Kass goes on, the "scientist-partner produce a triangle that somehow subverts the [conjugal] meaning of 'two'?" Here too we risk "paying in coin of our humanity" by generating sexlessly, precisely through reconfiguring the interrelationship of male and female.[31]

Kass' argument thus creates a division between the means and ends of human generation, a division that seems to be incompatible with his claim that the norm must be grounded in a *benefit* and not in the givenness of (a) nature. For Kass, IVF can secure the 'gift of life' for a child, which places it on a par with natural procreation. Additionally, the practice fulfills at least one "aspect of [a married couple's] separate sexual natures and of their married life together."[32] Yet while IVF also leads to a "self-degradation and dehumanization" of the procreative couple, Kass does not identify the irreplaceable benefit or good of natural reproduction. Kass grants that both the child-centric and parent-centric construals of the benefits of the 'gift of life' can be satisfied through IVF, which leaves him bereft of any resources to oppose the practice—except those he gains from appealing to the 'given' of our sexual natures, the very sort of appeal his later essay suggests is insufficient

Other problems emerge from Kass' division between the means of generating the 'gift of human life' and the transmission of the gift itself. Somewhat paradoxically, Kass' suggestion that *in vitro* satisfies the procreative aspiration undermines his emphasis on the importance of generational continuity. On Kass' account, the child's relationship to the parents is construed along the lines of the "gift" they receive, a gift specified by the place within the generations the child inherits. IVF fully fulfills this dimension of generational continuity, ostensibly leaving the relationship between parents and children unaltered. The only relationships that are reconfigured by IVF are those between the medical community and the newborn, and the internal relationship of the couple. Yet if the 'nature' of the male and female is disrupted through divorcing them from the means of generation, it is hard to see how the life they transmit is contiguous with the form of life the child receives. If the parents' internal relationship does not qualify the significance or meaning of the 'life' the child receives, then it seems like the 'life' the child receives is fundamentally and constitutively individualistic. This would not be

[31] Ibid., 101.
[32] Ibid., 97.

the only way Kass introduces a tacit individualism. As Gerald McKenny observes, Kass "displays an individualistic bias when he treats interdependence with others as a feature of human necessity rather than dignity."[33] This bias, I think, grounds his willingness to allow the 'gift of life' to be construed independently from the means of life's emergence in the world, and the distinctive role the parents play together in generating that life. Kass' only criterion for the 'gift of life' is whether generational continuity is preserved, which means the form of the newborn's dependence upon mother and father is up for grabs. By way of analogy, ordinary procreation is a necessity of our nature—but not a part of our dignity. And though intergenerational family ties supply a reason not to give a child up for adoption, such bonds are extraneous to the child's personal identity and nature.

Kass' individualism is not one that motivates or depends upon being a non-fungible, irrepeatable, immortal soul. Instead, reproduction has a communitarian dimension that is antithetical to the individual. Kass' argument that mortality makes procreation intelligible demands a willingness to be replaced by subsequent generations. Such an image reduces the relations between the generations to a zero-sum game; there is no way affirming the immortality of one generation while still permitting the procreation of the next. If children are "truly to flower, we must go to seed; we must wither and give ground."[34] While Kass allows that "immortality for oneself through children may be a delusion…participating in the natural and eternal renewal of human possibility through children is not—not even in today's world."[35] The 'illusion' of immortality that children provide thus is a 'noble lie': the individual perishes into nothingness, while one's society is renewed.

Kass' account of procreation, then, seems to split into two directions: On the one hand, it affirms an individualistic conception of the 'gift of life,' which introduces a rupture in the generational continuity he affirms. On the other hand, he suggests that the individual should be willing to accept their own self-negation for the sake of passing on their gift to the next generation. By bifurcating the internal relation of man and woman and the meaning of the 'gift of life,' Kass unintentionally seems to dissolve the very conditions on which the distinctive logic of the *family* might be based, thus rendering it a problem. (Indeed, it is striking how

[33] Gerald P. McKenny, *To Relieve the Human Condition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 142.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 273.

disconnected Kass' understanding of procreation seems to be from the logic of *parenthood*.) The 'special and individuating relationship' between parent and child discussed in the last chapter is thus reducible on his view to non-parental aspirations and ends.

Finally, Kass' requirement that the risks of a procreative choice be proportionate to the benefits to the individual conceived has intuitive force, but raises questions about what sort of scale of harms and benefits he is deploying. Kass suggests that the "gift of life can be held to be morally at least the equal of therapy," in that it offsets or compensates for whatever harms or suffering a child might experience. The idea that benefits might "outweigh" adversities is pervasive within bioethics.[36] Yet this form of calculating the value of life requires a prior judgment about what kind of standard might be used to "weigh up" such reasons, and how much life "weighs" on its own. It is not clear in Kass' work precisely what "price" is unreasonable to pay for the "gift of life." A 50% rate of embryo loss seems reasonable if we think the embryo does not have equal moral status to adults.[37] However, if embryos have full moral status then the value of the 'gift of life' must be extraordinarily weighty to compensate for such losses. Even so, there is presumably *some* amount of embryo loss on Kass' view that would render procreation dubious. Kass has little to say about such a threshold, which suggests that *how* valuable the "gift of life" might be is left to our intuitions.

Kass' account of the 'gift of life,' then, suffers from a number of limitations. For one, it requires that we take at least some guidance from the givenness of human nature, even while Kass says such an emphasis is morally insufficient. And second, it attempts to bracket the meaning of that 'nature' from the means of generation, such that at least certain aspects of it can be satisfied regardless of whether people procreate in the ordinary way or through IVF—only to turn around and then argue that altering the means *might* reconfigure the relationship between male and female and deny their nature. Such confusions stem, I suspect, from Kass' attenuated description of the 'begetting' that human beings undertake, relative to the 'making' that he associates IVF with. Closer attention to the internal limits of the procreative act thus might help clarify precisely what constitutes the 'gift of life.'

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[36] Nigel Biggar seems to adopt a similar stance when he suggests that we can be grateful for our existence "if the substantial benefits that the gift continues to confer are not outweighed by the attendant adversities." See *Aiming to Kill: The Ethics of Suicide and Euthanasia* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 26.
[37] See Ibid., 90. We "do not treat even the fetus as fully one of us," because we do not mourn it.

2.2.1 Alex Pruss and the Involuntariness of Natural Reproduction

Alex Pruss' evaluation of the intuitions beneath the 'gift analogy' emphasizes the involuntariness that structures ordinary procreation. Pruss names three aspects of ordinary procreation that make the 'gift analogy' plausible.[38] First, the "connection between intercourse and the child is mediated by many causal steps that occur outside our direct control, and the chance of successful conception appears not to exceed about one half on the most fertile of days." This involuntariness *within* the process seems to give the results a peculiar character: new life is closer to a flower than a painting. Additionally, the beginning of the process can be undertaken for its own sake, not just to have a child. Finally, echoing Kass, Pruss observes the process itself is given: we did not choose to generate new human life *in this way*. As there is involuntariness *within* procreation, so there is an involuntariness *of* the process. These three intuitions support the idea that the child is a gift.

Pruss argues that while IVF does make it easier to think of a child as a 'product,' the differences between it and ordinary procreation are less pronounced than it might seem. With respect to involuntariness *within* reproduction, IVF still fails at a relatively high rate and includes processes outside our control (for now). Additionally, we would not object if a couple gained minute control over their reproductive systems. We might also preserve the "lottery" dimension of procreation by randomizing our selection of embryos in IVF. Pruss thus suggests that there is no "innate difference" between IVF and intercourse with respect to their internal involuntariness, even if we tend to judge IVF's 'success' in terms of efficiency. Regarding the second intuition, Pruss suggests someone might undertake IVF for reasons independent of procreation, such as tax incentives or ascetism, which demonstrates the practice has intrinsic value. (At the same time, such reasons would have to justify a serious invasion of the body, which seems unlikely.) Pruss thinks the third intuition is sound, putting him in the ballpark of Kass: when we engage in a process "that is designed by nature or someone else, it is easier to accept the outcome of that process as a gift."[39]

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[38] Alexander R. Pruss, *One Body* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 412.
[39] Ibid.

However, Pruss' concessions to IVF seem too hasty. There are important differences between the respective processes. Consider the location of conception.[40] As we saw in the discussion of Kass' view, the decision to "generate beyond [the body's] confines" seems to bifurcate the personal agency involved in providing the environment for conception to occur from the material reality of fertilization.[41] As others have noted, such a division divides procreation into a series of efficient causes, of which the delivery of sperm and an ovum is only one.[42] As Anscombe writes, though, begetting "is a personal act involving actual union of man and woman. It is not the provision of sperm which is then conveyed to an ovum, even if there should then be conception as a result."[43]

In other words, collapsing the involuntariness of procreating into the generalized description of having "many causal steps that occur outside our direct control" obscures the ineradicable *personal* significance of involuntariness within ordinary procreation. Consider the experience of *shame* at being infertile, which is a widespread response.[44] The diffused and variegated agency of IVF renders such an experience less plausible than when reproduction happens within a material and causal environment wholly internal to the couple. This is not to endorse shame as an appropriate response to involuntary childlessness; rather, such shame is an epistemic indicator of the peculiarly personal stakes of reproduction for the couple. Moreover, the independence of the couple in originating the child's life allows them to say 'ours' or 'of us' about the child in an unambiguous way. As the number of agents in the generative process multiplies, so do the number of individuals against whom prospective parents or their children might have a complaint.

Additionally, Pruss' argument that we could create parity between the "luck" involved in IVF and ordinary procreation by randomizing the former presupposes that the moral

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[40] For an account that treats location as morally determinative, see Helen Watt's *The Ethics of Pregnancy, Abortion and Childbirth* (New York: Routledge, 2016).
[41] Kass, *Life,* 100.
[42] Jeff Bishop's argument that contemporary "metaphysics of medicine casts life in terms of efficient causation and matter in motion" applies to procreative ethics as well. Bishop contends that such an account reduces what constitutes an 'intention' to a choice to either begin, or not, the series of efficient causes, and that this approach renders traditional moral distinctions between killing and letting die unintelligible. See Jeffrey Bishop, *The Anticipatory Corpse* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 128-30.
[43] G. E. M. Anscombe, "On Humanae Vitae," in *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics*, ed. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2008), 197. Such an argument is similar to that advanced by Meilaender and Waters, as noted in the introduction.
[44] See Linda M. Whiteford and Lois Gonzalez, "Stigma," *Social Science and Medicine* 40, no. 1 (1995): 27–36.

significance of such luck is equivalent regardless of whether it is chosen or not. As noted above, the involuntariness *within* the procreative process exists partly because of the involuntariness *of* the procreative process. The means of generation are given, and the process involves an element of "luck." Yet the intentions and reasons available to an agent are materially different in environments where the luck is inherent than in environments where (some)one has intentionally randomized the process.[45] Pruss' concession that *not* choosing a process makes it easier to think of its results as a "gift" seems to depend upon this claim: the significance of the involuntariness *of* the process seems to be diminished if the involuntariness *within* the process is actively chosen by an agent. Pruss notes that the 'randomization' of IVF is in tension with the efficiency-criterion that we generally apply to it. But the efficiency-criterion seems to be inherent in the practice, which is ordered toward overcoming the involuntariness *within* ordinary procreation for those who 'lose' the procreative lottery. Both the 'involuntariness of' and the 'involuntariness within' ordinary procreation are required to make the 'gift analogy' plausible.

In fact, the 'luck' inherent within ordinary procreation calls into question whether the success of the process *can* be intended by those who begin it. The belief that one can intend to conceive is practically universal. Yet the conjunction of intentions, probabilities, and biological processes in procreating raise serious questions about the limits of intentions, which have not been adequately considered by moral philosophers (or theologians). My suggestion here is subsequently both speculative and tentative: my aim is to point (inconclusively) toward a plausible explanation for why the "luck" within procreative processes is essential the gift analogy. I suspect the 'gift analogy' is persuasive for some people because procreating is unavailable to an individual's intentions. At most, one can intend to unite bodily in an act that hopefully begins the reproductive process.

First, such a formulation depends upon an 'intention' being an action-predicate, rather than a psychological state or predicate.[46] What one intends is inextricable from both the end that

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[45] One can choose to randomize embryo selection for a variety of reasons or with different intentions. While both choice and intentions are morally significant, the moral significance of an act is partially conditional on the options one chooses between for fulfilling an end. An intention in an environment where the options are *unchosen* (because there are no alternatives) is less morally loaded than an act where the options are themselves a matter of choice. As such, Pruss' equivocation between the randomization of IVF and ordinary procreation seems dubious.

[46] My explorations on the nature of intention are influenced by Elizabeth Anscombe and some of her interlocutors. See G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). See also

one aims at and the form of action one undertakes. More importantly, however, such an approach treats intentions as instances and exemplifications of practical knowledge.[47] There is a skill-based component to an intention: one cannot intend what one lacks the skills to perform. No one picking up a bow for the first time can intend to hit the bullseye with an arrow from 100 yards away, nor can one intend to play a Mozart sonata when they first sit down at a piano. Both individuals can try, and *intend* to try. If they somehow succeeded without the relevant skill we would say they performed the act *intentionally* (it was a "lucky shot"). The intention to try is transparent, in that way, such that its moral significance is indistinguishable from intending an end. But the two intentions are not equivalent, and come apart in contexts where one lacks the practical know-how to bring about an end.[48]

If practical knowledge is a prerequisite for having the intention to bring about an end, then it is important to consider what constitutes it. Here I consider two conditions, both of which must obtain: a probabilistic condition and a modal condition. Probabilistically, it seems like there is some (almost certainly vague) threshold of success below which one cannot claim 'practical knowledge' of the task. A 30% free-throw shooter does not have the relevant skill to intend to make the shot, but a 70% free throw shooter might.[49] Similarly, one cannot intend to win the lottery: the odds of success are too low, even if one has the relevant know-how to put

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Roger Teichmann, "The Voluntary and the Involuntary," *ACPQ* 88, no. 3 (2014): 465-486. Teichmann suggests that for Anscombe, voluntary acts accept the question 'Why?' as relevant, but do not have an answer. On his view, involuntary acts are determined neither by their physiological dimensions nor by the passivity of the agent. One can voluntarily undertake an end in which one is physiologically restricted, or the accomplishment of which requires passivity. However, it is not the voluntariness or involuntariness of *actions* which I am interested in here, but the involuntarily (that is, unchosen or acted upon in any way) biological preconditions of action. To clarify, consider Helen Watt's description of pregnancy as "a goal directed activity, not a passive state." Such a locution rightfully ascribes agency to the woman who is gestating. However, it is odd to think of other biological processes as falling under an intention, and so being 'voluntary' in the same way. One might intentionally breathe air—but one cannot intend one's heart to distribute blood, at least if 'intend' is a predicate that orders us toward one's *action.* Instead, one's heart beating is a precondition for action. That is the sense of 'involuntariness' that interests me here. See Helen Watt, "Intending Reproduction as One's Primary Aim,'" *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 63, no. 3 (2015): 145-146.

[47] I follow Rachel Wiseman's account of practical knowledge here, available in her unpublished exposition of Anscombe, "Practical Knowledge and Knowledge of Facts."

[48] What constitutes the difference between a skill and luck may be inherently vague. For more on this account of intention, see: Alfred Mele and Steven Sverdlik, "Intention, Intentional Action, and Moral Responsibility," *Philosophical Studies* 82, no. 3 (1996): 265–287. Alfred R. Mele, "Intention, Belief, and Intentional Action," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1989): 19–30. Alfred R. Mele and Paul K. Moser, "Intentional Action," *Noûs* 28, no. 1 (1994): 39–68.

[49] These probabilistic constraints may be indexed to the kind of activity one undertakes, and whether other agents are involved. A batter's 30% success rate in professional baseball would plausibly make a player an all-star, despite the pervasiveness of their failure.

oneself in a position to win. The modal condition is this: one has the relevant practical knowledge if one *would have* successfully accomplished the project, but was prevented by an intrusion of an unexpected event from outside the process or a mistake within it. A free throw shooter *would have* made the shot, had his arm not unexpectedly buckled from his opponent hitting it or had his hand not suddenly gone numb. In that sense, having practical knowledge seems compatible with the failure of performances, depending on the reasons for their occurrence. Not every dimension of a performance is equally vulnerable to failure, though: some vulnerabilities are structural conditions of an act, and others are extrinsic to it. If a process is ordered such that failure is extremely likely, like the lottery, then it is the kind of process that brings about an end that is unavailable to one's intentions.

If such constraints are plausible, then 'conceiving a child' seems like the sort of end that lies beyond the reach of an intention—even though someone who conceives a child does so *intentionally.*[50] Consider the various 'success conditions' at which an act of sexual intercourse might aim. Helen Watt argues that in ordinary procreation intercourse is "biologically successful beyond the success of the immediate act."[51] While Watt is right biological process is "goal directed," its successful completion is unavailable to those who undertake it. There is nothing the mother *would* or *could* do to make the process "biologically successful" (as many infertile couples will attest).[52] The embryo's formation and development is beyond their grasp, and interventions into the process are inherently mediated by the woman's body. Moreover, the probability of failure seems to be intrinsic to the process. In any particular reproductive cycle, the fecundity rate "rarely exceeds 35%," and even under "ideal conditions, the greatest probability of achieving a clinical pregnancy is 30-40%."[53] Those odds clearly improve as couples *try* to conceive. Indeed, the likely reproductive failure of a single reproductive act makes its repetition almost necessary for a couple to seriously aim at procreating. The need for frequent repetition of the act in order to improve the odds of the 'further success' of procreating

[50] One possible feature of this view is that there is no such thing as an 'unintentional' child, as there can be no such thing as an intended child. Framing children as a side-effect of an intention does not remove it from moral scrutiny, any more than the side-effects of civilian death are irrelevant to the moral analysis of bombing. Everything one brings about 'intentionally,' ends and side-effects, matter for moral reasoning—even if they do not matter equivalently.
[51] Watt, "Intending,"145-146.
[52] One difference between procreation and other biological processes is that procreation requires two agents.
[53] Giuseppe Benagiano, Manuela Farris, and Gedis Grudzinskas, "Fate of Fertilized Human Oocytes," *Reproductive BioMedicine Online* 21, no. 6 (2010): 733.

suggests that the most one can do in any particular instance of intercourse is try to procreate, rather than intend to. Additionally, the correlation of the act's frequency with trying to procreate means the knowledge that a particular act was successful is *inversely* related to one's intentional attempts at procreating. A couple that increases their reproductive odds through frequent attempts in the right conditions makes it *harder* to know which act was reproductively successful—unlike if they 'unintentionally' became pregnant from a single act. In order to improve the probability of procreation, couples must dilute their own agency to the point that (unlike in IVF) they may not be able to name the place or time that a child was conceived. These oddities indicate that the practical knowledge of procreating stands beneath the "social practice of sexual reproduction" or the repeated attempts to generate life within the conditions necessary for its emergence.[54] But procreation is unavailable to the couple as a discrete end in any particular act itself.

There are reasons, then, to think that the intrinsic vulnerabilities and "luck" within ordinary procreation are structurally necessary for understanding its "biological success" as a 'gift.' Those who adopt the 'gift analogy' to object to IVF emphasize the unavailability of procreating to the couple who engages in sexual intercourse, even if they do not develop the account of agency as extensively as I have here. Roman Catholic theologian William May, for instance, argues every act of intercourse must be "intended to be *open to* the gift of life," which is an odd and cumbersome locution.[55] How can one *intend* what one cannot bring about, namely receiving (or bestowing) a gift? But if we adopt the above description of the limits of practical knowledge in procreating, May's formulation becomes intelligible. The only discrete end agents can intend in intercourse is a communicative act of love, affection, delight, and pleasure in one's spouse within the mutual openness to parenthood. What happens after is not up to them.

2.2.2 Michael Sandel and the Virtue of Limited Responsibility

If the 'gift analogy' resonates with intuitions about procreating and explains the oddities that seem to be inherent to procreative agency, that is certainly a point in its favor. Yet it is one

[54] The phrase comes from John Harris' "Sexual Reproduction Is a Survival Lottery," *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 13, no. 1 (2004): 75-90.
[55] Emphasis mine. William May, *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life, 3rd Edition* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2013), 133.

thing to explain how procreative agency is transformed when we diminish its vulnerability to failure by mitigating its luck-based dimensions; it is another to specify why those luck-based dimensions and the unavailability of procreating to the intentions of agents are benefits or goods. One might still wonder why the involuntariness both within and of the procreative process are worth preserving. Michael Sandel and Jürgen Habermas both attempt an answer, from different and complementary perspectives. I begin with Sandel.

Sandel construes the 'giftedness' of human life a number of ways. First, he suggests that 'giftedness' is a recognition that our "talents and powers are not wholly of our own doing, nor even fully ours, despite the efforts we expend to develop and exercise them."[56] While this sense of gift is partially "a religious sensibility," it has a "resonance [that] reaches beyond religion."[57] Second, he deploys the terminology of 'gift' to describe how parents ought relate to their children. Following William May's suggestion that the 'gifted' character of procreation requires an "openness to the unbidden," Sandel argues a 'gift ethic' requires "accepting [children] as they come, not as objects of our design, or products of our will, or instruments of our ambition."[58] Parents can over-determine a child's life through genetic enhancement or hyperactive parenting, which "represents an anxious excess of mastery and dominion that misses the sense of life as a gift."[59] Beneath this analogy is a sharp contrast between an "ethic of willfulness" and the "claims of giftedness." Enhancement is dubious because it "expresses and promotes" a disposition to mastery and control.[60] Sandel thus attempts to remain above the metaphysical fray by articulating the virtues and sentiments an ethic of gift supports. Specifically, the 'ethic of willfullness' reshapes "three key features of our moral landscape—humility, responsibility, and solidarity." Humility is constituted by the refusal to engage in mastery over life through retaining an "openness to the unbidden."[61] Moreover, increased mastery would mean our talents are not "gifts for which we are indebted," but "achievements for which we are responsible."[62] Enhancement would thus mean "the explosion, not the erosion,

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[56] Michael J. Sandel, *The Case against Perfection* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 27.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 45.
[59] Ibid., 62.
[60] Ibid., 46.
[61] ESCR is permissible on his view, since it is not paternalistically mastering the course of another person's life. Ibid., 101 ff.
[62] Ibid., 87.

of responsibility." It is one of the benefits of being "creatures of nature, God, or fortune" that we "are not wholly responsible for the way we are."[63] As areas of life "once governed by fate" are transformed into "arena[s] of choice," parents of disabled children will bear a greater (social) responsibility than when genetic screening was not an option.[64] Such an explosion of responsibility also threatens our solidarity with those less advantaged than ourselves. If our talents are gifts of "good fortune," then it is a mistake to believe that we "are entitled to the full measure of the bounty [those talents] reap in a market economy." The sense that our talents are 'given' animates an interest in sharing them with those who, "through no fault of their own, lack comparable gifts."[65]

While Sandel's virtue-oriented defense of the givenness of procreative agency is interesting, his appeal to the benefit of limited responsibility may allow procreators too much latitude. The parents' "openness to the unbidden" might be fulfilled through knowingly receiving an extremely deprived child.[66] As John Harris (caustically) observes, "Now, illnesses are unbidden, as are accidents, invasions by parasites and viruses and for that matter terrorists and foreign forces. I cannot see any obvious, or even subtle, merit in openness to the unbidden."[67] Even if the virtues Sandel names are lost as we move from "chance to choice" in procreative decisions, for those drawn to pessimistic accounts of well-being the *option* to avoid creating putatively 'miserable' individuals will make such a trade-off seem desirable. One question, then, is whether the limited responsibility upon progenitors can also be a benefit *to the child.* For that, we turn to Habermas.

2.2.3 Habermas and the Contingency of Origins

For Jürgen Habermas, limits on the agency of progenitors is crucial for the freedom and autonomy of their children. Following Hannah Arendt's concept of 'natality,' Habermas argues that freedom requires a beginning that "eludes human disposal." It must have a reference point

[63] Ibid.
[64] Sandel's suggestion that access to a particular power increases the responsibility on *everyone,* regardless of whether they use it, is a concession to John Harris' critiques of an earlier version of his argument. See John Harris, *Enhancing Evolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 109 ff.
[65] Ibid., 91.
[66] I set aside questions here about *knowledge* of certain consequences and the morality of *avoiding* bringing them about.
[67] Harris, *Enhancing,* 116.

outside one's "socialization fate," or the "lines of tradition and the contexts of interaction which constitute the process of formation through which personal identity is molded in the course of a life history."[68] Birth is a "natural fact" that meets the "conceptual requirement of constituting a beginning we can not control." It establishes a bright line between "what *we* are and what happens *to us.*" The ability to refer "to a bodily existence which is itself the continuation of a natural fate going back beyond the socialization process" allows us to achieve continuity within our life history, by providing a reference point from which people's interventions into our lives can be assessed. The person whose origins are genetically determined or selected by another agent can no longer see their beginning as a "contingent circumstance"—and thus the programmer intervenes "*within* the field of action of the programmed person."[69] As Sandel editorializes, the "drive to mastery…misses the part of freedom that consists in a persisting negotiation with the given."[70]

Habermas' argument that the contingency of our origins has an indispensable role in establishing freedom does not supply *moral* reasons to oppose eugenic interventions.[71] Instead, his objection to eugenic interventions takes two forms. First, eugenic interventions disrupt the capacity for 'authenticity,' which autonomy depends upon. The argument hangs on Habermas' distinction between the 'socialization process' and the natural facts of one's birth and genetic inheritance. Every parent has 'intentions' for their children, which the child may "appropriate." Yet intentions expressed in overbearing parenting are qualitatively different than those expressed in genetic intervention. The former intentions are "contestable": controlling parents meet an agent capable of resistance. Such a child may even retrospectively compensate for their over-determined upbringing by a "critical reappraisal of the genesis of such restrictive socialization processes." Hyperactive parenting, in other words, is "communicatively mediated by a socializing practice which can be subjected to reappraisal by the person 'raised.'"[72] Yet the genetic intentions of parental creators remove the child's opportunity to critically revise their

[68] Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2003), 59.
[69] Ibid., 60.
[70] Sandel, *Perfection,* 83.
[71] Sandel misreads Habermas on this point. He suggests this 'natality argument' is a *third* argument against eugenic interventions, the other two being the disruption to autonomy and equality. For Habermas, however, the description of the 'contingency' of birth forms the basis for those latter arguments and, indeed, even precedes them in the book. See Sandel, *Perfection,* 82-83.
[72] Habermas, *Future,* 64.

own origins. The person at odds with their genetic programming is "hopeless": they are barred from being the "spontaneous self-perception of being the undivided author of his own life."[73]

Of course, none of us have the possibility of 'revising' or choosing our genetic inheritance, which suggests the argument is incomplete.[74] One could buttress it by arguing, on constructivist grounds, that the parents' eugenic choice changes the complaint a child can have against their parents. While the child's genetic inheritance is fixed either way, intervention by the parents gives the child concrete agents they can blame (or praise), rather than raising their complaints against luck, nature, or God. The significance of life's involuntary dimensions is partially determined by who chose them and for what reasons. When one's origins are only conditioned by the parents' choice to engage in intercourse with each other, the child's genetic inheritance is only *indirectly* or *partially* determined by their parents. Direct determination happens in the 'socialization process,' which is resistible and revisable. In the case where an agent intervenes eugenically in the process of making a life, however, the child's genetic inheritance is determined directly by that agent. The content of their genetic inheritance is due to their creators in a more immediate way—which makes the worry about autonomy seem more reasonable.

This way of saving Habermas' argument shades into his second critique of eugenic interventions. Habermas argues that such interventions disrupt the reciprocity and equality of social roles necessary to form autonomous actors. Liberal equality requires, "in principle, a reversibility to interpersonal relationships."[75] For Habermas, this reversibility has only narrow application: equality requires relations of *dependency* to be reversible. Genetic interventions, though, introduce an asymmetry between the generations. Parents who design their children, as Sandel summarizes, "inevitably incur a responsibility for their children's lives that cannot possibly be reciprocal."[76] The non-revisability and permanence of the intention expressed by eugenic interventions establishes a permanent dependence between the creator and created, which Habermas contends principally bars the created from "exchanging roles with his designer."[77] While the relationship between creator and created is similarly permanent in

[73] Ibid., 63.
[74] Sandel, *Perfection,* 81.
[75] Habermas, *Future,* 63.
[76] Sandel, *Perfection,* 81.
[77] Habermas, *Future,* 65.

ordinary procreation, the social dependence of eugenic relationships is uniquely "irreversible because it was established by ascription," rather than luck.[78]

Habermas' reasoning here is obscure. It is unclear how the luck of ordinary procreation secures the reversibility of social roles necessary for inter-generational equality. Perhaps the argument turns on Habermas' claim that the genealogical dependence supplied by ordinary birth "only engages the children's existence…not their essence."[79] This distinction is "notably opaque," as Catherine Mills suggests, so it is worth parsing closely.[80] Habermas contends the *social* dependence of children upon parents is "resolved with the children growing up." But their genealogical dependence of 'being begotten from' remains. This 'genealogical dependence' only touches the child's "existence," not their essence. Yet this seems inconsistent with Habermas' argument that genetic intervention qualitatively determines the child's "future life," which seems to require that genetic constitution has *some* bearing on a person's "essence" and not only their existence. His argument seems to be that genetic *intervention* determines a person's *essence,* but the genetic *inheritance* of procreation only determines the person's *existence*. The only way through this puzzle I can see is to ground the person's essence within the socialization process. On this reading, the gap between the involuntariness of 'being begotten from' and the agency expressed by 'being genetically determined by' matters a great deal. The permanent genealogical dependency of ordinary procreation is commensurate with reciprocal social relationships between parents and children, as there is a dimension of the child's life permanently outside the parents' agency. While genealogical dependence remains forever, parents and children stand as equals before the altar of luck.[81] Contingency in our origins thus secures an important kind of independence from each other.

If this interpretation of Habermas' view is correct, it helps explain the delicate relationship of equality and asymmetrical authority within parent-child relations. Parents are clearly responsible for their children in a non-symmetrical, non-reciprocal way. Yet on the givenness hypothesis, parents and child have a deep fact about themselves in common: their origin has a reference outside the respective willing or decision of either party. While parents clearly

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[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 64.
[80] Mills, *Futures,* 88.
[81] This reading means Habermas anticipates Sandel's contention that Habermas does not sufficiently distinguish the determinations of genetic intervention and aggressive parenting. See Sandel, *Perfection,* 80-81.

determine the shape of their children's lives, such a limit establishes some grounds for a fundamental reciprocity and equality. The limitation on human agency that 'luck' preserves thus levels the parent-child relationship. Gaining more control over the means of reproduction magnifies the asymmetries between the creator and the created, and the inherent equality that involuntariness introduces recedes to the background.

Habermas and Sandel's accounts are closely related, but not identical. Where Habermas objects to the lack of self-determination and reciprocity eugenic intervention entails, Sandel objects to the attitudes and loss of virtues attached to the 'ethic of willfulness.' At the heart of both, however, is the idea that the contingency of our origins is essential for maintaining the equilibrium of responsibility between the generations. The increased responsibility progenitors bear if they intervene genetically alters the "special and individuating relation" of parent and child, expanding the range of claims children can make against their parents. On this account, moving from "chance to choice" in procreation removes conditions that prevent the inherent asymmetrical authority parents have over children from devolving into a hyperactive determinism. The luck of one's birth provides a point outside the parent-child relationship that helps secure justice within it.

Still, Habermas' approach might prohibit more than he intends. Habermas attempts to limit his objection to eugenic, rather than therapeutic, genetic interventions. Yet as Johnathan Pugh argues, the idea that "therapeutic modifications are morally permissible seems to be in tension with his appeal to natality." Habermas contends therapeutic genetic modifications are permissible on the basis of assumed consent. Yet if we need a reference point outside the sphere of social relations to ground equality and autonomy, then even therapeutic interventions seem impermissible. As Pugh summarizes, "If the contingency of one's genome is necessary for one's sense of self continuity, and a fortiori autonomy, then this seems to imply that a child who is the subject of a therapeutic genetic intervention, and whose genome is thereby not contingent, cannot have the sense of self-continuity that is necessary for autonomy."[82] Habermas has two paths out of this problem. He could reject the licitness of therapeutic genetic modifications. Other paternalist alterations to a child's biology (such a circumcision) would still be licit, provided that they do not determine an individual's 'essence' as *genetic* interventions purportedly do. Alternatively, he could adopt a normative account of 'health' as a corollary to

[82] Jonathan Pugh, "Autonomy, Natality and Freedom," *Bioethics* 29, no. 3 (2015): 149.

agency and autonomy, which would justify therapeutic genetic interventions, but not eugenic ones. However, any understanding of health not determined within the socializing process would "threaten the future child's conception of herself as an autonomous agent" and sit outside the scope of the liberal, post-metaphysical mode of reasoning Habermas employs.[83] Habermas thus does not have access to the resources he needs to overcome this worry.

Habermas' argument that givenness is necessary for autonomy and equality runs into conceptual challenges, then. Such worries do not mean Habermas' argument is *wrong*, provided he accepts that his view prohibits any genetic interventions or bites the metaphysical bullet and develops a normative account of health. Still, similar questions remain as those that emerged against Kass and Pruss' view: autonomy and liberal reciprocity might be valuable, but are they sufficiently valuable to preserve the vulnerabilities and risks of 'luck' within the procreative process? If Habermas' view does entail therapeutic genetic interventions are impermissible, the cost of preserving such 'luck' goes up considerably; if therapeutic interventions are permissible and eugenic interventions are not, preserving 'luck' seems like less of a risk. As we continue to bump up against the question of how valuable the 'gift of life' is relative to the risks of harm and suffering, it is worth turning directly to the problem.

2.3 Embryo Wastage and the Gift of Human Life

Those who procreate have extensive influence over another person's life. Whether they "give a gift," or "impose risk," or toss a child into a "predicament," they need a reason to welcome the limits ordinary procreation imposes on their agency. Such a rationale must explain how the "gift analogy" avoids giving procreators too much latitude in 'causing' suffering. Here I want to consider one risk internal to the procreative process, namely embryo death. John Harris argues that if one affirms the moral status of the embryo, the 'embryo wastage' problem creates a dilemma.[84] Harris argues that as many as five embryos are lost for every live birth. As such, the "sacrifice of embryos seems to be an inescapable part of the process of procreation." Despite not being intentional, this is a "conscious, knowing, and therefore deliberate

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[83] Ibid.

[84] John Harris, "Stem Cells, Sex, and Procreation," *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 12, no. 4 (2003): 353–371. As the final claim is not germane to my paper, I focus instead on the implications of Harris' argument for natural reproduction.

sacrifice."[85] Harris rejects any attempt to explain the problem away by appealing to the doctrine of double effect. As he puts it, "once you know that an activity causes harm and you persist in that activity, you are responsible for the harm caused, irrespective of your intentions or hopes about whether harm will occur."[86] The "consequent miscarriages are"—note the similarity to Kass' formulation above—"a price it is morally justifiable to exact to achieve that end."[87] The fact that we find such 'killing' in nature "acceptable" means that if our circumstances are similar, we can act for similar reasons.[88] For anyone who accepts this, the deliberate destruction of embryos for comparatively worthwhile ends—like life-saving research—must be morally justifiable. Anyone who rejects those practices because they lead to embryo death should not procreate naturally.[89]

There are a variety of paths one might take out of the puzzle besides downgrading the embryo's moral status to dissolve the problem. Empirically, one might challenge the accuracy and reliability of claims about the rate of embryo death in ordinary procreation. Harris acknowledges that a more conservative estimate would be three lost embryos per live birth. But that figure might still be high.[90] A recent review of the various studies on embryonic wasted suggested "early embryonic wastage is in the order of 50%," which is already a lower number than Harris uses. But the authors go on: one half of "early spontaneous abortion specimens contain no embryonic/fetal parts. If an embryo is present at all, it is often either severely damaged or fragmented."[91] If true, then only one out of every four embryos dies, as "wastage"

[85] Ibid., 362.
[86] Harris, "Sexual Reproduction," 77. "What matters is what the agents knowingly and voluntarily bring about." Harris, "Stem Cells," 362-363.
[87] Harris, "Stem Cells," 363.
[88] Kass explicitly repudiates this suggestion, when he contends that there "are many things that happen naturally that we ought not do deliberately." Kass, *Life,* 92.
[89] If IVF ever became more efficient than natural reproduction, those who affirm the full moral status to the embryo might have obligations to pursue it and not natural procreation.
[90] See Harris, "Stem Cells," 371 n.46.
[91] The authors cite one study in which 16% of the embryos recovered from miscarriages were normally developing, while 17% of them were malformed and 20% degenerating. Another study found that only 21% of lost fetuses were well-formed. See Benagiano, Farris, and Grudzinskas, "Fate," 736-737. Gavin Jarvis argues that the relevant studies are highly unreliable. While he suggests that the overall rate of pregnancy lost might be somewhere between 40-60%, he does not account for the possibility of incompletely formed embryonic material in this number. He raises the possibility that implantation failure in IVF may be related to the absence of a normal karyotype in IVF embryos, which would suggest that well-formed embryos tend to implant while malformed ones do not. See Gavin E. Jarvis, "Early Embryo Mortality in Natural Human Reproduction," *F1000Research* 5 (2016): 2765.

from incomplete fertilizations do not count morally on the view Harris critiques.[92]

Such a rejoinder raises difficult questions about the metaphysics of organisms and the difference between "degenerating embryos" and "incomplete fertilizations" (i.e. non-embryos). It also stays wholly within Harris' consequentialist frame, mitigating Harris' objection by arguing the ratio of embryo death is lower than assumed. Yet this strategy still leaves the question of how many dead embryos are a reasonable "price to be paid" for one birth. Framing the 'gift of life' in such terms has the advantage of concretely specifying its value relative to the risks of embryo death. Yet it also instrumentalizes the lost embryos: in Harris' description, they are a "sacrifice" for the sake of a child.

One might object to Harris' consequentialist framing by defending the doctrine of double effect. The doctrine of double effect allows an agent to intend the *good* outcomes, while accepting the *bad* outcomes as unintentional side-effects. If one intends to procreate, embryo death is not a 'price to be paid' for the sake of having a healthy child, but a regrettable if unavoidable 'side-effect.' Embryonic deaths are licit because they lay outside the scope of what the couple aims at, and because the intended end is proportionately weighty.[93] For Harris, double effect is special pleading: it provides a "defense of a particular set of justifications for killing normal human beings."[94] Yet this description applied to natural embryo loss seems implausible, given the limits on human agency within process. Unlike withdrawing life support, knowingly creating an organism with a low probability of living (but some probability, nonetheless) does not entail one kills that embryo—unless one has means to extend the embryo's life, and does not. It seems difficult to remove the moral analysis of what agents intend and accept from the scope of agency they have within a process. Even if double effect does remove culpability for embryonic deaths, though, it does not entail such deaths are inconsequential. The agent who appeals to double-effect may not be *culpable* or *blameworthy*

[92] Robert George and Christopher Tollefsen take this path, arguing that "severe chromosomal defects" in embryo wastage make it "plausible to infer that in some cases, these defects are so significant that a human embryo probably failed to form." See *Embryo* (Princeton: Witherspoon Institute, 2011), 135.
[93] Timothy Murphy appeals to double-effect to explain the problem in "Double-Effect Reasoning and the Conception of Human Embryos," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 39, no. 8 (2013): 529-532. See Katrien Devolder's "Embryo Deaths in Reproduction and Embryo Research," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 39, no. 8 (2013): 533–536.
[94] John Harris, "Pro-Life Is Anti-Life," in *Scratching the Surface of Bioethics*, ed. Matti Häyry and Tuija Takala (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 102.

for everything he causes. But his well-being or happiness may be diminished, because tragic circumstances have placed him in a situation where such a doctrine is pertinent.

However, one might also invoke the comparison to non-existence to show that the decision couples face in *creating* an embryo is distinct from the question of researching on existing embryos, as James Delaney does. Because a couple undertaking procreative intercourse does not know whether the embryo ("N") will die as a result of their action, their choice is “not between miscarriage and a healthy baby,” but rather between “bringing a person [N] into existence and not bringing that person into existence.” Either N is given existence for a very short time, or he does not get it at all. In embryonic research, though, the choice is between N’s continued existence or N’s death. The miscarried embryo is not “worse off” because it had a short existence rather than no existence at all. The embryo that dies due to research, though, is “worse off” because their ‘default’ (to use McMahan’s terminology) would have been a much longer existence. Harris’ argument requires that the miscarried embryo (hypothetically) “wish he had never been born,” as it is wrong on his view to create a very short life.[95] Yet this premise is undefended, and it seems there is little reason to think a very short life is *worse* than non-existence. Julian Savulescu argues in the same direction, though in a probabilistic key. For Savulescu, natural procreation gives “every embryo the greatest chance *it* could have of becoming a baby.”[96] Whether a risk is reasonable, on his view, is based on the relative values of success or failure. On this basis, Savulescu argues a “20% chance of a good life is better than nonexistence.”[97]

However, the involuntariness of the natural embryo loss seems to play a tacit role even in the appeal to the comparison to non-existence. As noted in the previous chapter, the ‘default’—what happens without one’s intervention—has a role in understanding the nature of what’s done in an act. Delaney contends embryo research makes an individual “worse off” because the ‘default’ is their ongoing existence. In modal terms, the embryo “would have had” more (presumably happy) life—so death is worse for it. However, the comparison to nonexistence to assess the death of the embryo in ordinary procreation is only intelligible because nothing can be done to prevent it. It is only because our agency in procreating is limited that ‘natural’

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[95] James J. Delaney, “Embryo Loss in Natural Procreation and Stem Cell Research,” *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (2012): 461–476.
[96] Julian Savulescu, “Embryo Research,” *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 13, no. 1 (2004): 71.
[97] Ibid., 70.

embryonic death seems less objectionable than that within our research. If we could prevent miscarriages, the comparison to nonexistence would lose its force. If we attained fine-grain control over our reproductive systems, it seems like it would become impermissible to procreate knowing an embryo would have a high likelihood of dying in the womb. If the choice is between a short life and non-existence, it seems permissible to create a short life. But if the choice is between a short life, non-existence, and a long life—then it seems like creating a short life would be morally bad. At the least, assessing the risks of procreation depends upon prior commitments about the agency at work within it.

The various responses to the problem of embryo wastage are helpful for clarifying the putative value of the "gift of life." In the first place, we might mitigate its anti-natalist force by contending that the ratio of embryo death is not as high as the skeptic presumes, especially once we account for the possibility that some miscarriages are not embryos. Second, we might appeal to the doctrine of double-effect, which seems to entail that the deaths are not intended and therefore not a 'price to be paid' or a 'sacrifice' for the sake of a child. Were a couple that is trying to procreate able to avoid embryo deaths, they presumably would. Finally, we might invoke a comparison to non-existence, and on that basis argue it is not worse for an embryo to have a short life than not exist at all. However, I suggested that the comparison to nonexistence allows us to make the "not worse" claim only because we presume the upper limit of the organism's life is its early termination. If that threshold changes, such that the embryo *would be* able to live longer, then knowingly creating an individual with a shorter life seems bad.

2.4.1 Concluding Summary

As this chapter has revealed, moral philosophers use the 'gift' analogy in more subtle ways than their critics tend to recognize. Some of those uses shade into theological territory: Sandel acknowledges that recognizing one's own gifts as extrinsically derived is partially a "religious sensibility," even if it has "resonance [that] reaches beyond religion."[98] Moreover, philosophical defenses of givenness frequently invoke the distinction between making and doing, and criticize the reduction of our personal agency to an 'ethic of willfulness'—moves that are shared by Protestant moral theologians like Meilaender and Waters. However, this

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[98] Ibid.

discussion has also attempted to go beyond such accounts by not only specifying the grounds for thinking of life as a 'gift' but assessing how weighty such a value might be relative to the risks and harms of creating. Recapitulating this chapter's central themes and assessing the value of the 'gift analogy' for procreative ethics is the burden of this final section.

Leon Kass' influential account argued that norms need to be specified by some benefit or good beyond the mere fact of givenness—yet his argument against IVF struggled to find one. On Kass' account, the 'gift of life' can be assessed in terms of the benefits of existence the child receives. The frequency of embryo death in both IVF and ordinary procreation can be justified only when assessed on that prior; assessed in a context where the interest in procreation is fundamentally egoistic, and their moral weight makes IVF impermissible. However, Kass also suggests the 'gift' takes form in the twin context of generational continuity and bodily integrity: the 'gift of life' is discovered and transmitted when parents discover the worth of their own lives and their bodily tendencies toward reproduction. This formulation, though, makes procreation inextricable from accepting one's mortality and replaceability by future generations. Kass buttresses this account by developing a metaphysical biology, which gives 'nature' a non-neutral, if incomplete moral value. Kass is clear that IVF and ordinary procreation equally satisfy the couple's interests in transmitting the gift of life and the child's interests in receiving it. It is on the basis of 'nature' that IVF is problematic: The givenness of the "natural" process of generation, and the "sexual natures" of male and female, mean IVF is depersonalizing and dehumanizing. Such a formulation requires granting that the tendencies and dispositions toward natural reproduction have *some* relevance to moral reasoning.

The division between the means and ends of human generation Kass' argument subtly allows seems to introduce a tacit individualism into his view. If IVF depersonalizes reproduction for the parents but leaves the 'gift of life' unaltered for them and the child, it seems like the child's origin is independent of the internal life of the generating couple. Such an individualism is even sharper in the link Kass draws between procreation and mortality. On his framing, procreating requires accepting mortality for the sake of being replaced. Yet this seems to give the relationship between parents and children an antagonistic undercurrent, as it is in the children's interests for the parents to embrace their mortality. If such an account can justify procreating, it seems it can only do so at an extraordinarily high cost—namely, by accepting mortality as a necessary condition for inter-generational relationships. If nothing else, neither

this argument nor his appeal to the importance of the 'sexual natures' of male and female seem to meet his standard of identifying the norm based on the good, and not on the given.

I then considered Alexander Pruss' comparison of the involuntariness of IVF and ordinary procreation to determine whether the intuitions beneath the 'gift analogy' have warrant. Pruss puts IVF and procreation on a par with respect to the involuntariness within the process, but thinks the involuntariness *of* ordinary procreation helps explain why it is easy to think of a child as a gift, not a product. However, I argued Pruss' description of the involuntary dimensions of procreation and IVF is too general to account for the uniquely personal dimension of natural reproduction: his equivalence tacitly accepts a view that procreators are efficient causes, rather than agents. Additionally, I argued that the involuntariness *within* and *of* ordinary procreation are both required for the gift analogy to be plausible. I defended the analogy's plausibility on the basis of involuntariness, by arguing for a narrow account of what agents can intend in sexual intercourse. If such a view is plausible, it helps explain why the 'gift analogy' has intuitive resonance, even on non-theological grounds.

To identify the benefits or goods of such involuntary dimensions, though, I turned to Michael Sandel and Jürgen Habermas. Sandel critiques the 'ethic of willfulness' for reshaping the humility, responsibility, and solidarity procreative parenthood supports. Sandel contends that increasing control over reproductive processes will generate *too much* responsibility on parents, and diminish the solidarity that emerges when we view our talents as unbidden, unearned gifts. However, Sandel's account raises questions about whether it leaves too much latitude for parents in procreating: the virtues he commends may not include sufficient constraints on procreative decisions. Habermas also finds benefits within ordinary procreation that disappear if we eugenically intervene in our children's genetic lives. For Habermas, the fact that 'being born' happens outside the 'socialization process' means our agency has an unconditioned, undetermined origin. Eugenic genetic interventions, though, mean the individual is no longer the undivided author of their own lives, disrupting the social equality between parents and children by removing the backdrop of contingency and luck they have in common. Such an account preserves the asymmetries between parents and children while providing a reference point outside the relationship that secures equality between them. Yet it also seems to rule out therapeutic genetic interventions.

Both Habermas and Sandel's arguments, then, raise the possibility that the "gift of life" is simply a tacit justification for disavowing—and not simply diminishing—procreative responsibility, regardless of what effects we bring about. While I considered pessimistic construals of the world in the previous chapter, here I considered a problem more immediately intrinsic to the process of procreation, namely, the frequency of embryo death. John Harris argues that granting full moral status to the embryo generates an anti-natalism on these grounds. The first path I considered to rejecting Harris' argument without downgrading the moral status of the embryo involved mitigating the problem through questioning its empirical foundation. Such a move, though, stays within Harris' consequentialism and still leaves open the question of how many dead embryos are a reasonable 'price to pay' for a child. I then considered the doctrine of double effect, an approach that exculpates progenitors of moral responsibility while still allowing the embryonic deaths they cause to diminish their well-being. Finally, I examined how the comparison to non-existence relates to embryo death; while James Delaney's argument that it is not worse than nonexistence to have a very short life seems right, I also suggested that the involuntariness of ordinary procreation plays a foundational role in the intuitions beneath the argument.

2.4.2 Concluding Analysis: The Limits of Optimism

The idea that life is a "gift" ranges across a wide variety of questions and appeals to a number of deep intuitions. It names everything from the joyful identification with and transmission of bodily life in the face of mortality to the involuntariness *of* the procreative process and the luck *within* it. Such limits mean we do not bear the full weight of responsibility for our descendants' existence, and that there is a reference point outside our social relationships that enables us to stand as equals. Givenness thus has at least some benefits or goods for the shape of human life. The process of ordinary procreation means we are something more than efficient causes of existences like our own: we are personal agents whose descendants emerge from within our bodies through an act of mutual love.

Such a description of procreating helps sharpen why individuals might be reasonably interested in pursuing parenthood this way. The involuntariness and luck that are intrinsic to ordinary procreation means those who try to conceive must repeatedly engage in a (hopefully

loving) union with each other as the source of their child's existence. Such a feature of procreation makes a non-proprietarian identification of parents with their child intelligible: the child is 'of the parents' in a way that simply is not the case when the means and ends of generation are untethered from each other. This luck-based dimension of procreation also raises the importance of the quality of the relationship: if we knew reproduction were likely to happen on the first attempt, the internal quality of the sexual union would be less important. But as attempts without success increase, the importance of non-instrumentalizing, unitive reasons to procreate increases as well—at least if the couple is to avoid treating each other as means for the sake of a child. The parent-child relationship that animates the procreative interest thus includes the whole cluster and complex of mutual cares and concerns between males and females. Procreation is a sign of the *luxuriousness* or *lavishness* at the heart of a union; because it necessarily exceeds the intentions and abilities of individuals to bring it about, the 'gift of life' is an overflow from the relationship's inner life. The deeper and more profound the 'gift' parents have in their life together, the more reasonable their procreative efforts become.

However, pessimistic theodicy problems lurk behind attempts to specify the value or benefit of procreative parenthood. If ordinary procreation means that five embryos die for every one that lives, then the threshold for justifying procreation seems impossibly high—on almost any account. Questions arise about whether "nature" is *itself* disposed *against* life. While double-effect and the comparison to non-existence could still be employed, it would be much harder to claim that the end is proportionately worthwhile given the scope of the destruction. However, if the ratio is inverted it begins to look like "nature" is more intelligibly ordered toward procreation. A ratio in which only (say) 25% of embryos perish preserves the luck that is intrinsic to procreation; one still does not know *which* gametes will combine. But it allows us to affirm luck's place in construing life as a "gift" without facing a nearly insurmountable theodicy problem. Given the inherent uncertainties about identifying the actual rate of embryo loss, it is plausible that our willingness to accept a particular ratio is founded upon such background commitments. On Kass' account of nature, for instance, it seems reasonable to expect a lower rate of embryo death in ordinary procreation, rather than a higher one.

The optimism within this approach to nature seems to overcome the 'theodicy problem' of embryo loss by making the problem *de facto* impossible. However persuasive such a view might be, it undermines the pro-natalist argument that leans on it, insofar as the affirmation of

procreation turns out to be dependent upon one's background commitments. Criticisms that the "gift analogy" reduces to theological claims are clearly too strong. Interesting questions arise if we look for benefits within the limits on human agency without adverting to revelation. However, such criticisms are not wholly beside the point. Appealing to a broader account of "nature" that grounds the optimistic assessment (and a correspondingly lower rate of embryo deaths) requires such an expansive theory that at some point one wonders whether "nature" is not simply a placeholder for the divine. At the very least, the defense of involuntariness that renders the 'gift analogy' plausible and the optimistic interpretation of 'nature' as having a semi-moral status both appeal to a complex of intuitions and judgments that are each clearly contentious. It is hard to see how this procreative optimism could possibly escape the many vulnerabilities that beset it, each of which weakens our confidence in the presumptive licitness of procreating.

The optimism beneath the conception of life as a "gift" also appears within the comparison to non-existence that we encountered in Chapter One and that reappeared here. As we saw with James Delaney's account, the short life of a miscarried embryo is not obviously *worse for* that embryo than not existing at all. "Bare existence" could still reasonably be said to be better for that organism than not existing at all. At the very least, it is hard to say upon what grounds it is worse, unless the individual is experiencing some kind of suffering or pain. In this way, recognizing the 'default' of a child's nonexistence seems to undergird a willingness to procreate: by heightening the *contingency* of the lives that emerge from us, the comparison to nonexistence renders them *more* valuable, rather than less. Change the 'default,' though, to a much longer life and the badness of the embryo's death becomes clearer.

Finally, and perhaps more troublingly, the optimistic account of the "givens" beneath procreative agency seems to reverse the moral asymmetry identified in the previous chapter. There I raised the intuition that harms count more than goods, a position that enabled a presumptive skepticism about procreating and a corresponding presumption in favor of adoption. It was (partially) on these grounds that I suggested "procreative neutrality" is tacit anti-natalism. However, the doctrine of double effect seems to invert this asymmetry. As a general matter, the idea that one can limit one's intentions to only a beneficial end but accept and cause (proportionate) harms or evils seems to eviscerate the force of the moral asymmetry, in which those harms count more than the goods. The prioritization of goods or benefits within

moral action double effect requires is analogous to the tendency toward goods or benefits an optimistic account might see in "nature" or reproduction.

If the parent-child relationship does supply a non-reducible reason to pursue it, construing procreation along the lines of 'giving a gift' seems necessary to justify becoming a parent *in this way,* namely through natural generation. However, it is not clear how such a reason can be founded within *parenthood*, which the previous chapter suggested should be a non-derivative source of reasons. In other words, the arguments considered here seem to justify procreation from *outside* the parent-child relationship. The 'gift analogy' might explain the significance of procreation and the reasons progenitors pursue it—but only in a way that seems untethered from parenthood's inner logic. The two reasons seem independent from each other. Neither are they mutually illuminating. That may be inevitable. It is difficult to argue that 'parenthood' can function as a non-derivative source of reasons to procreate, as long as it is possible to parent without procreation and to procreate without parenting. If procreation does have a substantive role to play within our understanding of parenthood, it would have to structure the value or significance of the parent-child bond. Whether it does so in a unique way is a major question in moral philosophy, to which I turn in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Three

Parenthood and Procreative Bonds

While the parent-child relationship seems to supply non-reducible reasons to enter it, it is harder to see how it provides reasons to enter *procreative* parenthood. The previous chapter examined one path toward overcoming this limitation, namely, by arguing the involuntariness or luck-based dimensions of natural procreation provide distinctively valuable reasons to procreate. This chapter considers the closely related possibility that biological ties supply reasons to procreate rather than adopt.[1] Many people have intuitions that such bonds do matter. As noted previously, Rivka Weinberg appeals to "biological joys and the biological connection…that is often an aspect of biological procreativity" to defend procreative parenthood. But such "joys" are vague at best. And as we saw in the first chapter, one strong source of procreative skepticism is the claim that duties to adopt qualify, if not trump, interests in procreating. Tina Rulli is representative in arguing there *pro tanto* duty to adopt, which is not defeated (in most instances) by a preference for genetic children.[2] The combination of weak accounts of procreative bonds with arguments that existing individuals are in need raise the stakes for pro-natalist views, which must not only show how and why procreative bonds are valuable for parenthood, but also why they are important enough to justify procreation rather than assisting existing individuals.[3] This chapter will evaluate a variety of defenses of biological bonds, then, to determine whether they are sufficiently weighty to justify procreating rather than adopting.[4]

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[1] Accounts of parenthood fall into four broad categories: intentional or voluntary, gestational, causal, and genetic or biological accounts. In most ordinary cases, procreation includes all four descriptions. Because one question is whether the value of procreation can be properly assessed when these dimensions come apart, I use 'procreative bonds' through this chapter when not referring to one of these specific dimensions of procreative parenthood. See David Archard and David Benatar, eds., *Procreation and Parenthood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 27.

[2] Rulli, "Preferring"; Rulli, "Ethics," 305–315. See also Friedrich, "Duty" and Rieder, "Procreation."

[3] As discussed in the introduction, theologians have also been busy critiquing the emphasis on biological ties. For similar critiques from legal philosophy, see Dorothy Roberts' criticisms of the racial dimensions at work in the argument for biological bonds, in "Race and the New Reproduction," *Hastings Law Journal* 47 (1996): 935–949; and "The Genetic Tie," *University of Chicago Law Review* 62, no. 1 (1995): 209–273.

[4] If the previous chapter considered the value of procreation from the standpoint of the specific act, this chapter considers it from the standpoint of the relationship which that act (in most cases) generates.

There are two reasons to prioritize biological bonds in our understanding of parenthood that this chapter will *not* consider. First, there is an *efficiency argument*, namely, that procreative parents are the best deliverers of care to children. Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift both admit that their scheme of parental rights and duties offers "no principled objection to the redistribution of babies at birth," but object to doing so on pragmatic grounds.[5] Yet this approach seems to undermine "quintessentially personal" character of parent-child relationships, and fails to treat 'parenthood' as a non-reducible reason for action.[6] As David Wasserman suggests, dividing generation from parenthood risks reducing procreating couples to "bureaucrats" who are "governed by a kind of impersonal morality."[7] Biological bonds should matter for reasons beyond efficiency of care.

Neither will this chapter consider the claim that biological bonds satisfy an evolutionarily grounded "genetic narcissism." As David DeGrazia suggests, the "desire to pass on one's own genes…is a significant psychological force" and a "biologically rooted preference."[8] Despite his anti-natalism, David Benatar acknowledges that the impulse to procreate is a "biological desire."[9] Such views suffer from the same difficulties that plague Leon Kass' ascription of moral import to 'nature.'[10] But they also don't explain as much about procreation as they claim. As Elizabeth Brake observes, a "procreator may…wish to reproduce her ancestors' or partner's genes, or those of a friend who donates gametes," rather than their own.[11]

First, then, this chapter considers three approaches that attempt to generate procreative interests from more basic commitments to "parenthood." Such accounts will be useful for specifying the difficulties pro-natalist appeals to biological bonds face. I then consider David Velleman's appeal to "self-knowledge" to justify the importance of biological relatedness, before turning to Melissa Moschella and Niko Kolodny's respective defenses of biological

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[5] See Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, *Family Values* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). If baby redistribution sounds absurd, Anca Gheaus argues that in some conditions of social injustice such redistribution may be warranted. See Anca Gheaus, "The Right to Parent One's Biological Baby," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20, no. 4 (2012): 432–455.
[6] David T. Wasserman, "Harms to Future People and Procreative Intentions," in *Harming Future Persons*, ed. Melinda A. Roberts and David T. Wasserman, vol. 35 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 142.
[7] Ibid.
[8] DeGrazia, *Creation Ethics*, 172.
[9] Benatar, *Better*, 98.
[10] Archard and Benatar *begin* by dismissing both the idea that the 'natural/unnatural' distinction. See *Procreation*, 4 ff.
[11] Elizabeth Brake, "Creation Theory," in *Permissible Progeny?,* ed. Sarah Hannan, Samantha Brennan, and Richard Vernon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 139.

bonds as a basis for parental partiality. I conclude by briefly summarizing the discussion and assessing whether the appeal to biological bonds is sufficiently weighty to overcome the skeptical challenge from adoption.

3.1 Hursthouse, Page, and Prusak on Parenthood and Procreation

I begin my exploration of the distinctive value (if any) of procreative bonds by considering Rosalind Hursthouse, Bernard Prusak, and Edgar Page's respective defenses. Such accounts highlight the difficulties biologically-grounded accounts of parenthood face in specifying the reasons why they should be prioritized. For Hursthouse, the interest in procreation is grounded not in a commitment to the abstraction of the "sanctity of life," but in the interest in *children.* Because we "have the attitude toward children that we have," she suggests, persons are worth creating.[12] Yet while she helpfully contends the parent-child relationship is a non-reducible source of reasons, she offers little in the way of defending the priority of procreation. Hursthouse acknowledges that "adoptive parents can make a child their own, just as genetic parents can abandon a child or alienate it." But she suggests that it "is, and would be, odd, to want to *have a child* (i.e. be a parent) as an end itself…without at all wanting *to have one's own child* (in the biological sense)."[13] Because Hursthouse's arguments for parenthood's creative dimension and the intrinsic value of gestation are unrelated to this one, her defense of prioritizing biological bonds is limited to asserting that preferring adoptive parenthood would be "odd."

Edgar Page locates the emergence of procreative interests within the intrinsic value of parenthood, which he construes as a form of creation rather than an efficient means of delivering 'well-being' or affection.[14] Parents are marked by a "general propensity to try to send their children forward in their own image, not in every detail, but in broad outline."[15] Yet procreation is not merely one way toward satisfying the parental interest among many. Instead,

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[12] Rosalind Hursthouse, *Beginning Lives* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1987), 310.
[13] Ibid. Hursthouse also defends the intrinsic value of childbearing. However, as these aspects of her view seem to undermine the parity between males and females with respect to the interest in biological bonds, I set them aside.
[14] Edgar Page, "Parental Rights," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (1984): 187-203. Page and Hursthouse have this in common, but it is much more developed in Page's account.
[15] Ibid., 195. Page immediately cordons this off from being a 'selfish' interest, but does not offer any reasons for why it is not.

biological bonds are "somehow vital to parenthood," so that infant redistribution schemes "would undermine the possibility of parenthood as the valued activity that it is."[16] Procreative parenthood is a *comprehensive* form of creation, which includes generating the raw "material" to be shaped and the shaping of that material.[17] The interest in having children in our image is "surely the creation of a whole person, and this takes within its grasp both the begetting and the raising of the child." Comprehensive creation thus holds together begetting and rearing, on grounds that the parents both "produce from their own bodies the material to be shaped, the organism that is to become a person" and shape the "kind of person their child becomes."[18]

Page, though, tries to cordon off his view from reductionistically biological accounts of parenthood. A physical connection, he writes, cannot "constitute a basis for parental rights over the child."[19] The value of procreative bonds hangs on the parents' unconditional "commitment to their children" and "acceptance of them, for better or worse, as the children that they produced and created."[20] Yet adoptive bonds, Page argues, have an "inherent vulnerability": adopted children can be 'returned' if the adoption fails. Adoptive parenthood is thus "modeled on natural parenthood and the commitment of adoptive parents to the child is parasitic on the special bond characteristic of natural parents." Again, this is not because of the biological bonds *per se,* but because there is "a framework of thought" which holds begetting and rearing together as parts of a single process.[21]

Page's construal of the parent-child bond has come under heavy scrutiny. Michael Austin contends that adoption and procreation are "on the same footing," as they are equally vulnerable to failure.[22] Procreated children can also be abandoned, which means the commitment of procreative parents is as conditional as adoptive parents.[23] Brighouse and Swift argue Page's understanding of comprehensive creation treats the child as "a vehicle for the realization of the

[16] Ibid.
[17] Page so emphasizes the value of creation that he suggests surrogacy relationships might satisfy parental interests more successfully than adoptive relationships, as the creative role is "there in varying degrees." See Edgar Page, "Donation, Surrogacy and Adoption," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (1985): 161–172.
[18] Page, "Parental," 199-200.
[19] Ibid., 200.
[20] Ibid 200-201. This 'unconditional' commitment is, he suggests, neither a "commitment of the will" nor an "emotional commitment," both of which are "likely to be eroded, or weakened."
[21] Ibid., 201.
[22] Michael W. Austin, *Conceptions of Parenthood* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 18.
[23] Page could evade the force of this argument by arguing the cases differ in that procreative parents fail in their obligations to the child in abandoning it, while adoptive parents do not in returning it. However, appealing to this intuition to justify the priority of procreative bonds seems question-begging.

parents' own self, and indeed somewhat narcissistic, interests."[24] Such a danger is undoubtedly acute, but also seems to apply to nearly every form of parenthood one might undertake. The interest in comprehensive creation need not be inherently opposed to the interests of the child, as their critique presumes.[25]

Unfortunately, Page's argument goes no deeper than pre-existing intuitions. His defense of parenthood claims people have a "propensity" to choose it and "characteristically" desire parenthood for its own sake.[26] He also contends that it "cannot be formally demonstrated that the biological relation is an essential or important element of parenthood." As the value of procreation is contingent upon his account of parenthood, the normative basis for his argument seems to bottom out (like Hursthouse's) in our intuitions and the pre-existing conventions of prioritizing procreative parenthood. His account has little to say to those who question the "framework of thought" in which such bonds have value. Such a problem may stem from Page's decision to bracket various aspects of procreation from parenthood's value—the efficiency of delivering well-being to a child, affections, the 'contingent' biological facts of reproduction—because they are not its core. Once such purportedly ancillary benefits to procreative parenthood are removed, it becomes significantly more challenging to articulate why biological bonds matter.

Like Page, Bernard Prusak emphasizes the importance of the unconditional love procreative bonds make possible—yet also ironically hollows out their special salience. For Prusak, the involuntariness of familial relationships is "the *setting* for our lives." Procreative bonds, specifically, form "a bed for the development of a relationship marked by unconditional love—love that attaches to a child's being, the sheer fact of his or her existence."[27] Yet while Page's account prioritizes procreative bonds, Prusak argues for parity. He does not think "that *parental* love is essential to a child's flourishing," even if children deprived of their biological parents suffer "a great misfortune."[28] Moreover, adoptive relationships can be counted on "*as*

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[24] Brighouse and Swift, *Family Values*, 103. Overall extends this critique to all genetic accounts. As she writes, is "anyone's biological composition so valuable that it must be perpetuated?" Treating children as "little replicas" unnecessarily creates more pressure on them. And it is "conceited" to think that "one's genetic inheritance is inherently good and worth preserving no matter one's identity." See Overall, *Why,* 61-63.
[25] Again, Page cordons the interest in creation off from being 'selfish.' While further work would need to be done to explain why it is not, such work seems intuitively possible.
[26] Page, "Parental," 197.
[27] Bernard G. Prusak, *Parental Obligations and Bioethics* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 16. Ibid., 1
[28] Ibid., 18.

given" and are often just as 'involuntary' as procreative bonds. The most significant fact about adoptive and biological children is true of both: "he or she is simply *[their parents']*."[29] But this parity between adoption and procreation renders biologically bonds morally trivial. How a child comes to be in a family "appears not at all important."[30] Subsequently, Prusak's defense of procreative bonds bottoms out in convention. His concern is "with the ethics of the family as we know it," and in our world, kinship structures built on biology are a "matter of course."[31] Prusak's endorsement of such bonds thus does very little for a skeptic willing to overturn such conventions.[32]

While the three views considered here attempt to demonstrate the moral significance of biological bonds, they each borrow heavily from pre-existing social structures and intuitions to do so. While Page's defense of 'comprehensive creation' is attractive, it also sets up an explicit disparity between adoptive and procreative bonds that many moral philosophers are eager to reject, on grounds that such prioritization establishes inequalities inside families. Such accounts have the difficulty of articulating reasons for a practice that we take for granted. But they also contain little that would satisfy procreative skeptics and pessimists.

3.2 David Velleman and Self-Knowledge

Unlike the accounts considered in the previous section, David Velleman's argument for the moral salience of biological bonds emphasizes their role in forming an individual's self-understanding. Gamete donation is wrong because it "purposely severs a connection of the sort that normally informs a person's sense of identity."[33] Biological bonds provide a web of connections in which we discern "family resemblances," enabling us to discover how we are

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[29] Ibid., 20.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 21. Michael Austin's causal account demonstrates similar shortcomings. As he argues, "adoptive parents and stepparents have full access to the essential goods of parenthood….biology is not an essential component of parenthood and its value for us." His affirmation of biology's value is thus reduced to a tautology: "The biological or genetic connections *may be important* to us because they constitute an *important part of* begetting or rearing a child, but the most important components of parenthood are its social, moral, and relational aspects" (emphasis mine). See Austin, *Conceptions*, 17.
[32] Ferdinand Schoeman explicitly argues that "what is important about the biological relationship between parents and children is the *conventional meaning* given to it within our culture." See Ferdinand Schoeman, "Rights of Children, Rights of Parents, and the Moral Basis of the Family," in *Philosophy, Children, and the Family*, ed. Albert C. Cafagna, Richard T. Peterson, and Craig A. Staudenbaur (Boston: Springer, 1982), 209.
[33] J. David Velleman, "Family History," *Philosophical Papers* 34, no. 3 (2005): 363.

like other family members.[34] Yet Velleman (like Page) grants his argument for biological bonds is beset by a structural vagueness: the contents of self-knowledge delivered from family resemblances "cannot be articulated." Such resemblances give us "paradigms or images but no specific definition."[35] Such hesitations, though, do not prevent Velleman from drawing the strong conclusion that those deprived of their biological bonds "must be like wandering in a world without reflective surfaces, permanently self-blind."[36]

As with the accounts considered previously, Velleman tries to avoid biological or genetic reductionism. Our biology forms the "objective reality of the creature who I am," an objective realty that must be integrated into our "egocentric perspective."[37] The task of subjective identity-formation works on "raw materials that are not infinitely plastic."[38] A genetic inheritance sets the contours of one's personal identity, even if it does not rigidly determine its content. But incorporating one's "genetic endowment" into one's personal identity makes us retrospectively concerned about the persons whose genetic material combined to create the objective (biological) reality of our life. A child benefits from their genetic parents through seeing both halves of their genetic endowment incorporated into their parents' 'personal identity.'[39] Knowing our biological lineage puts us in touch with "the objective order" through allowing us to locate ourselves "in the web of causality."[40] Through enfolding the causal antecedents of our bodies—our biological origins—into our "egocentric perspective," our causal origins thus become our 'personal origins.'

Velleman's account of how we bridge the gap between the genetic and the personal has two important consequences, one negative and the other positive. Negatively, not having the personal correlate for the genetic connections "anchoring that creature in objective reality" makes a person "existentially insecure" or rootless. As self-replication is constitutive of living things, not knowing one's place within the 'web of causality' undermines one's "sense of one's membership in the realm of life."[41] Positively, this personal dimension to genetic bonds grounds

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[34] Ibid., 365, 359. Velleman's claim sounds empirical ('most people', 'normally'), which would certainly weaken its philosophical force.
[35] Ibid., 366.
[36] Ibid., 368.
[37] Velleman, "Gift," 262.
[38] Ibid., 257.
[39] Ibid., 258-259.
[40] Ibid., 262.
[41] Ibid., 263.

the non-transferability of parental obligations. The obligations that arise from making genetic contributions to another are non-transferable because “they arise in the context of a personal relationship.”[42]

While such self-knowledge seems intrinsically valuable, Velleman’s construal of ‘life’ makes it essential for well-being. Velleman rejects the idea that life is a “gift,” and instead proposes that parents throw their biological children “into a predicament” and confront it “with a challenge in which the stakes are high, both for good and for ill.”[43] The nature of our predicament is specified by the objective conditions of our genetic endowment, which transforms the imperative to know one’s genetic relatives into a “personal need.”[44] Personal knowledge of how individuals with the same genetic stock navigated their ‘predicament’ helps the child successfully negotiate their own.[45]

Velleman’s argument has proved controversial. Feminist philosophers Charlotte Witt, Sally Haslanger, and Tina Rulli have all criticized aspects of his view.[46] Witt makes two empirical claims as counter-examples to the argument that those who do not know their biological parents are ‘rootless.’ First, she observes that many of us lack ties to extended family, yet do not lack in self-understanding. Second, she suggests some fathers might unwittingly be raising a non-biological child. Velleman cannot say it makes “no difference whether the father is the biological parent of the child or no.” But if neither party knows the mistake, it is “very implausible to think that the fact that the child’s father is not biologically related to her would make a difference in the child’s psychological development.”[47]

More persuasively, Witt also argues Velleman conflates *kinship* and *similarity*, which are not mutually entailing. On her account, family is about kinship rather than resemblance, which means there is no “conceptual connection tying biological ancestry relations to resemblances as the metaphor of family resemblances might suggest.”[48] Haslanger argues in a closely related vein that what constitutes similarities are contextual, such that a particular social framework

[42] Ibid., 264.
[43] Ibid., 251.
[44] Ibid., 246.
[45] See Velleman, “Family,” 370.
[46] Charlotte Witt, “A Critique of the Bionormative Concept of the Family,” in *Family-Making*, ed. Francoise Baylis and Carolyn McLeod (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 49-64; Sally Haslanger, “Family, Ancestry and Self,” *Adoption and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2009), 12; Rulli, “Ethics.”
[47] Witt, “Bionormative,” 54.
[48] Ibid., 55.

may make similarity in certain attributes important while downplaying similarities in other attributes (like temperament). Even if the similarities Velleman cares about were important, they do not sufficiently ground the need for a *relationship* between parents and child. When adoptees search for their biological parents, "How much more than a glimpse is needed?"[49]

The strongest critique of Velleman's view, though, is that it presupposes its conclusion and then interprets the data in light of it. Haslanger argues that appeals to socially accepted norms are insufficient to defend the moral salience of genetic ties. Velleman's "bionormative" argument, she contends, is "locally self-affirming." Adopted children who grow up in contexts that value biological ties are "more likely to have identity problems and search for their biological relatives"—which means that their sense of rootlessness cannot be used to defend the existing paradigm.[50] Even if keeping biological parents and children together is practiced universally, the "'naturalness' or ubiquity of a practice" does not render it moral.[51] The bond between biological mother and child is pervasive, but only because it arose "simply from the fact that from the very earliest twilight of human society every infant was found to be in a state of needing a lactating woman, the nearest being its biological mother."[52] As Tina Rulli clarifies, Velleman's use of 'family resemblances' to justify genetic relationships begs the question.[53]

While such objections are forceful, it is worth noting that Velleman sets the justificatory threshold for his view at a lower level than his critics. Both Witt and Haslanger argue that Velleman must show biological ties are *necessary* to cultivate a personal identity. But Velleman, like Page, adopts a lower standard: he "cannot prove" that biological relatedness is "part of the minimally adequate provision for a child," but can only "make plausible the venerable and worldwide conviction to that effect."[54] This lower standard suggests the argument leans on pre-existing intuitions for its persuasive force. At the same time, raising the threshold of proof is crucial to making debunking and skeptical rejoinders seem more plausible.

Even if Velleman's account were right, though, it is not sufficiently tied to *parenthood,* and so includes too much. Velleman's argument that the objective, "causal web" is important to personal identity brackets the reasons creators have as determinative for the significance of

[49] Haslanger, "Family," 18.
[50] Ibid., 17.
[51] Ibid., 26- 27.
[52] Ibid., 28.
[53] Rulli, "Preferring," 14.
[54] Velleman, "Gift," 257.

one's origins. Such an approach, paradoxically, seems to diminish the unique inter-personal nature of the parent-child relationship. It is not clear that Velleman's argument for self-knowledge on the basis of 'family resemblances' requires *reciprocal knowledge* between parents and children. Whether a 'glimpse' is sufficient or not, a child watching their parents' lives through a monitor might be. Alternatively, consider cloning—which has sometimes been defended by appealing to the value of genetic bonds.[55] Velleman's claims about the importance of apprehending the "causal web" and the "objective conditions" of self-understanding are applicable to the clone as well. Cloning inherently divorces *causing a person to exist* from *parenthood.* Yet that division cannot be overcome by defending the importance of knowing the "objective conditions" of one's biological or genetic origins for 'personal identity'—which as much as Velleman's approach can say. Instead, the question must be how parenthood structures and is structured by the transmission of a genealogical inheritance. Without an explanation of why the non-reducible reason of "parenthood" *leads to* or *generates* new life, Velleman's approach seems to allow for forms of causing human life that have no intrinsic connection to the parent-child bond. In that way, it does not seem to overcome the gap between the 'objective' conditions of genetic causation and the 'subjective' dimensions of an interpersonal relationship.

3.3 Melissa Moschella and Irreplaceable Causality

While Melissa Moschella's recent defense of procreative bonds focuses on the special obligations they impose upon procreators, it is also useful for identifying the reasons prospective parents might have for embracing such obligations themselves. Following Alasdair MacIntyre, Moschella suggests obligations are specified by personal relationships where there is some relation of dependency or care, regardless of whether it is intentionally or voluntarily assumed. The strength of such obligations varies based on the "closeness of the relationship (from the perspective of the person in need) and the importance of the need in question."[56] Moschella then adds a non-fungibility constraint: in personal relationships the participants "relate as unique and irreplaceable individuals."[57] Such relationships generate *personal*

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[55] See Neil Levy and Mianna Lotz, "Reproductive Cloning and a (Kind Of) Genetic Fallacy," *Bioethics* 19, no. 3 (2005): 232–250.
[56] Melissa Moschella, *To Whom Do Children Belong?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 34.
[57] Ibid., 33.

dependencies, which can be met only by that particular agent. It is these personal dependencies that ground non-transferable obligations.

This forms the basis for Moschella's argument that biological relationships are personal relationships, even if the genetic contributors and child never meet. Biological ties constitute relationships because they are a "union or interconnection of persons at one more dimensions of their being." Moschella contends that the relationship is one of "biological causality and strong genetic similarity" that will "extend to the psychological" and "intellectual and volitional levels," unless it is truncated prematurely.[58] Such a relationship is also irreplaceable. Because the "parents' combined gametes are the biological cause of their child's existence and identity as a human organism," the child "is who he is because of who his parents are."[59] The child's identity depends upon *just those* genetic contributors, which means the "biological (i.e. genetic) parents are, and always will be, unique and irreplaceable to their children," regardless of whether they have an interpersonal relationship.[60]

As I read Moschella, then, genetic bonds have four aspects that ground the non-transferability of parental obligations: similarity, causality, irreplaceability, and dependency. Each aspect seems to have a distinct role in explaining biologically-grounded kinship relations. Genetic similarity "calls for a corresponding extension" of the relationship into the psychological aspects of our being, which explains the intelligibility of wanting to know one's ancestors or distant relatives.[61] Causality plays a robust role in specifying the unique nature of the parent-child relationship, which is necessary given identical twins have stronger genetic similarity with each other than their parents. But 'causality' is too broad a category to account for the distinctive nature of parent-child bonds, as it includes IVF technicians. Instead, being the *irreplaceable* cause of a genetically similar individual leads to or 'calls for' an interpersonal relationship between parent and child, and makes the general obligations created by the child's dependency non-transferable. As Moschella explains, the child's dependency "flows precisely out of their personal relationship with their biological parents," rather than grounding the parental tie.[62]

[58] Ibid., 35.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid. See also Prusak, *Parental,* 22.
[61] Moschella, *To Whom*, 37.
[62] Ibid., 38.

Moschella emphasizes the value of knowing the irreplaceable causes of one's existence. There is a unique good in "knowing oneself to be loved *by one's biological parents*, by those out of whose bodies and bodily union one came into existence."[63] The parent-child bond is the "closest of that child's relationships, and that relationship is permanent by its very nature."[64] Though Moschella doesn't specify which aspect of the relationship is "permanent," there are two possibilities: the relationship of genetic similarity, and the relationship of non-fungible causality. Given that parents satisfy both, and siblings only the former, it seems reasonable to think she is appealing predominately to the latter. As she writes elsewhere, it is "because biological parents stand in a permanent, unique and intimate relationship to their children *as the cause* of those children's existence and identity, that they are irreplaceable to their children in this way," namely, as sources of love and affection.[65]

Moschella's defense of the moral salience of biological bonds, however, qualifies their weight. Adoptive parents are "true parents," as 'parenthood' means "engendering a new human being not only biologically, but also psychologically, morally and intellectually."[66] While a relationship of irreplaceable biological causality is sufficient to *begin* parenthood, biological bonds are only the "starting point" for the more comprehensive psychological and affective bonds that we typically associate with such relationships. This concession places the bulk of the reason-giving weight and value of parenthood on its non-biological dimensions. Biological bonds thus seem to be the presupposition to an interpersonal relationship. But then it is difficult to see why we would appeal to their salience when the psychological, moral and intellectual aspects of parenthood are available without such a presupposition.[67]

While Moschella's account of the value of procreative bonds is plausible, I suspect procreative skeptics will find little in it to allay their worries. Moschella's assertion that there is an irreducible value to being loved by the irreplaceable cause of one's existence has deep intuitive force. But it is precisely that premise skeptics of the value of procreative bonds have called into question. Moschella's argument requires specifying *why* and *how* being loved by the

[63] Ibid., 41.
[64] Ibid., 37.
[65] Ibid., 41. Emphasis mine.
[66] Ibid., 45.
[67] Moschella acknowledges that her view rests on the metaphysical principle that the body is an "intrinsic and essential aspect of personal identity." But that does not clarify what is lost, morally, if such an aspect is ignored in *this* context. Moschella references Patrick Lee and Robert P. George, *Body-Self Dualism in Contemporary Ethics and Politics*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

irreplaceable cause of one's existence is uniquely valuable. The nearest Moschella comes to such an explanation is appealing to the (underspecified) "permanency" of the relationship. Yet even if that is the right source for an explanation, it also seems trivial, given that Moschella herself seems to allow the value of procreative bonds to dissolve into the broader psychological, intellectual and moral dimensions of parenthood. For those skeptical of biological bonds, then, the claim that there is a unique value in being loved by one's progenitor needs more development and defense than Moschella's assertion supplies.

3.4 Niko Kolodny and Resonance

One intriguing proposal for explaining the moral salience of the procreative bonds is Niko Kolodny's notion of 'resonance.' Resonance occurs when "one has reason to respond to a decision by which someone expresses an intention…that a person or thing fare a certain way." Such a response is a "reactive attitude" that incorporates a general concern for well-being, but also "reflects the distinctive importance of how others regard whom or what one cares about."[68] It is an interpersonal phenomenon, which explains why partiality is morally permissible. Resonance explains the unique importance other people's actions and reasons have for our egocentric concerns "when we are personally related to them: when they are specially 'ours,' in some sense."[69]

Kolodny does not justify or defend this notion of 'resonance.' Rather, he uses it to explain two distinct grounds for partiality. First, two agents might have a 'shared history of encounter,' such that their attitudes toward each other "should resonate with the proper responses to the discrete encounters of which it is composed."[70] A traveler and their companion have a history that "roots an expansive loyalty, in a way in which no string of encounters with a changing cast could."[71] Second, individuals might have 'common personal histories and situations,' which form the basis for resonance. If two individuals share substantively similar personal histories,

[68] Niko Kolodny, "Which Relationships Justify Partiality?," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 38, no. 1 (2010): 44-45.
[69] Ibid., 46.
[70] Ibid., 50.
[71] Ibid., 51.

they would have reason for partiality were they ever to discover their commonalities by meeting.

On Kolodny's argument, the "shared history of encounter" can explain partiality in *parent-child* relationships, but not the special partiality of *procreative* relationships. Parents have a reason for partiality toward their children because of their history of fulfilling the general responsibility to support their child's well-being. This relationship of partiality is both reciprocal and conditional. So, the "child has reason for filial partiality to any adult who has had a history of *responsibility* for it." The child reciprocates partiality only in response to the parent. And the history of the parent-child relationship is conditional upon the parents' fulfillment of their responsibilities. Children have no reason for partiality toward abusive parents, who do not satisfy this condition.[72]

Before extending this understanding of resonance to explain why *genetic* partiality is defensible, Kolodny constrains the interest in genetic bonds in two ways.[73] First, he reiterates that he is not defending a reductionistic account of partiality that is exclusively focused on genetic bonds. Genetic bonds follow the 'history of responsibility' form of resonance: genetic children have reasons for partiality *only if* genetic parents fulfill their obligations. And second, Kolodny argues that the genetic bond does not imply that adoptive parents have a weaker reason for partiality than genetic parents. Instead, in cases where "there is already a history of responsibility, the reasons that a genetic relationship provides are simply redundant."[74]

To properly defend the distinctiveness of genetic partiality, Kolodny describes a form of 'resonance' that goes beyond the 'shared history of encounter' and the 'common personal situation' varieties he had previously described. He argues that resonance can occur when two people share a sufficient amount of genetic material. Genetic partiality stems from "the fact that the child's creation was, and its biological life has been, later stages of a continuous biological process (i) that began as an episode in the biological life of the parent and (ii) that has been governed throughout, in part, by the parent's genetic code: or, less clinically, by the parent's principle of organization, or specific Aristotelian Form."[75] This view requires adopting two

[72] Ibid., 60.
[73] Kolodny considers whether the 'responsibility for creation' is sufficient for explaining intuitions about the significance of genetic bonds. He thinks such accounts do not, as we would still think there would be special reasons for concern in cases where the parents did nothing voluntarily to cause the child to exist.
[74] Ibid., 68.
[75] Ibid., 70.

principles about egoistic concern. First, egoistic concern extends to one's own organic and genetic material; and second, egoistic concern extends to organisms that have sufficient continuity with one's own (including one's future organism). If one has reason to be partial to one's own genetic material, then, there is reason "for a kind of partiality to my genetic children that nevertheless reflects the fact that this latter relationship is to a separate and independent person."[76] We do not live on through genetic children. But because both individuals consist of a "continuous biological process, governed by the same genetic code,…there is a natural way to see them as counterparts." As Kolodny observes, even if this defense of genetic partiality fails, it makes clear that the "significance, if any, of biological relationships lies in the significance, if any, of biology to personal identity."[77]

Kolodny's creative account flounders on the horns of a dilemma that we encountered previously. As Tina Rulli argues, either biological resonance supplies unique reasons for parents to prefer genetically related children, or it is trivial.[78] Kolodny's concession that biological partiality is "redundant" when a history of relationship exists makes it clear he prefers the latter horn. But then we are left wondering why biological resonance matters at all, and what prevents it from collapsing into the history that progenitors have with their offspring. Kolodny has almost no answer for this, as is clear from his struggle to say how the history of responsibility that grounds 'parenthood' *begins.* Kolodny does not think parenthood should *purely* contingent upon the history of parents' responses to children. Parenthood is 'response independent.' Otherwise, an individual who *never* responds partially to their genetic child would not be a parent, an implication Kolodny is keen to avoid.[79] Yet Kolodny brackets a genetic explanation for the 'response-independent' basis of parenthood, because adoptive parents are equally parents. How, then, does parenthood begin if not genetically? "If Nature or convention so conspires," Kolodny writes, "an adult may come to share a history of [collective responsibility] encounters with a specific child."[80] Such a history is what makes them a parent—which functionally reduces the origins of the relationship to pure happenstance. Notice as well that this history of 'parenting' is one of being the most proximate deliverer of what a society is

[76] Ibid., 71.
[77] Ibid., 73.
[78] Rulli, "Preferring," 23-24.
[79] Kolodny, "Which Relationships," 58.
[80] Ibid., 59.

collectively responsible to give a child for their well-being. Such a history of caretaking is insufficiently *parental,* even if it supplies grounds for being sufficiently *partial.* It functionally reduces parenthood to a history of encounters by the most proximate and efficient deliverer of care to the child. Yet reducing the unique parent-child bond to such a relationship risks, once again, bureaucratizing it.

Those skeptical of the putative value of procreative bonds will find little, then, in Kolodny's argument to sway them. While Nature or convention might currently conspire to make certain individuals parents of their biological children, those who are concerned about parity between adopted and biological children are interested in reconfiguring the latter in order to eliminate the effects of the former. As such, a defense that appeals to either is no more powerful than reasserting their truth in the face of objections.

3.5.1 Conclusion: Parenthood, Biological Bonds, and Moral Philosophy

This chapter has evaluated a variety of efforts to specify the moral salience of procreative bonds. Both Hursthouse and Page defend such bonds as a form of the non-reducible good of parenthood. Yet both of their views seem to bottom out in convention. The most Hursthouse can say is that it would be "odd" to desire parenthood *without* biological bonds, while Page contends such bonds represent a "system of thought" that connotes an "unconditional commitment" by the parents, rather than the ostensibly conditioned-commitment of adoptive ties. Bernard Prusak takes a similar approach as Page, suggesting that involuntary bonds establish the "setting" for our lives. But his interest in establishing parity between adoptive and procreative bonds also narrows his defense to convention, ironically hollowing out the very relationship he sets out to defend.

I then turned to David Velleman's defense of biologically grounded "family resemblances" for self-knowledge, and for navigating the "predicament" of life. Velleman argues the "objective conditions" of genetics and biology are important for the formation of our "subjective" personal identity, such that being cut off from one's family tree leaves one rootless and lost. Yet while Velleman's argument is limited to "plausibility," rather than proof, his critics demand more. For those who are skeptical about the significance or value of biological or genetic similarities, Velleman's argument seems question-begging. Despite trying to explain

what he considers a universal feature of the human experience, he interprets the data in light of his conclusion.

Melissa Moschella argues procreative relationships are unique because just two people are the "irreplaceable cause" of another person's existence. For Moschella, there is an indispensable value in knowing one is loved by one's creators. Yet Moschella does not specify what this value is, or why it is so important. Additionally, like many others she diminishes the putative value of such biological bonds to acknowledge that adoptive parents are "true parents." While she seems to think biological bonds are *intrinsically* valuable, she defends them on the grounds that they 'call for' other relational dimensions. Yet little seems to be lost if those other relational dimensions are had without the biological presupposition.

Finally, I turned to Niko Kolodny's creative understanding of 'resonance,' which he uses to explain why a 'history of responsibility' generates partiality between parents and children. He defends procreative bonds by arguing that there is a unique form of genetic 'resonance,' through which egoistic concern for our organic material extends to our offspring. Kolodny identifies the central problem of specifying the putative value of procreative bonds, namely, the role biology plays in our understanding of personal identity. Yet his account flounders upon the dilemma that emerged elsewhere: either we accept a disparity between adopted and biological children, or the value of biological bonds is trivial. Kolodny embraces the latter horn by suggesting that genetic resonance is 'redundant' when a history of relationship exists—which seems to have the paradoxical implication that the biological conditions of our origins have no normative significance after all.

To succeed, a defense of the moral salience of procreative bonds needs to squeeze into an extraordinarily small box. For one, it has to avoid objections from conventionality, disparity, and triviality. The difficulty of doing so might be endemic to the question. There is a deep puzzle about how one *could* argue for the intrinsic value of biological bonds, especially if one is attempting to treat 'parenthood' as a non-reducible source of reasons. Appealing to 'parenthood' to explain procreation can only be non-circular if the argument invokes values or reasons outside of parenthood itself. Once we do that, however, we risk reducing the value of procreative parenthood to general considerations like the delivery of well-being, or the value of creation, or of life. When that happens, questions arise about whether such goods are equally available within relationships not constituted around procreation, such as adoptive parenthood.

Say that they are equally available and the triviality objection emerges. Deny their equal availability and the disparity problem arises. Attempt to avoid both of these, and the argument for procreative parenthood bottoms out in convention. Once defenses of procreative bonds attempt to go beyond the brute assertion that "biology matters," the value of such bonds dissolves into other considerations, and their goods appear equally available outside them.

3.5.2 Parenthood, Procreation and Adoption: Equality or Identity

The relationship between adoptive and procreative bonds in moral philosophy is one that pits equality against any type of disparity. It is hard to see how procreative and adoptive bonds can be distinct forms of parenthood without one form having priority within a family arrangement that includes both. This problem is perhaps most clear in the criticisms of 'symbolic' understandings of parenthood and childhood. Despite having no principled objection to infant redistribution, Brighouse and Swift grant that the "child is a living symbol, as well as a product" of a sexual union, a feature which can be an "enriching experience" to parents and, presumably, the child.[81] Similarly, Tina Rulli allows that a "child is a natural product of [the couple's] love, the literal product of their coming together." Children are a "powerful symbol of their romantic relationship and commitment to one another, physically manifesting the new life they have made together."[82] Despite this lofty rhetoric, critics are quick to contend that there is no disparity between adoptive and procreative relationships in this respect. Levy and Lotz contend *any* child can be the embodiment of the love of two people: there is "no reason why an adopted child cannot be considered the physical expression of a couple's love for one another."[83] Mimicking Page's account, they propose it is "not biology that underlies our personal ties, but (at best) our beliefs about biology."[84] Similarly, Rulli argues that it is "uncharitable" to think the claim children are a symbolic union requires a physical union. The shared values of the family have nothing do with biological connectedness. The child, instead, "embodies their union because she is some body who is the beneficiary of this surfeit of

[81] Brighouse and Swift, *Family Values*, 106.
[82] Rulli, "Preferring," 19.
[83] Levy and Lotz, "Cloning," 245.
[84] Ibid. In this respect, they are similar to Page, who sought to ground the tie in the "world of thought" that accompanies genetic ties, rather than the ties themselves.

romantic love," even if her body does not "literally come from them."[85] Adopted children are thus "no less inclined" than biological ones to assume their parents' values and belief.[86] The 'symbolism' of procreation also bottoms out in convention, is trivial, or establishes a problematic disparity between adopted and biological children.

One path through this minefield would be to accept that there *is* a disparity between adoptive and procreative parenthood, as Page does, while trying to cordon that disparity off from supporting an inequality of value between them. Such an assertion is a repugnant non-starter to many ordinary individuals and moral philosophers. Tina Rulli contends suggesting procreative parents have special reasons for partiality toward their procreated children is "both unintuitive and reprehensible."[87] But affirming parity seems to undermine the possibility of any distinct interest in procreative parenthood. If adoption and procreation are on a par, 'parenthood' *cannot* generate non-reductive reasons to procreate *rather than* adopt. This means one cannot appeal to parenthood as an explanation for a reason to procreate *vis a vis* adoption—any explanation one offers would have to reduce to goods or values that are only incidentally related to the parent-child relationship. As long as what is true of procreative parenthood is true of adoptive parenthood, without loss or emendation, parenthood cannot supply reasons to procreate. So there is good reason to want an account that specifies the disparity between them, so that procreative parenthood has sufficient weight that it is reasonable to prefer to adoption—but without denigrating adoptive relationships by making them less valuable than procreative bonds.

There are two plausible ways of describing how such an account might go. First, one could argue that the equality between adoptive and procreative relationships is *post factum*. That is, adoptive and procreative bonds may not have an equivalent reason-giving weight for *entering* parenthood, but do supply equivalent reason-giving weight *within* parenthood. It is unclear, though, on what basis this distinction might be set forth without it being purely an *ad hoc* maneuver meant to escape an otherwise insoluble problem. Moreover, as we saw Wasserman argue in Chapter One, the reasons one has to *begin* a relationship affect its moral quality. It would be highly unlikely if a reason that affirmed a differential weight between procreating and adopting at the beginning of a relationship could be quarantined from

[85] Rulli, "Preferring," 20.
[86] Ibid., 21.
[87] Ibid., 24.

perpetuating that weight throughout a relationship. A more successful strategy would be to argue that *denying* the disparity between procreative and adoptive bonds has its own dangers for "mixed" families. Reflecting on her own upbringing as an adopted child, philosopher Kimberly Leighton observes that while she was treated equally, she "also felt an unspoken imperative" to "*be the same as*" her biological kin. Her desire to know her biological origins was a source of danger to the family, even while they assured her that being adopted was "not something [she] should be ashamed of."[88] The worry, as Leighton articulates it, is that the "adoptive family is reproduced as 'natural' through the denial of bodily details and traces in the family, who 'passes' as if it were not produced by law."[89] The adopted child is expected to adopt the "identity" of the family in full. The effect on Leighton was to render her "silent about [her] body," so that it could be "considered as part of the body of her family" and "reflect (constitutively) the *identity* that such inclusion engendered."[90] Leighton's argument is a criticism of modeling adoptive relationships on biological ones, as Page does. She wants *more* destabilization of the 'natural,' not less. But it is also an ironic caution against a view of "equality" that flattens or denies the differences between *being born from* and *being adopted by* one's parents. It opens up the possibility that the equality of adoptive and procreative bonds *requires* seeing them as disparate in crucial respects, differences that may form the basis of reasons why hopeful parents would reasonably opt for one or the other.

Whether this is plausible, though, may not actually matter for my purposes. While such an account does not exist (that I am aware of) in moral philosophy, it seems unlikely that it would show that the disparate benefits or goods of procreative relationships would be weighty enough to overcome the skeptical presumption that we have a *duty* to adopt. It is not enough to show that procreative bonds have *distinct* goods to overcome such debunking arguments: rather, one would have to show that those goods are considerably more valuable or important, such that they trump or block the duties to adopt. Without a thicker, more robust defense of the putative value of procreative bonds and an explanation of *how* they structure our understanding of parenthood—and vice versa—the pro-natalist outlook will flounder. Nor does Page and

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[88] Kimberly Leighton, "Being Adopted and Being a Philosopher," in *Adoption Matters*, ed. Sally Haslanger and Charlotte Witt (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 151. This danger seems particularly acute for *closed* adoptions.
[89] Ibid., 153.
[90] Ibid., 152.

Velleman's appeal to a lower threshold of "plausibility" help. If procreative bonds are only *presumptively* significant for our understanding of 'parenthood,' rather than necessary, they are more vulnerable to being outweighed by the duty to adopt. If adoption and procreation are on a par, the debunking argument from a procreative skeptic becomes even more forceful than it is otherwise.

3.5.3: The Presuppositions of the Argument

Defending the moral significance of procreative bonds turns on identifying the moral salience of two distinct presuppositions of an agent's "personal identity." The first is one's bodily life and genetic endowment. As Kolodny observed, the "significance, if any, of biological relationships lies in the significance, if any, of biology to personal identity."[91] It is thus not surprising that philosophers appeal to studies regarding the "genetic heritability" of various behavioral traits to buttress their arguments, as Velleman and Moschella do.[92] As Moschella summarizes, scientists "agree that most, if not all, personality traits have some relationship, albeit indirect, complex, and non-deterministic to our genetic endowment."[93] Unsurprisingly, skeptics point to contrary research from the social sciences and psychology to argue that adoption makes little difference to a person's identity or well-being. Levy and Lotz point to the extreme variation in 'perfect pitch' among children between cultures with tonally based languages and those without to argue that "our most important characteristics are acquired, not innate."[94] Haslanger draws on empirical psychological research that demonstrates there is no difference in how black American children develop their personal identity between transracial and inracial adoptions.[95]

Weighing up the relevant evidence and the methodological questions of behavioral genetics would take us beyond the scope of this dissertation. The modesty of Rulli's judgment, though, seems wise: genetics, she allows, should "increase the probability of parent-child

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[91] Kolodny, "Which Relationships," 73.
[92] Velleman, "Gift," 258; Moschella, *To Whom*, 40.
[93] Moschella, *To Whom*, 40 n37.
[94] Levy and Lotz, "Cloning," 238. Levy and Lotz also cite research that is skeptical of behavioral genetics, namely, Jonathan Michael Kaplan, *The Limits and Lies of Human Genetic Research* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Richard C. Lewontin, Steven Rose, and Leon J. Kamin, *Not in Our Genes* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017).
[95] Haslanger, "Family," 9.

psychological similarity over adoption, on the whole." But claims on behalf of genetic heritability should be more tempered than they often are.[96] Few people doubt that one's genetic inheritance makes *some* kind of difference to their lives—at a minimum, genetically inherited diseases or disabilities can profoundly shape one's opportunities. Yet this claim only gets us so far. While such limitations matter for general considerations of well-being, they do not obviously matter for assessing the moral significance of partial, parent-child relationships. Responding to debunking arguments by inflating the importance of genetics for personal identity risks tacitly becoming a genetic determinism. But if we adopt a more modest account of genetics' role in personal identity, then their position inside of family-relationships will have a correspondingly modest moral salience, rendering them less likely to help overcome skeptical postures toward procreation and the bonds it forges. This question of how we understand and incorporate the biological "setting" for our lives raises questions very similar to those we have encountered before. David Heyd's defended neutrality about human beings as such, while Leon Kass argued that 'natures' are dispositional in their structure, even if not fully moral. Here we see a similar dynamic at work: whether biology is neutral for the formation of our "personal identity," or whether its dispositions are morally relevant seems to mark a dividing line between those who wish to defend procreative bonds and those who wish to destabilize them.

The second presupposition is like unto the first. Whether and how we identify the value of procreative bonds seems to turn in part on the significance we ascribe to what happens *prior to* our existence. Symbolic accounts attempt to explain the value of parenthood through how the child represents or distills the internal life of the generating couple. Yet if that description is true (for adoption or procreation), the child has a significant retrospective stake in the content of that relationship. Even if his account is not fully successful, Velleman's approach suggests that the interest children have in their origins is a *personal* one, which is concerned with the *agents* and *reasons* that stand behind their own existence. In Kolodny's terms, our egoistic concern seems to reach *behind* and *before* our existence—but it takes an interest not in genetic or biological causes *per se,* but in individuals whose rational actions led to our existence. I suspect articulating the unique value of procreative bonds is impossible without adopting this presupposition, and subsequently explaining how the retrospective concern structures adoptive bonds and procreative bonds differently.

[96] Rulli, "Preferring," 15.

The difficulty of specifying why we have this retrospective concern is closely associated to a question that emerged in the discussion of Moschella's account, namely, why we care in the first place about being *loved by* the cause of our origins. It is possible that the difficulty of answering it persuasively has to do with our tendency to think of reasons as *responding* to existence, rather than as *preceding* existence. Such a difficulty stands beneath intuitions that we have duties to adopt which trump any interests in procreation: our duties and the reasons beneath them are responsive to *existing* individuals in a way that the *non-existing, possible* people who 'await' our procreative action cannot claim. But this framework is challenged by the claim that we have an egoistic concern for what happens *prior* to our own existence: if it is possible to care about what happened when we were not, it is equally possible to care about others who are not (yet). The retrospective concern is not simply that we would be *loved by* the cause of our existence, as Moschella put it. Rather, it is that love would *be the cause* of our existence: that the agents who brought us into being would have reasons that are not *responsive* to our existence, but *precede* and *explain* it.

Acknowledging the import of these two presuppositions challenges, I think, the individualistic character of much of procreative reasoning—and comports exceedingly well with those constructivist accounts of procreative reasons evaluated in Chapter One. If our genetic-biological composition and the relational conditions and reasons for our existence are both morally salient, then the concept of the 'person' who is benefited or harmed through such procreative actions must be broad enough to include such dimensions. The value of procreative bonds turns not only on the relationship between biology and personal identity: the value of such bonds is also contingent upon the *origins* of one's body. The moral analysis of procreative bonds cannot be so broad that it justifies cloning, not without obscuring the essential role the historical, personal presuppositions of a person's life and origins play in their existence.

3.5.4: The Limits of Moral Philosophy and the Reasons to Procreate

The attempt to determine whether the value of biological relatedness supplies a sufficiently weighty reason to procreate rather than adopt has run into a variety of roadblocks. The objections from convention, disparity, and triviality have real force. For a defense to succeed, it faces the daunting task of explaining why the genetic presupposition of our lives is

valuable to developing our personal identity, and why we have a stake or interest in the origins and causes of our existence. While the intuitions that these matter are strong, they are also the very intuitions procreative skeptics have called into question. Such debunking arguments are uneven in their quality. But their contention that the defenses of procreative parenthood are question-begging is difficult to refute.

Such difficulties are akin to those that optimistic accounts faced in the previous chapters. The discussion of The Asymmetry, for instance, was driven by competing intuitions about whether there are reasons to create happy people. The previous chapter saw an optimistic account of the "luck" and involuntariness of the procreative process come head-to-head with the question of embryo wastage. In this chapter, the optimistic affirmation of procreative bonds floundered against the disparity such a view creates within mixed families, when it managed to escape being reduced to convention or triviality. Even if the accounts considered here successfully identified a distinct value of procreative bonds, it is implausible they showed such a value to be weighty enough that would could reasonably pursue procreative parenthood in the face of putative duties to adopt.

As with the previous chapters, then, procreative optimism seems attractive—but also seems too unstable to be conclusive or definitive. This is particularly the case given that the challenges of procreative skeptics raise the justificatory threshold. The gap between rendering the value of procreative bonds *plausible* and offering *proof* is considerable. A lowered threshold for justification is sometimes reasonable to accept, given the nature of moral reasons and the vagueness of our intuitions.[97] Yet debunking arguments are *designed* to challenge givens, and invariably and necessarily raise the threshold for persuasion. They thus present a challenge that requires something more than the reassertion of conventional norms or intuitions, a challenge that the moral philosophers I examined in the first part of this dissertation have not successfully met.

[97] Aristotle proposes something like a lowered threshold, I take it, for moral philosophy in the opening of the *Nicomachean Ethics.* See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), I.3.1.

Chapter Four

Neither Optimism nor Pessimism: Karl Barth Among the Moral Philosophers

As the previous chapters have shown, moral philosophers struggle to find persuasive normative reasons to procreate. The first chapter considered 'The Asymmetry,' and argued that the absence of a moral reason to procreate leads to a *de facto* anti-natalism. However promising, constructivist defenses of 'parenthood' struggle to overcome a presumptive anti-natalism. Chapter Two suggested the 'gift-analogy' is philosophically defensible, but also highly dependent upon background commitments regarding nature. Chapter Three set adoption next to procreative bonds, and argued that affirming their equality risks making the interest in procreation merely conventional or trivial. Philosophical defenses of procreating thus leave the practice in a precarious theoretical position. Those who offer the most persuasive pro-natalisms assume a presumptive skepticism on the basis of life's risks, and then attempt to mitigate its force—and struggle to do so. Similarly, those defend the value of procreative bonds lower the threshold of justification from proof to plausibility—which is odd, given the ubiquity of the intuition that we should keep biological parents and children together. Debunking arguments and theodicy problems are difficult to escape on purely philosophical terms. There is thus something to Anscombe's judgment that it might take "prophetical revelation or a blind belief in the care of God" to explain the normative grounds for having children.[1] But the problem is not so easily solved by turning to contemporary Protestant moral theology, as the introduction notes, which has been more concerned to 'relativize' the value of procreative bonds than articulate why Christians should establish them. The effect creates a similar lacuna similar to moral philosophy: Christians go on procreating, but no one seems to understand why. Hauerwas is right to suggest that the question is a burden for 'secular' moral philosophers. But neither can we assume moral theology has the answer.

This dissertation now turns, then, to the task of exploring why *Christians* procreate. In the chapters that follow, I articulate and defend a theologically grounded pro-natalism, which I dub 'procreative fideism,' through a critical and constructive evaluation of Karl Barth's account of procreation's theological and moral significance. Barth's approach, I argue, attempts to escape

[1] Anscombe, "Why," 48.

the ‘contest of intuitions’ about life’s value by founding our confidence upon the revelation of Jesus Christ. His understanding of human limits and action makes procreating a peculiar honour for parents, who are afforded the privilege of being present for God’s creation of a human life.

Methodologically, this ‘theological turn’ is not an attempt to persuade philosophers to adopt its conclusions, or the framework that produces them. Such an (explicit) apologetic strategy would be inimical to Barth’s thought. However, there is nothing in Barth’s work that requires ignoring philosophy or refusing to allow it to speak on its own terms. It is “quite improper for theology to assume *a priori* an attitude of scepticism” toward philosophy’s ability to answer the problem of “pure becoming,” Barth writes.[2] Similarly, it seems improper to assume in advance moral philosophy’s failure to normatively justify having children. Close attention to moral philosophy by theologians need not entail either wholesale repudiation or captivity. My hope is to allow the questions and themes that emerged in previous chapters to shed light on Barth’s thought, and in so doing discover dimensions of his understanding of procreation previously overlooked by his readers. As Kenneth Oakes writes, Barth’s theology means “engagements with ‘non-theological’ sources remain open,” and that their “potential fruitfulness for theology cannot be determined beforehand.”[3]

Barth is an odd choice for an interlocutor, however, because he says so little about procreation’s theological significance.[4] Instead, his emphasis lies where his theological heirs have placed it: on relativizing any obligation to procreate. As he puts it, after the birth of Christ “the propagation of the race (‘Be fruitful, and multiply,’ Gen. 1:28) has ceased to be an unconditional command.”[5] It is a “very heathen or even Jewish type of thought to try to make it an invariable rule” that faith should always and everywhere generate the “cheerful confidence in life” required to procreate.[6] William Werpehowski wonders whether “one basis of Barth’s limited treatment” of parents and children “is a reluctance to endorse any but the most qualified ‘pro-natalism’ as over against, by his (perhaps mistaken) lights, Roman Catholic and Jewish

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[2] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, 341. (Hereafter *Church Dogmatics* will be shortened to *CD*.)
[3] Additionally, Barth’s “lasting contribution to contemporary theology is not that theologians are free to ignore the concerns and criticisms of other discourses, but that these cares can be taken up and engaged within the process of discussing Christian doctrine and practice in a way free of anxiety and pretensions to self-justification.” See Kenneth Oakes, *Karl Barth on Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 253.
[4] As Gary Deddo writes, “Barth has not said very much about the positive significance of procreation.” See Gary W. Deddo, *Karl Barth’s Theology of Relations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 226.
[5] Barth, *CD* III/4, 268.
[6] Ibid., 272.

thought."[7] Yet Barth allows that there may be "times and situations in which it will be the duty of the Christian community to awaken either a people or a section of people which has grown tired of life….to the conscientious realisation that to avoid arbitrary decay they should make use of this merciful divine permission and seriously try to maintain the race."[8] This dialectic of relativization without rejection will occupy much of what follows.

However thin Barth's explicit ethics of procreation might be, his theology seems inextricably intertwined with his account of the interrelationship of sex and procreation. The subsequent discussion thus considers how Barth's understanding of procreation structures and is structured by his doctrines of creation and eschatology, and the theological anthropology they generate. This broad context, though, means it is a mistake to remain too narrowly bound to his explicit treatment of parents and children when searching for reasons to procreate. The doctrinal underpinnings of his understanding of procreation require considering his ethics of both life and its limits. While the majority of what follows will focus on Volume III of the *Church Dogmatics*, the prominent exception is my critical reconstruction of Barth's Mariology—which I invoke to help assess how the birth of Jesus Christ can and cannot function as a prototype for ordinary procreation.[9]

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[7] William Werpehowski, "Reading Karl Barth on Children," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 404. Matthew Rose confirms Werpehowski's judgment, suggesting that "Barth's commentary [on parents and children] must be counted among the most unsatisfying of his excurses." Matthew Rose, *Ethics with Barth* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 161.

[8] Barth, *CD* III/4, 268.

[9] While Barth's ethics has a vast secondary literature, Matthew Rose notes that it "has inspired relatively little work on individual moral problems." (See Rose, *Ethics*, 12.) One notable exception for our purposes is Gary Deddo's valuable treatment of Barth's understanding of parents and children. While Barth's understanding of sex difference has received extraordinary levels of attention, Deddo's work is unique in attempting to discover a "positive theological interpretation of the meaning of procreation and parenting" in Barth's thought (Deddo, *Theology*, 347). I will affirm a number of Deddo's readings, but the analysis I offer considers aspects of Barth's thought that Deddo either ignores or gives only cursory attention to. Deddo overlooks how Barth's account of creation challenges both 'optimism' and 'pessimism,' and pays no heed to how such a context frames the 'confidence in life' that stands beneath a society's procreative practices. Second, Deddo locates Barth's special ethics of parents and children predominately against the backdrop of *CD* III/2, which is understandable given Barth's structural parallels between it and *CD* III/4 (cf. Deddo, *Theology*, 40). Yet such a move means Barth's understanding of procreation's role in III/1 gets short shrift. A sharper account of how Barth construes the duty to procreate *ante Christum natum* helps clarify why Barth thinks the general obligation has been removed after Christ. Third, Deddo says nothing about Mary's relationship to Christ, nor about her own role within a fully-formed ethic of procreation. Closer attention to Barth's understanding of Mary, though, helps build out Barth's account of the relativization of procreation in ways that not even Barth himself pursues. (See also Dustin Resch's observation of this lacuna, in *Barth's Interpretation of the Virgin Mary* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 88). Finally, and most importantly, Deddo says almost nothing about how Barth's account of humanity's constitution and limits structures procreation or its significance. Deddo suggests that because Barth's accounts of 'Freedom for Life' and 'Freedom in Limitation' "follow after the section of [his] central concern," neither they nor their corresponding sections of

This chapter considers Barth's argument that a Christian doctrine of creation helps escape the ambiguity and ambivalence of 'optimism' and 'pessimism.' In Chapter One, I argued neutrality toward procreating individuals whose lives would be worth living seems to entail a *de facto* anti-natalism. Here, I suggest Barth's account of the relationship between creation and the covenant shows respect toward both optimistic and pessimistic accounts of the world, but also transcends them and allows for an affirmation of the future that is not founded upon risk, mitigating harms, or the abstraction of 'nature.' While Barth's vocabulary and concerns by no means correspond directly to the philosophical discussions previously considered, I will conclude by evaluating how his understanding of the asymmetrical relationship between good and evil maps on to discussions of The Asymmetry.

4.1 Creation and Fideism

Barth's doctrine of creation is unapologetically and unremittingly fideistic: a thoroughly theological understanding of creation means not only basing our understanding of its content or significance on revelation, but our belief in its existence as well. As Barth notes in the opening of III/1, the doctrine of creation means there is reality distinct from God, the existence of which remains "an indemonstrable and contestable hypothesis" unless we accept the "divine self-witness."[10] We "know only in faith that the world is."[11] Barth thus heightens the contrast between asserting that 'God created' and the "mere opinion and hypothesis" that existence is real. Not surprisingly, Barth is able to take this stance because he adopts the highest possible threshold of epistemic justification for what counts as knowledge.[12] But such a threshold is warranted not for its own sake, but because of its ethical significance: we must "make up our minds to think and live and die on the basis of this hypothesis," he contends.[13]

Barth's stance that creation is an *articulus fidei* is also animated by his concern to connect its content with Scripture, and his corresponding concern to preserve it as a work of the Triune

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Barth's theological anthropology are "essential for [his] presentation" (Deddo, *Theology*, 40). This leaves out crucial resources for understanding both procreation's theological significance and the positive reasons Christians have to pursue it. My analysis, then, of Barth supplements and expands the Deddo's work, even while occasionally correcting it.

[10] *CD* III/1, 5.

[11] Ibid., 6. See as well Barth's critique of Descartes in III/1, §42.2, 350 ff., which I take up below.

[12] Ibid., 3.

[13] Ibid., 5, 8.

God. Barth's "anticipatory reference" to how Scripture structures the doctrine of creation distinguishes a Christian account of origins from naturalistic versions. First, Barth contends that Scripture demarcates 'God' as the "Father of Jesus Christ," and not as an abstract 'world-cause.' 'Father' thus governs our understanding of 'Creator'—rather than vice versa.[14] However, that God is Creator also means creation is an act that "happened once and for all."[15] This finality of creation distinguishes God's action of creating from the impersonal descriptions of 'world cause' or 'first cause,' which denote a "timeless relationship" analogous to the impersonal mechanism of cause and effect.[16] Instead, creation has its only analogy in the "eternal begetting of the Son by the Father," and not "at all in the life of the creature."[17] Such an analogy means that creation happens "under no other inward constraint than that of the freedom of [God's] love."[18] The "world itself, in respect of its existence and essence, is an absolute gift of God."[19] The principle that the Creator-creature relationship corresponds "externally" to the "inner life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost" is the basis for everything else that must be said about creation and its continuation. That God's inner life is the origin, the *terminus a quo* of creation, will "always be in the background" of everything else that happens.[20]

While Scripture informs the doctrine of creation, then, it is the person of Jesus Christ who is its contents and grounds. Jesus Christ "is the key to the secret of creation," both epistemically and ontologically. The divine self-witness in Jesus Christ supplies the "basis, norm and meaning" of the relationship between the Creator and creature.[21] Christ is the Word "by which the knowledge of creation is mediated to us because He is the Word by which God has fulfilled creation and continually maintains and rules it."[22] The Christological basis of 'God created' means that the latter is not "a postulate or hypothesis," but may be confessed with "absolute certainty."[23]

Barth's fideism is absolute, then. He establishes the Christian doctrine of creation on grounds inaccessible to philosophy, and infuses its confession with a certitude unavailable

[14] Ibid., 12. See also: "It is as we know this Father that we know the Creator, and not *vice versa,*" 390.
[15] Ibid., 13.
[16] Ibid. See also *CD* III/3, §49.1, 98.
[17] Ibid., 14.
[18] Ibid., 15.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 16.
[21] Ibid., 25.
[22] Ibid., 28.
[23] Ibid.

elsewhere. Yet this "knowledge of faith" is not an abstraction.[24] Rather, the "very definite attitude and decision" that is faith in Jesus Christ is "a life in the presence of the Creator."[25] Only through such a life is humanity "able to participate in the knowledge of the secret of creation."[26] The Christian doctrine of creation escapes the vagueness and indefinite quality of philosophy, but only through being lived by the community and individuals who confess it.

4.2 Immanent Purposes in the Covenant and Creation

The substance of Barth's doctrine of creation takes shape around two claims: 'creation is the external basis of the covenant,' and 'the covenant is the internal basis of creation.' Barth develops the former through a detailed (idiosyncratic) exegesis of the first creation account, and the latter through a close reading of the second. Barth thinks the two statements are not reducible to each other, and that the benefit or goodness of creation can only be understood when they are each allowed to stand on their own terms.[27] My interest here is in how Barth understands the ends or purposes toward which creation is ordered, a question about which there is considerable dispute.[28] Does the 'external basis' of creation have any kind of immanent or intrinsic relationship to the covenant? In other words, on what basis are we able to say that creation is 'good'?

First, Barth argues that the covenant is both ontologically and epistemically primary to creation, so that the nature and significance of the latter can be known only within the context of

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[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 32.
[26] Ibid., 33.
[27] Barth argues this, as we shall see, in §42.1,
[28] One prominent question within Barth scholarship at the moment is the relationship between Barth's 'actualism' and metaphysics or ontology. On one side are readings like those proffered by Donna Neal and Matthew Rose, which bring Barth into close alignment with Thomism. Neal argues that the covenantal determination of creation does not absorb creation into the covenant, undermining its ontological distinctness, but rather that "Barth's ontology of creation is specifically *covenantal in structure,* but is not equivalent to Christology." (Deonna Neal, *Be Who You Are* (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2010), 5). On the other side are those who think Barth's actualism challenges the classical metaphysics beneath such an account. James Cassidy argues, for instance, that Neal "fails to realize that classical metaphysics is precisely what Barth attacks" on his way to a more radically reconstructed doctrine of creation. (James Cassidy, *God's Time for Us* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 58 ff.) My reading of Barth's doctrine of creation inclines me toward Neal's position, as will become clear. On Barth's doctrine of creation, see Martin Henry, "Karl Barth on Creation," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (2004): 219–223; Syd Hielema, "Searching for 'Disconnected Wires,'": *Calvin Theological Journal* 30, no. 1 (1995): 75–93; Kathryn Tanner, "Creation and Providence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Andrew Gabriel, *Barth's Doctrine of Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

the former. While creation "precedes and prepares for" God's work of reconciliation in the covenant, the covenant is creation's "indispensable basis and presupposition"—and as such, creation 'follows' the covenant.[29] What comes second in time is first in priority, a methodological principle animated by Barth's Christocentrism: as the world is created for Christ Jesus, the covenant must govern our understanding of creation.[30] And what is Christocentric is also inescapably Trinitarian. There is an "obvious proportion" between the Father's begetting of the Son and the creation of the cosmos. Christ is thus the "inner divine analogy and justification of creation."[31] Additionally, "the whole order of the relation between God the Creator and His creatures" pre-exists in the Spirit, who is the "innermost secret of God."[32] If Christ is the justification of creation, the Holy Spirit makes it "possible and legitimate."[33]

Grounding creation within the Triune God's inner life this way solidifies its status as the sphere of God's love—a love that the covenant reveals. Indeed, creation is the 'presupposition' of the covenant: it is not a "remote and alien sphere abandoned to its own teleology," but a "work of [God's] love." As creation's existence is a gift of grace, an "immanent determination of its goal or purpose" cannot be derived or read off from its existence itself. Creation's fulfillment can only happen through God's providential care. God's love, the "inner basis of the covenant," aims beyond the creature's "mere existence" toward its "preservation and glorification…"[34] God's love brings creation to completion. Yet it is also a mark of its specifically *divine* quality that love comprehends the act of creating itself. The mutuality of human love responds to one whose existence is independent; divine love, though, does not "rest on a presupposition of this kind, but creates the presupposition."[35]

As the sphere of God's love and the external basis of God's covenantal action, then, creation is ordered toward the covenant. As Barth writes, "the covenant is the goal of creation

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[29] *CD* III/1, 46, 44. See also 232, where Barth describes creation as the "formal presupposition" of the covenant, and the covenant as the "material presupposition" of creation. While I am inclined to agree with much of Nathan Hitchcock's critical assessment of Barth's account, he overreads Barth in suggesting that the "covenant is a *sufficient* condition for creation." While creation is a "subsidiary function of the covenant," it is not an "appendage, an accessory, [or] a derivation". Nathan Hitchcock, *Karl Barth and the Resurrection of the Flesh* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 174.
[30] Ibid., 76. "If creation takes precedence historically, the covenant does so in substance." (231)
[31] Ibid., 55.
[32] Ibid., 57.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 95.
[35] Ibid., 96.

and creation the way to the covenant."[36] In this way, it is fair to speak of creation as having a teleological character: the "aim of creation is history," and specifically salvation history. But this history does not arise from within creation's own internal resources: the covenant is not the 'purpose' of creation in the sense that creation *causes* the covenant. Creation's teleology must be bracketed from indicating any kind of intrinsic capacity for the covenant. Such an approach leads to concerns that Barth allows the covenant to swallow up creation, eviscerating its significance and instrumentalizing it.[37] Barth does describe creation as the "establishment of the ground and sphere and object and instrument" of the covenant. The epistemic and ontological priority of the covenant threatens to leave its form in creation without any significance on its own.[38] Creation only makes the covenant "technically possible."[39]

Yet Barth's complementary but distinct claim that the covenant is the 'inner basis of creation' seems to indicate that creation makes the covenant 'technically possible' by being adapted to and fit for that purpose. From this standpoint, creation "is itself already a unique sign of the covenant and a true sacrament…"[40] It may not have an immanent teleological capacity for the covenant, but the internal differentiation of its order is arranged so that it is a *useful* instrument for the covenant. Creation, Barth writes, is "adapted to be a theatre of the covenant." Moreover, because of its "nature" creation is "radically incapable of serving any other purpose."[41] This symbolic quality informs Barth's reading of the first creation account. The creation of light is neither arbitrary nor empty, but indicates the covenant. Darkness is created in "total inferiority" to light, which "is the symbol of the revelation of grace."[42] This does not entail its goodness is immanent: rather, light is good based on its "correspondence to the goodness of His creative will and acts."[43] Light is thus God's "witness and sign" against darkness and chaos.[44] The goodness or perfection of light is demarcated by God's act of separating and ordering in creation, rather than its intrinsic quality. The sun and moon

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[36] Ibid., 97.
[37] Syd Hielema writes that this means "the significance of the creation is completely enveloped by its covenantal character." Hielema, "Searching," 79.
[38] *CD* III/1, 47.
[39] Ibid., 22
[40] Ibid., 232.
[41] Ibid., 99.
[42] Ibid., 119.
[43] Ibid., 122.
[44] Such an account of goodness, Barth suggests, is distinct from a "divine optimism, or an ancient Hebrew optimism." Ibid.

themselves have a "destiny as images of the divine creation of light," as they are "signs and *media* of instruction for the history of the divine covenant."[45] The good or perfection of created things might be extrinsic to them, then, but they are apt or suited for it.

Moreover, the 'signs and symbols' of creation are not simply static, inert images. They do not stand distinct from the "sacramental" aspects of God's presence within creation. Barth associates the sea in Genesis 1:9-13 with the "evil powers which oppose and resist the salvation intended for the people of Israel."[46] However, this is not a "mere image." Instead, the seas "fully participate as an image in the actuality of a higher order which is the theme of the history of Israel."[47] Creation is a moving image, which has a correspondence to the history of the covenant. The covenant of grace is "prefigured" in nature, and the "beginning of natural history…is both a precursory type and also a substratum of the history of the covenant of grace."[48] This entails, though, that creation is "one long preparation, and therefore the being and existence of the creature one long readiness, for what God will intend and do with it in the history of the covenant." Its "nature" is its "equipment for grace." The creature is thus "intrinsically determined as the exponent of [God's] glory and for the corresponding service."[49]

Barth's understanding of creation and covenant, then, ascribes to creation's internal order and differentiation a theological significance *without* founding its goodness on the capacities or powers immanent within it. Creation's goodness has a double-referential structure: it is good as it is adapted to be the theatre of God's grace, and it is good as it is brought to completion within the covenant. Creation stands as a sign, symbol, and witness to the covenant—the meanings of which are unintelligible without the covenant. The covenant is primary: it "already characterises creation itself and as such, and therefore the being and existence of the creature."[50] But as the "necessary preparation" which "genuinely points to grace," creation is also itself grace.[51]

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[45] Ibid., 166.
[46] Ibid., 147.
[47] Ibid., 149.
[48] Ibid., 144, 154.
[49] Ibid., 231.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 97.

4.3.1 Against and Beyond Optimism and Pessimism: Pessimism and the Dissociation of Creation and the Covenant

The doctrine of creation establishes the grounds upon which Barth repudiates pessimism and optimism, which Barth suggests "embody the two classical views of life which have always divided men."[52] The affirmation of creation as good is "not only permitted," but "commanded," as creation "carries with it the Yes of God to that which He creates."[53] But the covenant properly secures creation's status as "divine benefit." Both pessimism and optimism arise from the dissociation of creation and covenant, and a corresponding diminishment of Scripture's witness about creation. I take up Barth's discussion of pessimism through his criticisms of Marcion and Schopenhauer, before considering his account of optimism below.

Barth identifies a number of ways the bond between creation and covenant can be weakened. Positing a knowledge of creation "alongside or outside the Christian knowledge of the covenant," or allowing a "special knowledge of the covenant alongside or outside the Christian knowledge of creation" both weaken the affirmation of creation.[54] Misconstruing their order has a similar effect: creation and covenant are not "two intrinsically separate spheres" that proceed one after the other in a step-like fashion. Treating them as such nominalizes creation and reduces its goodness to a "mere hypothesis." Such a denuded understanding of creation is concomitant with a poor understanding of Scripture, which as a witness "lives in virtue of this inner connexion [of creation and covenant], and cannot be heard where the view of this connexion is fundamentally repudiated and disappears."[55] Barth points to the relation of the Old and New Testaments as uniquely important, such that dividing the Testaments imperils the order of creation and covenant—and vice versa.[56]

Barth's excursus argues Marcion and Schopenhauer both go awry in dissociating the creation and the covenant, albeit in different ways. On the one side, Marcion's intention is "to look wholly and exclusively to the covenant." Yet while Barth acknowledges the pervasiveness of Christ in Marcion's work, "all that glitters is not gold. Marcion's Christology is in fact

[52] *CD* III/2, 543.
[53] *CD* III/1, 331.
[54] Ibid., 333.
[55] Ibid., 333-334.
[56] Ibid.

docetic."[57] Marcion's Christ "could not speak, act, suffer, die and rise again," which means those aspects of life are now "irrelevant." Marcion's "whole message of joy and emancipation has a hollow ring against this background."[58] This docetism is connected to Marcion's repudiation of the Old Testament: "Where the humanity of Christ is denied and by implication the covenant, Israel and the Old Testament, the Creator and creation, are all necessarily placed on the left hand and cast into outer darkness."[59]

On the other side, Schopenhauer focuses his attention wholly on creation, and thus develops an account that is "inevitably as godless as Marcion's view of God is world-less." For Schopenhauer, humanity "has to thank himself alone, and is responsible only to himself, for the existence and apprehension of the world and himself."[60] Isolating creation from God, though, shrouds its goodness in darkness. On Schopenhauer's unsparing anthropocentrism, humanity is condemned: "the fault of this creator-god [humanity] with all his fictions and illusions is to have been born at all."[61] Such honesty is Schopenhauer's "greatness," as "the creation from which God is excluded can only be evil." Moreover, such pessimism "cannot be refuted once his presuppositions are granted."[62]

Barth argues, though, that *any* philosophical attempt to explain creation's status as benefit ultimately becomes the Christian doctrine of creation or reduces to Schopenhauerian pessimism. Philosophical answers to the question of the 'whence' of the universe must be "able to show as unequivocally as is the case in the Christian doctrine of creation that this pure becoming is *pure divine benefit* preceding all knowledge and being and underlying all knowledge and being."[63] In other words: philosophy must demonstrate creation's fundamental and ineradicable character as 'good.' Barth supplies no basis or grounds for such a methodological requirement, and it is not clear—besides a reassertion of the primacy of Jesus Christ—what sort of explanation he might have on offer. Yet any attempt to answer the question of creation's 'pure becoming' on a basis other than the covenant "is logically doomed to end up with Marcion or Schopenhauer"—or

[57] Ibid., 337.
[58] Ibid., 338.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 339.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., 340.
[63] Ibid., 342. Emphasis mine.

"must itself become theology," and thus cease to be true to itself.[64] There is only the Christian doctrine of creation or pessimism.

4.3.2 The Actualization of Creation and the Escape from Nihilism

Barth's substantive articulation of creation's status as 'benefit' includes both its existence and its goodness, or its 'actualization' and 'justification.' Barth expands on the former claim through a critical interaction with Descartes' natural theology, in which Barth builds an ethical dimension into the argument that our knowledge of creation's existence is contingent upon revelation. Barth recognizes the 'common-sense' position that we "assume being and not appearance or non-being," but adopts as his own Cartesian skepticism that such an assumption is "in itself is not better founded than the morbid idea that we are not, and that nothing is."[65] Yet he carries this skepticism one step further, against the common-sense stance: the idea that we live 'as if' we exist is *itself* insecure. The nihilism "implicit and often enough explicit in the human mode of life" makes the idea nothing more than a hypothesis. No attempt at self-persuasion can escape the "vicious circle of consciousness and being."[66] Instead, we must be "authorised and compelled" to say we exist, which we can only do "because it has first been said to us."[67]

The full-flowering of this moral dimension in Barth's argument emerges in Barth's extensive excursus on Descartes' *Meditations.* The threshold for proving God exists goes beyond logical necessity: a proof must have the force of "the self-demonstration of the One whose existence is to be proved." Otherwise, God necessarily remains within the realm of human ideas. Such a claim, though, shifts the proof away from Descartes' theoretical deductions toward the moral life of creatures who have heard God's self-demonstration. As Barth puts it, proof of God's existence can only be given if it is "prescribed to man that he should [make such a proof], and he is obedient to this command." The obedience *itself* is the demonstration: "Only in this way, by his obedient activity, does man show that he is aware of the divine existence and

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[64] Ibid. Correspondingly, theology is reduced to "a type of philosophical thinking…if it concerns itself with the problem of pure becoming without this character [that creation is benefit]." (343)
[65] Ibid., 345.
[66] Ibid., 346.
[67] Ibid., 348.

can prove it."[68] Anselm's proof is specifically a proof of the God "who is revealed and believed in the Christian Church," and makes it "logically *and morally* impossible" to think such a God does not exist.[69] The only escape from the vicious circle of consciousness that traps Descartes is to believe "the word of God who evinces Himself authoritatively in His revelation" and subjects "[one] to His commands and prohibition." Only through obedience does one "prove and confirm [one's] awareness of the divine character of the being whose existence is to be demonstrated."[70]

Grounding the knowledge that creation exists on God's self-disclosure simultaneously heightens our confidence in reality, and our crisis of despair and doubt. For Barth, the "wretchedness of life" is "bound up with the fact that sound common sense and the *natura docet* have no power at all firmly to plant our feet on the ground of the confidence that the created world is real."[71] Such an "inner assurance and confidence" are only attained on the basis of God's self-disclosure. This means Descartes merely trifled with the problem of nothingness and doubt. Had Descartes actually contemplated the God of the Bible he would have fallen "into despair." Recognizing *this* God makes the problem of the world's existence seem "colossal." Yet such a crisis also engenders gratitude "that this God has repudiated the nothingness of creation, that He has rescued it from annihilation and affirmed it and endowed it with reality."[72] The self-attestation of God thus makes the problem of doubt *more* serious than it is otherwise, while rescuing the Christian from its trappings.

For Barth, then, the 'reality' of creation is not a neutral, empty space into which values are imported from the outside. It is not a bare, descriptive is from which oughts are derived. Such an approach would risk making creation and covenant two isolated, independent spheres. God's love aims beyond the creature's "mere existence" toward its "preservation and glorification." But the creature's 'actualization' also means its "affirmation, election and acceptance" by God.[73] Creation is benefit precisely *because* it "provides a sphere and object" for this divine affirmation, and the creature exists "as the sphere and object of the covenant."[74] Creatureliness

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[68] Ibid., 360.
[69] Ibid., Emphasis mine.
[70] Ibid., 361.
[71] Ibid., 362.
[72] Ibid., 363.
[73] Ibid., 95, 363.
[74] Ibid., 363.

consists in having the covenant as a determination, in being “prepared for the place where [God’s] honour dwells.”[75] It is only from the standpoint of the grace given within the covenant that we are able to see and proclaim the reality of grace in creation, and hence the grace of creation’s reality. If the covenant of grace is real, the creature must have actualization as well.

4.3.3 The Justification of Creation and the Rejection of Optimism

If the actualization of the creature is one side of the ‘divine benefit’ of creation, its justification is the other—and the “decisively important” side.[76] Barth’s account of creation’s justification is set against the optimism of Leibniz and his heirs, and brings the ethical, non-neutral dimension of creation’s reality out into the open. The justification of creation means that it is “not neutral; it is not bad but good.” Such goodness is present in its origins: its completion and fulfillment “presupposes that [creation] is already perfectly justified by the mere fact of its creation.”[77] Creation is good beginning to end, as it were. However, such a judgment is not founded on creation’s intrinsic capacity or quality. Instead, the creature is good “because the judgment with which God confronts it is good…”[78]

Unsurprisingly, Barth contends that the specificity of this account of goodness on the basis of the covenant and the Triune God requires repudiating any optimistic attempt to explain or secure the goodness of creation on non-revealed grounds. Again, Barth’s critique has an ethical edge. Trying to secure creation’s goodness by positing a “kindly God” might only be the “last and supreme expression” of our scheme of valuation. As such, it cannot deliver anything besides the “comforting and expressive underlining to convictions already formed and established.”[79] As a projection of our values, optimism is inherently unstable: it can “easily turn into pessimism and even indifference”: it cannot secure an “unequivocal Yes with the certitude necessary for a life lived in faith.”[80]

Instead, founding creation’s justification in Jesus Christ establishes a third vantage point, which transcends both optimism and pessimism while also reestablishing them. The covenant

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[75] Ibid., 364.
[76] Ibid., 366.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 368.
[80] Ibid.

indicates creation has a 'shadow side,' which helps explain the allure of pessimism. Barth emphatically distinguishes between an account of creation's goodness that is immanent and one that is extrinsic, arguing that the light of God's "good-pleasure resting on the created world" is something other than the goods we grasp from below.[81] The creaturely realm's goodness and rightness spring "from its correspondence to the work of God's own Son." In "its essence and structure," creation is an "appropriate sphere and instrument of the divine activity."[82] Yet as before, Barth does not brutely instrumentalize creation here, either. Creation has a "direct and immanent goodness," which God's self-disclosure *obligates* one to recognize—even if the order of recognition is still theocentric.[83] God's disclosure of his own goodness is not dependent upon this created goodness. Creation shines with light "in reflection of this [divine] light."[84] Such an ordering secures divine freedom. But it also means the Christian doctrine of creation can take its "shadow side" more seriously than Schopenhauer, as divine goodness is revealed in the atonement. Viewing the covenant as primary in our understanding of creation's goodness allows us to do "justice to the reality of the created world even on its darker aspect," and "accept its silent or negative testimony."[85]

Creation's goodness, then, means we can recognize the reasons beneath both pessimism and optimism without being bound by their terms. Transcending such categories entails a "confirmation of these two aspects and judgments (as opposed to their neutralization by doubt)."[86] Because of the Christological center of creation, there is a "more profound and more radical" form of joy *and* misery that determine the creature. Both pessimism and optimism, then, have "their root in the will of God and in the truth of being."[87] However, this transcendent vantage point is emphatically *not* neutrality or indifference toward creation. Because both the light and darkness of creation are assumed by God, "we are unambiguously summoned to take life seriously in its twofold determination." The "indolence and neutrality" into which we might

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[81] Ibid., 369. It also liberates us from the sphere of human opinions by deciding "the conflict of thesis and hypothesis before it has begun."
[82] Ibid., 370.
[83] Ibid., 371.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 372.
[86] Ibid., 375.
[87] Ibid., 376.

retreat is "so plainly forbidden us" that it is "the most impossible of all courses." "Indifference alone—if the accursed were capable of it—would be genuine ungodliness."[88]

However, transcending optimism and pessimism does not entail that the goods and bads within creation are symmetrical. Any philosophical attempt to coordinate them, Barth contends, can only come at the "expense of the full seriousness of one or the other aspect."[89] The covenant means we must take both seriously, but also establishes an asymmetry between them: goodness is primary and fundamental. Christ "pronounced the Yes and No with differing emphases."[90] The "miracle of reconciliation" in the person and work of Jesus Christ requires us to acknowledge that there is a "transparency, meaning and even perfection of creaturely imperfection." Such a perfection is extrinsic: it is established by God's appointing the creature as "His own vesture and nature" in His Son. But in doing so Christ takes on creation's light and dark in different ways. Christ's "humiliation and death" is not willed by God in the same way as His "exaltation and resurrection." Sorrow and suffering are transient: "The cross is followed by the resurrection…and the latter is the true, definitive and eternal form of the incarnate Son of God."[91] The resurrection grounds the asymmetry between the light and the darkness, and reveals that the creature's perfection consists in "contesting and overcoming of the imperfection of the creature by God's own intervention on its behalf." The Yes of creation "conforms to this archetype [of the resurrection]."[92]

However, this theological coordination of the light and shadows of creation has, for Barth, no necessary substantive overlap with the judgments of philosophical optimism and pessimism. Christianity acknowledges the unreliability of our assessments of well-being better than pessimism can. But unlike pessimism, the Christian 'No' is "never addressed to creation as such but to the nothingness by which creation is surrounded and menaced…"[93] In the same way, Christianity "realises better than any optimism that the final Word about creation is positive and not negative." But this enables it to "take in all seriousness the penultimate negative word which is also true in this connexion, but only within its limits…" For Barth, such a coordinated

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[88] Ibid., 377-378. The doctrine of creation requires repudiating "false attitude of resignation or neutrality in the face of the question of [creation's] goodness." (370)
[89] Ibid., 378.
[90] Ibid., 383.
[91] Ibid., 384.
[92] From the standpoint of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, the creature's "justification and perfection will be infallibly perceived, and it will be seen to be the best of all possible worlds." (385)
[93] Ibid., 386.

asymmetry within the resurrection engenders a greater confidence in life. The creature is still trapped in a circle in which "we can only [move] in one direction, and which we can no longer leave"—but now we are in the circle of *God's* confidence. As Barth puts it, there remains for the creature "only a great confidence in the whole of reality," which is the "necessary and therefore sure confidence of those whom God has first drawn into His confidence..."[94]

Barth develops and expands this dialectic of confidence and circularity in his critical interaction with Leibniz. If Schopenhauer provides a negative witness, Leibniz forms a positive one: It "cannot be denied that Leibniz and all his stronger and weaker followers proclaim glad tidings, and thus display a formal affinity to the proclamation of the Gospel."[95] Such linguistic similarities, though, mask fundamental insecurities in their optimism. Leibniz pushes the shadow side of creation to the margins, and the gladness of 18th century optimism turns out to be a facade. "Incapable of weeping with them that weep," he writes, "it is also incapable at bottom of rejoicing with them that rejoice, i.e., profoundly, calmly and definitively." The school's excessive dependence on superlatives and its moralizing tone are marks of its frailty, a weakness that stems from its belief that the "goodness which justifies creation must be intrinsic to it, and as such amenable to human judgment." There remains a "question of the goodness of this good," which precludes Leibniz from being "as certain of goodness as so obviously desired."[96] What appears to be the height of confidence fundamentally lacks it.

The frail confidence that besets optimism derives from the same circularity Barth had challenged Descartes' view with. The 18th century optimists thought they could infer God's character from the "character of the world." But the reliability of this inference is precisely what is in question. Their argument assumes as "given and known that which is to be proved—the perfection of existence." There is a vicious circle of God and nature within such natural theologies, and the only point of entry into it is ourselves—which is "purely and simply an act of human self-confidence."[97] For the optimist, "existence is rational as and to the extent that he himself is rational. Once he doubts himself, the abyss yawns."[98] In contrast, Christian optimism

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[94] Ibid., 388
[95] Ibid. "In the whole history of ideas," Barth writes, "there is hardly a single verdict which verbally corresponds so closely to the Christian verdict as that of 18th century optimism." All of us "and the whole of Christendom," Barth contends, "must think and feel and speak more or less plainly and tastefully according to the insights, expression and tone of the 18th century…" Ibid., 405.
[96] Ibid., 408.
[97] Ibid., 410.
[98] Ibid.

has “nothing whatever to do with that sort of self-confidence,” as it is based “unequivocally on the judgment of the Creator God.”[99] Optimism’s echo of the gospel is confused.

Here again, though, we encounter an ethical dimension to Barth’s critique. Beneath the self-confidence of optimism lies a practical “impotence.” Optimists become mere spectators of the world, such that they “do not allow themselves to be personally affected.” Such a distant reserve is a mark of optimism’s insecurity. It is, on this basis, “symbolical and symptomatic” that the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 overturned optimism. “Real certainty,” he contends, “depends on whether the ground on which we see and think is solid or unstable.” Those who utter the Christian affirmation of creation do so, not just as “spectators but sworn witnesses to the perfection of the created world.”[100]

Barth revisits the practical dimensions of his critiques of optimism and pessimism near the end of III/2, but in an anthropological context. In the face of death we may be “unreflective and frivolous…or reflective and preoccupied,” “optimists or pessimists…"[101] However theoretically pure these attitudes might be, though, practically we invariably adopt an amalgam of both. There is “something healthy and brave about” an unreflective optimism in the face of death. Yet this cannot account for all the facts: a “broad shadow of uncertainty lies over all the time we have,” which induces a reflectiveness about life we “stifle or suppress” but cannot extinguish.[102] Neither is the pessimistic confrontation with death any more complete. “Because of its ostensible honesty and realism,” pessimism is “often compared favourably with its opposite.”[103] It has the appearances of being the view of the “mature man, of one who has plumbed life to the depths.” Yet nobody can be a “pure pessimist.” Schopenhauer was only one “on paper,” and the one who commits suicide indicates that “in spite of everything he is trying to make a better future.”[104]

Here as well Barth follows the pattern of distancing the Gospel from these pessimistic and optimistic attitudes, even while deepening them within the scope of the covenant. The linchpin of the argument is again confidence. The Christian should face the future with an unreflectiveness distinct from optimism, which is marked by the “confidence that the future is

[99] Ibid., 411.
[100] Ibid., 412.
[101] *CD* III/2, 542.
[102] Ibid., 543.
[103] Ibid., 544.
[104] Ibid.

that which God gives, and this confidence alone."[105] Such a confidence approaches the success of the future "as a gift actually given, knowing that God will be over and with our future being."[106] We are also summoned to reflectiveness akin to pessimism, as it is God's "judgment which will be pronounced over us at the end." The question of whether we have really lived our lives with God reveals how "comical and empty all optimism" is. The knowledge that death means meeting God, then, both banishes "all false fears of the future, enabling us to live unreflectively" and "evokes and inspires the necessary and serious fear of God Himself."[107]

The primacy of the covenant means creation has a Christological center and form. Its 'shadow side' is a natural analogue to the defeat of sin and evil in the atonement; yet that relation can only be discovered from within revelation. What this means for Barth's anthropology and the question of procreative norms remains to be seen. However, this approach does not justify ignoring the deliverances of moral philosophy. Barth's doctrine of creation allows no commerce between doctrinal and philosophical approaches—but this independence of theological reasoning frees philosophical sources to speak and be heard on their own terms. Barth's use of moral philosophy in §42's discussion of creation's status as 'benefit' counts as apologetic in the sense that it demonstrates the necessity of fideism through immanent critiques of moral philosophers—but it does so only by presuming the necessity of fideism, and discovering within moral philosophy invalid inferences that may not appear otherwise. However, this only emerges through the encounter: there is no *a priori* determination here about what philosophy can do. And on the problem of 'pure becoming,' Barth is clear there cannot be one. Neither is theology's internal witness or content determined by these philosophical discussions or vocabulary: rather, the transcendent goodness which incorporates both light and darkness is clarified by the contrastive comparison with optimism and pessimism. Barth's Christocentric approach to creation, then, makes time for dissenting opinions, but in a way that clarifies and deepens his dogmatic account through highlighting the antitheses and contradictions between it and philosophical alternatives.

However, Barth's litmus test is fundamentally ethical: what ultimately matters is whether a person can live and die upon their optimism, pessimism, or Christianity. Schopenhauer's anthropocentrism, Descartes' solipsism, and Leibniz's assertion of self-confidence each fail to

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[105] Ibid., 548.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.

offer the comfort and security required for life. Even Barth's account of the 'reality' of creation shades into an evaluative dimension. Seeing how creation is an expression of God's *Yes* can only be done when creation and covenant, Old and New Testaments are held together in a distinct but inseparable connection. When what God has joined together comes apart, either the optimism of natural theology arises or the pessimistic shrieks of Schopenhauer (or Benatar) take hold—and the instability of the former means the latter is inevitable. Neither outlook, though, can adequately secure the confidence we need to enter the future gladly and actively, not as spectators of the evils around us but as witnesses to God's *Yes* to His world.

4.4 Barth's Doctrine of Creation Among the Analytic Moral Philosophers

Introducing the premise that 'the Triune God created' draws us into a distinct moral universe, which has its own method and logic—even if it is not hermetically sealed from philosophy. The answers such an outlook provides to the questions moral philosophy poses may only come indirectly. Moreover, such questions may not be theology's primary concern—yet that need not entail theology remain silent when moral philosophy asks them. The intellectual commerce at work might also move in the other direction, after all: the questions and commitments that arise within theological ethics might inform moral philosophy's own. Barth's doctrine of creation forms the broad backdrop against which his procreative ethics takes shape. But it also clarifies certain commitments within moral philosophy's discussion of procreative ethics. My purpose here, then, is *not* to develop a fully articulated 'Barthian response' to every aspect within moral philosophy, but to tease out the commonalities and differences in ways that delineate how Barth's account of procreation might inform a general procreative ethic.

First, Barth's doctrine of creation clearly preserves an asymmetrical ordering of goods and bads, within which the goods are fundamental and recalcitrant while the bads are transient. The Resurrection means the 'shadow side' of creation is only the penultimate, not the ultimate. The 'third vantage point' of Christianity asymmetrically coordinates harms and benefits: The 'Yes' of Christian optimism is primary and its 'No' is secondary and derivative. This primacy, though, might indicate that philosophical *optimism*—not pessimism—is especially dangerous to the Christian witness, as it is more liable to be confused with it. Barth indicates that optimism has a commonality with Christianity that Schopenhauer's 'honest' pessimism cannot match. Leibniz

"must be taken seriously in dogmatics," Barth suggests, "because he too…in his own way did in fact sing, the unqualified praise of God the Creator in His relationship to the creature."[108] Schopenhauer receives no such commendation—his witness to the truth of Christianity is negative. As an inversion of the asymmetry of goods and bads, pessimism is also further removed from both the practical optimism that manifests in human life and the deep optimism the Resurrection secures. In that way, pessimism seems less dangerous—and Protestant moral theologians are right to focus their deconstructive work on procreative optimisms and pro-natalisms.[109]

The asymmetrical durability of goods the Resurrection secures also has a creaturely dimension, though: As noted above, the *Yes* of creation "conforms to this archetype [of the resurrection]." Though Barth knows nothing of the 'Pollyanna Principle,' he doubtlessly would recognize the phenomenon—and perhaps wonder whether it bears secret, if ambivalent, witness to the asymmetry of light and darkness the Resurrection secures. God uses the convulsions of creation as witnesses, but even so the "witness of existence itself and as such is not unequivocal."[110] Barth argues in III/2 that traumatic events like death or war fail to awake humanity to the transcendent: "The Lord was not in the storm, the earthquake or the fire," he writes. "He really was not."[111] The durability of our practical outlook, then, is in some ways more secure or well-founded than our attempts to theoretically justify it. Pessimism is wrong ultimately because it is practically self-defeating, as Barth contends suicide is. The recalcitrance of our tendency to go on is a phenomenon in want of an explanation, which Barth's transcendent critiques of optimism and pessimism seems to provide.

Second, Barth's account of the extrinsic perfection of creation means non-theological forms of ethics will be inherently vague or ambivalent. The 'contest of intuitions' that emerged in the first chapter is thus a structural feature of moral philosophy (indicating McMahan is right to worry that 'realism' might be the cost of consistency). Creation's completion and the vindication of its justification at creation is dependent upon a second work of God, an 'eschatological' interruption into the natural that brings about its fulfillment. This means,

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[108] *CD* III/1, 405.
[109] Such a point is commensurate, I think, with Barth's claim that indifference is the real opponent of Christianity. This point could be strengthened if optimism in procreative practices takes the form of ethno-nationalist 'blood and soil' doctrines—as is plausible.
[110] Ibid., 374.
[111] *CD* III/2, 115.

though, there can be no inference from nature's powers or capacities to the content of its perfection—the move that natural theology depends upon. From a non-theological standpoint, the moral field is inescapably ambiguous: the Word of God rescues us out of a "clash of opinions." Barth's approach is closely related to David Heyd's contention that we need an independent, external reference point to determine whether we ought be optimists or pessimists about procreating. Only Barth thinks revelation makes such a standpoint available.

Moreover, Barth's critiques of optimism calls into question the mitigating pro-natalist approaches that also emerged in Chapter One. Barth contends that any attempt to philosophically coordinate the light and shadow sides of creation will fail to give one their due. Similarly, both Benatar and the pro-natalists who accept his skeptical terms end up overlooking or downplaying countervailing evidence about their assessments of life's harms and benefits, and the corresponding risks of procreating. Optimistic accounts similarly tend to downplay the seriousness of pessimistic concerns, as Sandel's defense of limited responsibility and optimistic rejoinders to embryo death come near doing. Like 18th century optimism, contemporary procreative optimisms are too unstable, too insecure to live or die based upon them. But Barth's 'Christian optimism' is not the mitigating variety. It does not accept the default of creation's badness, but its goodness—while also supplying grounds for unflinchingly facing the horrors that life might bring. How, in the shadow of the second world war, could a doctrine of creation do otherwise?

To put the point differently, the asymmetrical durability and order of goods and bads within creation changes the landscape against which the 'risk' of procreating is assessed. Risk assessments in this context require more than moral philosophy's back-of-the-envelope calculations about the overall harms or goods of life. Barth's account is not so far from Kass' teleological, evolutionary understanding of 'nature,' in that the presuppositions of moral judgments (nature for Kass, creation for Barth) dispose us in certain ways, without themselves being the grounds or basis for moral judgments. For Barth, creation is really adapted, intrinsically, to be the instrument of God and the theatre of the covenant. Though it does not determine or produce the covenant, its form is thus not dispensable or arbitrary with respect to the covenant. Such an account may mean it is reasonable to expect, for instance, a low rate of embryo loss—while still taking seriously the 'shadow side' within the immanent processes of creation, rather than downplaying or looking away from it. Yet Barth's view comes apart from

Kass' as well: prioritizing the covenant means the moral backdrop includes God's inner life and love. Such an account entails that the 'risk assessment' for procreating cannot be limited to assessments and projections about human well-being, but must also take this vertical dimension into account. The 'increasing circle of God's confidence' Barth defends is founded not only in the completed act of God's creation, but directly within the circle of God's own life.

Two other observations remain. First, Barth's understanding of creation's interdependence with the covenant raises interesting possibilities for assessing the relation between reasons to create and reasons to save. The weight of the latter posed problems for procreative optimism in the previous chapters, as duties to existing individuals plausibly trumped the reasons one might have to create more. Barth's prioritization of the covenant seems to fit with this emphasis. And yet, the covenant is not independent from creation, but sheds light on creation. As we saw above, Barth contends that the reason for creation is fundamentally grounded in God's inner life: there is a correspondence between creation and the begetting of the Son. Yet I think that entails on Barth's thought that God's reasons to create are inclusive of the covenant: hence, God's love for the creature aims beyond its 'mere existence' toward its glorification.[112] In that sense, the reasons to save disclose something important about the value and goodness of creating.

What this might mean for *pro*creative reasons is difficult to determine, for now. Whether there is a correspondence between God's work in creating and procreating is an important question, which shall occupy us in subsequent chapters. It seems unlikely, though, that a straightforward derivation from divine reasons to procreative reasons is possible. Consider Barth's choice in distinguishing human and divine love, noted above: Barth frames the mutuality of human love as responding to existing individuals, which is clearly different from the asymmetries between parents and children in procreating. His suggestion that God's love does not "rest on a presupposition of this kind, but creates the presupposition" clearly leaves a gap around the human agency involved in procreating.[113] But this could be a benefit: a

[112] I set aside questions about how whether God's election of the Son is constitutive of His being as the Triune God might affect the nature of his reasons to create. I suspect they would entail an identification of the reasons to create and save which I am not sure is warranted. I find George Hunsinger's critiques of this reading persuasive. See George Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015). For the seminal article, see Bruce McCormack, "Grace and Being," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth,* ed. John Webster (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[113] *CD* III/1, 96.

straightforward derivation from God's reasons to our own would put parents at risk of assuming a 'Messiah complex' *vis a vis* their procreated children, so that they undertake the obligations for the sake of being the child's rescuer and 'savior' (from bads, if not nonexistence).

Additionally, making procreative reasons analogous to the 'covenant' might obliterate a 'threshold' of well-being for permissible procreation. God's reconciliation of the creature in Christ means there is a "transparency, meaning and even perfection of creaturely imperfection." If applied to procreative ethics, this would entail the suffering a person would likely experience would not count against creating them, regardless of how horrendous it might be. Such a standard might work when a prospective individual's quality of life is opaque or inaccessible—but as knowledge of genetic heredity improves, appeals to uncertainty become more difficult. Moreover, if God's reasons to create include the covenant in such a way that the suffering of Christ is not a reason *against* creating but constitutive of the reason *for* it, a derivation to our reasons would mean an individual's suffering might count as a reason to create them. Such a result would doubtlessly be counterintuitive and unwelcome. Much clearly hangs on whether and how a derivation from the covenant to procreative reasons can be established.

The only way to clarify how such a derivation might proceed within Barth's thought is to assess his account of procreation's meaning and significance. Adequately addressing such a question requires disentangling a variety of themes. First, we must consider how procreation relates to the creation and the covenant, and correspondingly with the Old and New Testaments. Barth's critique of Marcion observed that his docetism corresponds with his repudiation of the Old Testament. However, there is a question within Barth's thought about whether his Christological focus leaves sufficient room for Old Testament's witness on this question. These themes occupy Chapter Five. Additionally, there are questions about how Barth's anthropology and his account of humanity's constitution underpin his approach to procreative ethics—questions that are commensurate with those raised in Chapter Three. As Kolodny observed, the moral value of procreative bonds depends on the significance of biology to personal identity. This is also true for Barth, as Chapter Six suggests. Additionally, as Barth's anthropology is Christologically determined, the significance of Christ's birth has some bearing on our own. Chapter Seven thus introduces Barth's Mariology, to determine how Barth's worries there might structure his special ethics of procreation. And finally, questions about the relationship of divine and human agency in procreating lurk everywhere in what follows, which evokes and recalls

problems that emerged in Chapter Two. One strength of Barth's doctrine of creation is that causes are thoroughly moralized from the start—there is no room for an abstract, impersonal account of cause and effect that is not first determined by reasons and (Divine) Persons. Such an approach affects how we understand procreation, as we have seen—but for Barth, it also opens up questions about how divine and human reasons and persons interact in creating life. The final chapter will explicitly undertake this question of dual-agency, and the reasons for procreating that might arise from within it. While I attempt to proceed in as orderly a manner as possible, some overlap between the various chapters is inevitable, and necessary to properly account for Barth's own manner of reasoning.

The strength of Barth's account of creation is that—if true—it engenders the highest possible level of confidence about facing the future. Barth's argument that pessimism and optimism are neither deep nor comprehensive enough to live upon is attractive. In the face of suffering and the debunking arguments that draw upon it, mitigating strategies by pro-natalists seem wanting. Yet humans keep carrying on as a species, forgetting the traumas and horrors of the past out of a resilient belief that goodness will prevail. Neither pessimism nor Pollyannish optimism are able to account for this strange set of affairs. Yet Barth's doctrine of creation, with its prioritization of the covenant and the asymmetrical acknowledgment of both creation's light and darkness, offers an escape from the interminably vague contest of intuitions, opinions, and hypotheses that otherwise besets us. Only faith in God the Creator offers us the "necessary and therefore sure confidence of those whom God has first drawn into His confidence, by the revelation of His activity, in view of which this confidence is continually renewed and its certainty continually achieved and confirmed."[114]

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[114] Ibid., 388

Chapter Five

Procreation Between the Covenants: Barth's Account of Procreation

If the previous chapter took a panoramic view of Barth's doctrine of creation, this chapter narrows the focus to procreation's theological significance (if any). This narrower frame of reference, though, requires considering a broader portion the *Church Dogmatics.* While Barth locates his special ethics of procreation in III/4, understanding his view requires seeing how Barth frames procreation in his interpretation of Genesis' two creation accounts in III/1 and in his anthropology in III/2. For Barth, the ethical question of whether Christians may or must procreate is intertwined with considerations of its theological significance. As such, considering how Barth locates procreation between God's act of creation and His fulfillment of the covenant in Jesus Christ will draw us into a host of interrelated theological issues, such as the relationship between creation and eschatology, marriage and ecclesiology, and the Old and New Testaments. Indeed, a proper examination of these dimensions will require two chapters to undertake properly. Chapter Six will undertake many of the same themes and questions, though from a distinct (though complementary) standpoint.

First, then, I evaluate Barth's construal of procreation within his examination of the two creation accounts, including how procreation intersects (or fails to) with humanity's status as *imago Dei.* I then consider Barth's development of the same theme from the standpoint of his theological anthropology—or as he puts it, 'from within.' Finally, I evaluate Barth's ethics of marriage and procreation from III/4, in order to assess the basis on which his broader understanding of procreation might supply confidence to Christians and individuals looking to procreate here and now.

5.1.1 The Place of Procreation in the Doctrine of Creation (III/1): Procreation and the Generation of Life in the First Creation Account

Barth's understanding of procreation in the first creation account can be understood properly only when located in the broader matrix of vegetative and animal life. Barth associates life with reproduction: a "creature is alive," he suggests, when "through its seed it can continue

in the existence of similar creatures, and in addition can bear fruit."[1] The emergence of vegetative life corresponds to the later command to humanity to 'be fruitful and multiply.' The earth brings forth vegetation in response to the divine command, not as the development of its intrinsic powers. In this way, vegetation is "an archetype of the capacity for obedience on the part of the creature as the Bible understands it."[2] Yet unlike the creation of light and dark, vegetation's reproductive potential entails that "what is produced by the Word of God is itself something that produces."[3] Because it bears seed "and is therefore alive," vegetation begins 'natural history,' which prefigures and is determined by the "future prototype" of the covenant of grace.[4]

The reproduction of birds and fish the 'fifth day' inaugurates has a similar pedagogical and typological role, despite disclosing different aspects of procreation's theological significance. Barth observes that the autonomous movement of animals requires a special blessing to reproduce, while vegetation "already possesses [blessing] by reason of its nature."[5] Such a divine blessing is an authorization and empowerment "with a definite promise of success for one particular action as distinct from another which is also a possibility." The blessing is needed because animal reproduction requires the "spontaneous association of two mutually adapted beings," and because it approximates the "divine activity" of creation.[6] Additionally, that creatures who live in close proximity to the chaos sea and air signify are the first to receive the blessing should "inspire confidence." Even in the "inhospitable regions," where the "sign of God's wrath" is visible, this "countersign" of blessing is present.[7]

The blessing of fecundity on birds and animals thus outlines the covenant between God and humanity—and places the grounds for confidence in reproduction in God, not in the creature's reproductive powers. Unlike vegetative life, which made natural history possible, animal life and reproduction introduce the problem of "history proper as a continuation of creation." Such a problem takes as its original form "the problem of the sequence of

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[1] *CD* III/1, 143.
[2] Ibid., 153.
[3] Ibid., "The living creature" is, "without being untrue to its nature, able to reproduce itself in the form of seed, which without being untrue to itself can again be productive."
[4] Ibid., 154.
[5] Ibid., 174.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 169.

procreation, of fatherhood and sonship."[8] The need for divine action and blessing means the fifth day thus functions as an "introductory prologue" to the covenant.[9] But this 'prologue' also reveals that God does not intend His "fashioning of creaturely nature" to be "futile or unfruitful," but will in His goodness "bear and surround and rule it in the exercise of the freedom granted to it."[10] Anticipating his doctrine of providence in III/3, Barth contends that the blessing means the animal needs "the accompaniment of the powerful Word of God," by whom it is "empowered to accomplish its own living acts."[11] Such divine accompaniment means the "history of the preservation and renewal of created life as such is to take its course," even in the face of the threats of chaos and nothingness.[12] On this basis humanity "may therefore live, not in fear but in trust and confidence."[13]

Barth's development of human procreation places it in continuity with the theological significance he affords animal and vegetative reproduction—yet is also marked by the text's suggestion that humanity is created in the 'image of God' in 1:26. The blessing of humanity to 'be fruitful and multiply is "something new," such that there is a "clear-cut distinction" between humans and animals.[14] Such a distinction is ethical: animals may function as a "spectacle of submission," but only humanity hears the Word of God "mediately, reflectively and deliberatively." We are "ordained to meet the divine reason with reason."[15] That humanity can be disobedient is the converse of the fact that we are "summoned to decision by the divine address," giving us a freedom that animals lack.

On Barth's account of the *imago Dei,* the "creaturely repetition" or "copy and imitation" of God's inner life that makes humanity the fitting counterpart to God is constituted by the structural differentiation of 'male and female.'[16] The duality of man and woman indicates that humanity is a creature, but also "distinct and free" and thus to "reflect God's image." The *'true humanum'* of male and female are the "great paradigm" of the history of divine action, a "type

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[8] Ibid., 170.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 174.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 171. Land animals are a "dumb but eloquent type" of the "theme of human history," which is the "mystery of fatherhood and sonship," but also introduce the possibility of sacrifice—and thus indicate the "indispensable offering of the promised Son of Man." Ibid., 178.
[14] Ibid., 179.
[15] Ibid., 175.
[16] Ibid., 183.

of the history of the covenant and salvation."[17] However, this *humanum* is only the presupposition for human action—which, unlike spontaneous and independent human movement, does not need any additional divine blessing.[18] Such movement takes two forms: procreation and 'lordship' over other animals. The former is "animal-like," but the latter "assumes a dangerous proximity to God's activity as Creator" and thus stands in particular need of God's "permission and promise for his activity."[19] Barth thus distinguishes between the features that demarcate humanity from the animals, and the continuation of the species through procreating we have in common with them.

This distinction, though, is fundamentally founded upon Jesus Christ's status as the *imago Dei* to whom the rest of humanity corresponds. The blessing required for human action is an "element in the history of creation," but is thereby "already an element in the history of the covenant."[20] The covenant reveals, however, that the "divine likeness" can only exist for humanity in the one who "will actually be God's image," who is "real man on his behalf," namely, "Jesus Christ and His community."[21] Strictly speaking, humanity is created "in correspondence with the image of God."[22] Barth argues that the "creation saga is careful not to say of Adam that he either was or in some way possessed the image of God." Such a position is reserved for Christ alone.[23]

Barth's argument that the *imago* in Genesis 1 proleptically refers to Christ enables him to argue that human action, in both its procreative and 'lordship' forms, takes on the character of hope. It is because humanity is created in (and not as) God's image and likeness that he is "wholly directed to set all his hope on God."[24] On Barth's understanding, the covenant ratifies and confirms the divine blessing on human action. Indeed, the security of the latter is governed by the former. Humanity's existence is "only the external basis" of the existence of Christ—it makes Christ's existence technically possible—but as such, it "may really be an existence in genuine hope on God." Through their exercise of the twin-powers of procreation and lordship, humans "continually realise in themselves the sign of this hope," and even participate in that to

[17] Ibid., 186.
[18] Ibid., 188.
[19] Ibid., 188-89.
[20] Ibid., 189.
[21] Ibid., 190.
[22] Ibid., 197.
[23] Ibid., 202.
[24] Ibid., 190.

which they point, namely “the sign of the Son of Man and of His community.”[25] The need for God’s special action in the covenant is thus a ratification and confirmation of the need for the ‘divine blessing’ over any human action in creation. As Barth puts it, the *imago Dei* is the “special feature of human existence in virtue of which man is capable of action in relation to God.”[26]

Barth’s construal of the relationship between the *imago Dei* and procreation entails both that one’s genealogy will be composed of individuals in the *imago Dei*—and, paradoxically, that humans are not capable of bringing this continuity about.[27] We shall take these in turn. Regarding the first, Barth contends that new individuals will “also be blessed with the blessing addressed to the first man in and with his creation.” In this way, everything that happens in the generational line of humanity “will essentially and properly be salvation history,” as God will not retract his pledge or promise to Adam or his posterity.[28] The genealogical tables of the Old Testament are a “sign of the patience in which God fulfills his blessing of the human race and makes possible its history.”[29]

However, the security of such generational continuity is *not* founded upon procreation *per se*. Begetting another human being is not identical to creating an individual in the *imago Dei*. The divine likeness is the “pledge and promise with which God accompanies the physical sequence of the generations and gives it meaning.” But the fulfillment of this is not founded upon the “course of any natural compulsion, and therefore not merely in and with generation.”[30] Only “the existence of the human race as such” is transmitted in procreating: procreation only establishes the physical possibility of the *imago.* Adam’s begetting of Seth is a separate act from God’s creating of Adam—which means the “the likeness of Adam to God and the likeness of Seth to Adam” are two different things.[31] As Barth emphasizes, it is “not at all the case that

[25] Ibid., 190-191. Barth here seems to generalize the ‘realisation’ of this hope, such that individuals who enact lordship and procreation act as signs of such hope “willingly and wittingly or not”. (191) Christ and the community will ‘confirm and fulfil the blessing’ given to humanity in propagation and Lordship. If this account generalizes and endures *post natum Christum,* the curious result emerges that procreation *outside* the people of God is a ‘sign of hope,’ while *not* such a sign within the covenant people, where baptism now plays that role.
[26] Ibid., 199.
[27] Nathan MacDonald, “The *Imago Dei* and Election,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 3 (2008): 303–327.
[28] *CD* III/1, 189.
[29] Ibid., 199.
[30] Ibid., 200.
[31] Ibid., 193.

God's activity now finds as it were renewal and continuation in Adam's procreation."[32] Because the covenant requires divine action, the "possibility and continuity" of human history is "not assured by the fact Adam can be reflected in Seth…"[33] Instead, the most a paternal father can do is "hope" that the Creator will "so acknowledge the new creature," that the "son he has begotten may like himself be created in and after the image of God." Children do not inherit the *imago Dei* from their progenitors: rather, their reception of it is "the realization of a hope which can be fulfilled only in a direct decision and action on the part of God Himself."[34]

Barth's depiction of life and human procreation in the first creation account thus attempts to hold together the human action of generating a posterity with the need for special, divine action in creating individuals. On the one side, procreation makes the advent of Christ "technically" or physically possible. On the other side, it is a sign of hope in God. Such descriptions are not incommensurate. And yet, it is difficult to avoid the impression that Barth divides human and divine action in procreating, and so strips procreation of its theological significance. It is striking that Barth suggests that it is humanity's lordship over other animals which places him in "dangerous proximity" to God's status as Creator—while simultaneously working to dissociate human begetting from the divine action of creating. The fact that procreation appears to be so *near* to creating a human being in God's image may animate Barth to emphatically distinguish them only to dialectically hold them together. But Barth's focus on the prophetic quality of procreation also obscures the possibility that it is just *as* a sign of hope in the advent of Christ that procreation is also a renewal and continuation of God's activity in creating Adam.

Barth's construal of procreation in the first creation account, then, undergoes what we might call a 'double dislocation.' The *imago Dei* is not a possession or intrinsic capacity of humanity, but is instead an external referent to which humanity's existence and action corresponds. Humanity is not the *imago Dei,* but created only *in* or *as* it. At the same time, the correspondence of humanity's existence with this image as male and female is the presupposition of action, the success of which requires a *further* divine work of blessing. The means of securing a genealogy of descendants in the *imago Dei* lies not in humanity but only in the God who first created us.

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[32] Ibid., 198.
[33] Ibid., 199.
[34] Ibid.

5.1.2 The Place of Procreation in the Doctrine of Creation (III/1): Procreation and the Generation of Life in the Second Creation Account

Barth's evaluation of Genesis' second creation account argues that it discloses similar themes as the first, but from a distinct (and complementary) standpoint. If the first account frames creation as 'prophetical,' the second focuses on how creation "prefigures" the covenant and is "itself already a unique sign of the covenant and a true sacrament."[35] Genesis 2:4-25 depicts the history of creation "from the inside," which narrows the exegetical interest to those aspects of creation that are as near as possible to the later biblical history. The narrative, in other words, aims at and prepares for the subsequent episode of the fall—and thus "describes creation as the sign and witness of the event which will follow," namely the covenant. The summation or goal of the narrative is the creation of woman—but this goal is also "already present and visible in the beginning itself and as such," which means that the creation of the man may also be interpreted in light of it.[36] Because our interest in what follows is narrowly on how Barth understands the second creation account's omission of the blessing upon humanity's procreative powers, it will focus on the creation of Adam and Eve and leave aside the trees.[37]

Barth's construal of the creation of the man in Genesis 2:4b-7 frames humanity as a "sign of the courage and confidence" that creation's existence will not be left barren or meaningless. On Barth's reading, humanity is introduced into creation as the "one who had to be created for the sake of the earth and to serve it."[38] While Barth had framed the threat to creation in the first account as a chaos external to its order, here Barth suggests the crisis is internal. The question of creation is whether "God should have created the earth in vain, denying it a future and hope."[39] The answer to that question is Adam—and, specifically, Adam's creation and constitution indicate about humanity's dependency upon God. God's "most direct and personal and most special" act of breathing life into humanity's nostrils means humanity is able to function as a sign.[40] Humanity's creation from the dust means that "man is destined for the

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[35] Ibid., 232.
[36] Ibid., 233.
[37] Barth's discussion of the tree of life emphasizes the extrinsic grounds of human life, leaving out life's self-renewing, intrinsically reproductive quality of life he had identified in the first account of creation. See 254 ff. and 281 ff.
[38] Ibid., 235.
[39] Ibid., 241.
[40] Ibid., 237.

earth, for its service, i.e. its cultivation."[41] But the particular details of Adam's creation also evoke the threat and hope that mark humanity's relationship to God. On the one side, humanity's origins in dust indicate the threat he stands under—it places humanity "under the law of humility and the fear of God." On the other side, God's direct action entails that in "God and in Him alone has he hope."[42] Humanity triumphs over the "aridity, barrenness and deadness of the earth" only because God is his hope.[43]

However, Barth emphasizes that the creation of the woman is necessary to fulfill and complete the man. Barth ties together the creation of the woman with the covenant in two interrelated ways. First, Barth suggests that humanity's existence "must be an anticipation or type"—the image—of the "form of God's relationship to it…in the coming covenant between them."[44] Male and female together thus function as an image of the covenant. Second, Barth contends the creation of male and female is patterned upon creation and its completion in the covenant. On Barth's understanding, the creation of the woman is "not only one secret but *the* secret, the heart of all the secrets of God the Creator." God's covenant with humanity is "prefigured in this event, in the completing of man's emergence by the coming of woman to man."[45] Barth on this basis recapitulates his stance that the covenant is not caused through creation's internal capacities, but divine action. Adam is incapable of bringing about the woman: he does not "actively participate" in the "completion of his own creation."[46] Nor does Eve's formation from Adam's rib indicate that his flesh is an intrinsically suitable instrument for God's creative-redemptive action. Instead, Adam becomes for Eve what the earth and dust was to his own creation—"the material which quite apart from its merits or suitability is used by God for His work and impressed into His service."[47] If there is a preparation for the covenant in humans, it is "the secret of God."[48]

[41] Ibid., 244.
[42] Ibid., 245.
[43] Ibid., 237.
[44] Ibid., 290.
[45] Ibid., 295.
[46] Ibid., 294.
[47] Ibid., 302.
[48] Ibid., 295. The completion of creation takes a Christological shape: the removal of Adam's rib indicates that a "grievous wound inflicted on him but also healed." The creation of Eve as his completion is an indicator to Adam of the "nearness of death but also—and much more so—of protection from death." Ibid., 299

However, the completion of creation by the covenant has no *further* referent or completion to which it might be ordered—a position that has significant implications for Barth's view of procreation. The woman's silence indicates that as the completion of man the woman "has no need of a further completion of her own."[49] As Barth had in the first account distanced procreation from any kind of continuation of or participation in God's creation, he here associates marriage with the completion of humanity. The 'therefore' that transitions from the depiction of Eve's creation to the narrator's explanation that a man "shall cleave unto his wife" is not arbitrarily placed. Instead, a man leaving his parents and clinging to his wife in marriage is "conformable to what begins in creation"—while their act in creating new human life through consummating their union is not. Barth discovers in the passage an "account of the divine basis of love and marriage as the fulfillment of the relationship between man and wife," which reveals the "mystery of the divine covenant of grace." The creation of Eve thus inaugurates a marriage—which needs no "further completion."[50]

Such a reading corresponds to Barth's argument that the eschatological reconfiguration of love and marriage announces the possibility of a marital union that has no reference to children. The Old Testament predominately frames the "problem of posterity" as the reason for marriage; marriage is sacred because it makes possible the "procreation of the holy seed and therefore the hope of Israel."[51] Only Genesis 2 and the Song of Songs know of male and female apart from their status as potential fathers and mothers.[52] The *eros* these texts depict appears only because the Old Testament is able to see (in a glass darkly) outside itself toward the covenant's fulfillment.[53] "Because the election of God is real," Barth famously writes, "there is such a thing as love and marriage."[54] But because the Israelites wait for such a fulfillment, the Old Testament mainly depicts "man and woman in the role of father and mother, begetting and bearing posterity, i.e. not directed toward themselves but towards the future Son."[55] The fulfillment of creation through Christ's action in the covenant means "for the first time the relationship between man and woman is honoured as such, and not merely in the light of

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[49] Ibid., 303.
[50] Ibid., 307.
[51] Ibid., 312.
[52] Ibid., 313.
[53] Ibid., 314.
[54] Ibid., 318.
[55] Ibid., 320.

fatherhood or motherhood or posterity—which fade into the background in the New Testament."[56]

The absence of any further 'completion' of Eve thus corresponds to Barth's argument that the text's silence about procreation is founded on its tacit, eschatological awareness. This means, though, that it is the *absence* of children that predominately marks Barth's understanding of the eschatologically reconfiguration of marriage—rather than their presence. The completion of the man by the woman—and the corresponding completion of creation by the covenant—seems to generate fruit only accidentally, as there is nothing intrinsic within the relationship of male and female "as such" that requires or needs anything further. While Barth's account does not necessarily entail that the paradigmatic marriage is 'barren' or 'sterile,' Barth's theological reasoning uniquely emphasizes the abrogation of procreation's significance—which leaves it in a precarious theological position, at best.

5.2 Procreation in Barth's Anthropology (III/2)

Barth's doctrine of creation, then, isolates procreation from having a distinct theological significance. Procreation creates a natural history that renders the covenant physically possible. But the consummation of the covenant is marked by the abrogation of procreation as the basis for the union of male and female, which means the 'sign of hope' is ordered toward its own dissolution. This tension between the prospective, prophetic character of procreation in the Old Testament and its theological abrogation by the New reappears within Barth's theological anthropology. But it does so through and within the added challenge of explaining how the revelation of Jesus Christ informs, destabilizes, and affirms 'human nature.'

As with his doctrine of creation, Barth's theological anthropology takes the disclosure of the Word of God in Jesus Christ as both its epistemic and ontic basis.[57] The empirical 'phenomena' available to us outside the context of special revelation are only indications of true humanity; they are founded upon the more basic and fundamental fact of humanity's relationship with God, rather than *vice versa*. Even so, Barth closes off a straightforward derivation of anthropology from Christology. Negatively, the problem of sin means humanity

[56] Ibid., 323.
[57] *CD* III/2, 41.

exists in a self-contradiction that Jesus protests against. Positively, Christ's humanity is "determined by a relationship between God and Himself such as has never existed between God and us, and never will exist."[58] As such, Christ reveals to us human nature in its most basic form; His work "reveals and explains human nature with all its possibilities."[59] The task of theological anthropology, then, is to expound this revelation of human nature in Jesus Christ "from within."[60]

The irrepeatability of Christ's humanity, though, is tied to his salvific role: Christ in the Scriptures is depicted as "wholly and utterly the Bearer of an office." There is "no neutral humanity in Jesus."[61] He is instead entirely determined by His irrepeatable hypostatic union with God and by His unique role as Savior. This status governs Christ's "whole existence," so that there is no place outside Christ's determination by and for the covenant from which we might discover the essence of human nature. Instead, Christ is the human whose 'essence' is *for* God. It "does not merely belong to the essence, but it is the essence of man, to be for God."[62] Christ's *for* presupposes His being *from* God—humanity is "essentially for God because he is essentially from God and in God." Still, that Christ is the human *from* God takes a secondary position to the *for*: the "basis of human life," Barth writes, is "identical with its *telos*."[63]

Barth confirms this prioritization of the 'for' in his elaboration of how Christ's humanity is ordered toward His fellows. While the "divinity of the man Jesus" is constituted by His being "man for God," his humanity "can and must be described no less succinctly in the proposition that He is man for man, for other men, His fellows."[64] The priority of this "for" is founded upon the New Testament's exclusive interest in Christ's office as Savior. However, Barth suggests that it has two implications, a *from* and a *to.* Regarding the former, Christ allows his humanity to be "prescribed and dictated and determined by an alien human being (that of His more near and distant fellows), and by the need and infinite peril of this being."[65] Barth frames this question of Christ's origins along the lines of the I-Thou dialectic he develops from Buber, suggesting that if there "is indeed a powerful I of Jesus, it is only from this Thou, this fallen

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[58] Ibid., 49.
[59] Ibid., 59.
[60] Ibid., 55.
[61] Ibid., 56.
[62] Ibid., 71.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 208.
[65] Ibid., 214.

Adam" and from the "sequence of generations" that springs from Him. Christ has his life "from His apostles." Yet Christ is also *to* His fellows, as he makes their deliverance "His exclusive task."[66] This 'from' and 'to' of Christ's fellow-humanity mean we cannot see Christ if we do not also see Him with His fellows.[67] Still, it is the 'for' that takes precedent in identifying the content of Jesus' humanity and which establishes the *analogia relationis* that marks Him as the image of God. The *for* marks His office and vocation: "As he is for God, so He is for man; and as He is for man, so He is for God."[68] For Barth, the correspondence and similarity between Christ's humanity and the inner life of the Trinity consists "in the fact that the man Jesus in His being for man repeats and reflects the inner being or essence of God and this confirms His being for God."[69] Christ's being for man is the direct corollary of his being for God.[70]

Barth's general anthropology, however, brackets this emphasis on the *for* and instead takes shape around the preposition *with*. Christ's unique and irrepeatable position as counterpart to God means that "basically and comprehensively…to be a man is to be with God."[71] Such a claim is dependent upon Christology, as humanity is with God only insofar as "he is with Jesus."[72] However, Barth also thinks our position *with* God in Jesus includes and is specified by a *from*: humanity "derives from God" and thus is "dependent on God."[73] Such a derivation is founded upon Christ's witness to the Kingdom, in which "God *comes* to man."[74] The incarnation means that humanity is "so with God that he derives solely and exclusively from Him."[75] Humanity's status *from* God through being with Jesus is founded upon God's election and the divine Christ's life discloses. Humans are "summoned because chosen."[76] Human nature is 'real' only to the extent that it is summoned by God to be with Him in Christ.[77]

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[66] Ibid., 215.
[67] Ibid., 216.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 219.
[70] Ibid., 220.
[71] Ibid., 135.
[72] Ibid., 136.
[73] Ibid., 140.
[74] Ibid., 141.
[75] Ibid., 142.
[76] Ibid., 150.
[77] Ibid. Stuart McLean writes, "Detecting the significance Barth assigns these two prepositions (with and for) is a crucial insight into his theology." Indeed. As is the subordination of the human *from*. See *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 112.

The *with,* though, also governs and includes humanity's relationships toward each other. The human nature summoned by God "is a being of man with others."[78] Such a 'being with' is not an abstraction, but rather is filled in with the dialectical stance that "I am as Thou art."[79] However, this dialectical encounter requires *reciprocity,* even in its origination: the 'as' cannot mean that "Thou art" is the "cause, even the instrumental cause, or the true substance of the 'I am,'" as that causation would undermine the reciprocity that marks the relationship.[80] While each side of the I-Thou relationship has its "own validity, dignity and self-certainty," they are not static existences but instead a history of dynamic and active relations. The origins of the I and Thou is thus "two-sided."[81] In order to understand the *whence* of the I—its origin outside the mature encounter with the Thou, as manifested by the individual's independent existence as an organism prior to the mature encounter of male and female—theology must turn toward the Creator Himself. Humanity's status as 'from' God precedes and determines the *with* which marks our relationships as fellow-humans.

Barth's theological anthropology is so emphatic about the individual's origins from God alone that he places his direct explication of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* inside it. Anthropology, not creation, requires and fully discloses the doctrine's "inner necessity." Near the heart of Barth's concern is an aversion to allowing anything, including humanity's material constitution, to function as a presupposition of divine action toward humans. The only thing that "precedes human being as a being summoned by the Word of God is simply…God in the existence of the man Jesus."[82] While there is a "real pre-existence" of humanity in the "counsel of God," *creatio ex nihilo* means humanity's existence is "not grounded upon nothingness and chaos," but "derives from God and no other source."[83] The question of a creaturely presupposition of this summons arises only on the basis of a non-theological anthropology, so that attempting to know a beginning behind humanity's summons in Jesus Christ is the anthropological equivalent of attempting to know the God who is "known to us only in this

[78] Ibid., 243.
[79] James Mumford rightly criticizes this understanding of humanity as 'being in encounter' for its inability to understand procreation, as the reciprocity and equality inherent within it fails to capture the asymmetrical relationship that a mother has with her embryo. See James Mumford, *Ethics at the Beginning of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[80] *CD* III/2, 248.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 151.
[83] Ibid., 155.

absence of any other presupposition or not at all."[84] Barth does acknowledge that humanity's material constitution is a "presupposition" to the divine summons—but it is not explanatory of the summons in any interesting way. Rather, in a move commensurate with his prioritization of the covenant, Barth argues humanity's "endowment merely follows as part of the summons, his constitution being his equipment."[85] Humanity's constitution is—like the dust from which Adam was formed—only a "*materia inhabilis et indispositia"* next to human *being* itself.[86]

If humanity's constitution has a subordinate position in explaining human nature, history—and specifically, covenantal history—takes the primary position. For Barth, history begins when "something new and other than its own nature befalls" a creature. It is not the creature's self-motivated action through time that makes history possible, but an encounter with something that transcends it so that it is "compelled and enabled to transcend itself in response and in relation to this new factor."[87] This entails, though, that the creature does not *have* a history but rather "*is* in the history itself."[88] Barth's account is again founded upon Christology; in Jesus the "identity of the Creator and the creature" is manifested so that the "Creator is for the creature the utterly new and other."[89] However, this also entails humanity is the one "in whose sphere…this history [of God's encounter in Jesus] takes place."[90] Such a history is constituted by a dialectic of divine grace and humanity's response: human life means responsibly answering God's grace in gratitude.[91]

Barth's anthropology, then, attempts to integrate the covenantal and creaturely dimensions of humanity without dividing or confusing them—just like his doctrine of creation. Humanity's "divine determination" to be a covenant partner of God and his "creaturely form, his humanity" are not in contradiction. Instead, humanity's "creaturely form corresponds and is similar to his divine determination, his being as the covenant-partner of God."[92] Such a form is not neutral; humanity "cannot be man without being directed to and prepared for the fulfillment of his determination…" Nor is the form immediately deducible or identical to one's physical

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[84] Ibid., 151.
[85] Ibid., 152.
[86] Ibid. Finally, the doctrine discloses that "even the potentiality of [humanity's] being does not lie within but outside himself." This is a point to which we shall return in Chapter Seven.
[87] Ibid., 158.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 159.
[90] Ibid., 160.
[91] Ibid., 166.
[92] Ibid., 206.

constitution. As a "sign here below of what he really is as seen from above, from God," humanity is not "intrinsically recognisable as this sign." As the being of humanity is derived from Christology, so is our understanding of the significance of its form.[93]

Barth's anthropology also carries on the prioritization of sex-differentiation for understanding human nature that he had begun in his doctrine of creation. Male and female are the only "structural differentiation of human existence."[94] Barth recapitulates his reading of Genesis 2 that humanity is paradigmatically disclosed in the encounter between male and female as such, without reference to procreation. The I-Thou dynamic must be "explained as coincident with that of male and female." As such, the "basic form of humanity" that Barth sketches can be done so "without the usual expansion or restriction" that the duality of man and woman leads us to "father and mother and therefore child as the third thing proceeding from the other two."[95] Male and female are still primarily ordered toward the covenant, not each other: male and female are "covenant-partners by nature," but not "the covenant-partners *of God* by nature."[96] Unlike becoming covenant-partners with God, being male and female is "something which is our own, and is inviolable and indestructible." That we are created in this way "*as* mutual partners…leaves open the further possibility that we are created to be the partners of God."[97]

Barth once more recapitulates the reasons for relativizing procreation, namely, the New Testament's eschatological announcement. For Israel, the covenant with God is a "promise and preparation" for Christ's advent, and as such its completion must come to them from beyond. Because Israel is on the way in the "middle stretch between creation and the end," it must "display that sober interest in man and woman in their quality as father and mother."[98] However, the eschatological completion the New Testament announces means the "whole concern for marrying and giving in marriage and the raising up of children" can "no longer occupy men in the resurrection when according to Lk 20:38 they cannot 'die any more.'"[99] The

[93] Ibid., 208.
[94] Ibid., 286.
[95] Ibid., 293.
[96] Ibid., 320, emphasis mine.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid. The man and woman are related to each other as the creation and covenant. If marriage's fulfillment is independent of procreation, so the covenant's eschatological disclosure puts an end (when finally consummated) with time.
[99] Ibid., 295.

mystery disclosed by the marital relation of male and female is "Christ and the community"—a relationship that Barth thinks is uniquely marked by the independence from procreation.[100]

This account helps explain why Barth does not opt to include the child within his framework of the *imago Dei*, as some of his interlocutors have wished.[101] As Salai Hla Aung writes, "If Barth had seriously taken the place of the child in the structure of human relationship and interpreted the trinitarian model of human creation in the image of God as a creation in the form of I-Thou-He/It relationship…it would make his trinitarian model a truly trinitarian one."[102] Such an amendment need be neither arbitrary nor founded upon natural theology, as Andrew Gabriel suggests.[103] Consider: the parent-child relationship is constituted (in part) by an asymmetry of origin that goes hand in hand with an asymmetry of authority. The child is from the parents, not vice versa. It is possible to see a correspondence to this asymmetry within the Triune God's inner life: the Father begets the Son, not vice versa.[104] Barth's argument that the Christological covenant is the prototype for the covenant of male-female marriage makes this further correspondence seem reasonable. Christ is begotten by the Father with the same love which He reveals in his covenantal love for the Church: being 'begotten from' the Father is thus the inner basis for Christ's union with the Church. And if Christ and the church are the prototype for male-female covenantal marriage, the Father-Son relationship would be the prototype for the *fulfillment* of marriage: ergo, procreation is necessary for the *imago.* Yet Barth does not take this path, in part because he had argued that *creation* rather than *pro*creation corresponds to the Father's begetting of the Son. Such a distinction seems to place a stopping point at the correspondence between human marriage and the Triune life at the work of Christ *ad extra*—and thus entail that male-female are the sum and substance of the *imago Dei.*

In other words, Barth is concerned to not let the *imago Dei* run over the distinction between the Creator and creature. He thus emphasizes a number of asymmetries between God's covenant with us in Christ, and the corresponding human covenant of male-female in marriage.

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[100] Ibid., 317. As Faye Bodley-Dangelo notes, Barth's "account of sexual difference is detached from any discussion of sexual reproduction itself." See *Veiled and Unveiled Others* (ThD diss., Harvard Divinity School, 2016), 75.
[101] See Elizabeth Frykberg, *Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology* (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1993).
[102] Salai Hla Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Barth, Moltmann and Pannenberg* (Regensburg: Roderer Verlag, 1998), 269.
[103] Gabriel, *Barth's Doctrine*, 69.
[104] Gary Deddo notes that Richard St. Victor makes such a parallel in his work on the Trinity. See Deddo, *Theology,* 351 n75.

In the former, there is an asymmetry of origin at work: Christ is with and from God in a wholly unique way. Male and female in marriage have an equality and reciprocity the Creator-creature covenant lacks—at least if Barth were to be consistent with his explicit statements on the matter.[105] Such an equality is tied to the non-causal, bilateral understanding of the *from* that Barth associates with the I-Thou dialectic: the female is the source of the male and *vice versa* in the encounter. But this cannot be said of Christ and the church as the image of God, or of the individual in their encounter with God.[106] Nor can it be said, on Barth's view, of the child who is born into such a relationship—since childhood is subordinate to the primary structural differentiation of male and female.

Barth's Christological anthropology, then, consistently moves questions of origins to a secondary sphere. In one sense, Barth's prioritization of the covenant as the 'internal basis of creation' demands such a position: the *for* of Christ's active disclosure of God's love on the cross is primary for disclosing the uniqueness of His humanity, while the *from* that names the presupposition of His revelation is secondary. This principle holds for both the two Testaments and the respective peoples that surround the disclosure of Jesus Christ. Barth's complicated relationship to Jews and to Judaism are beyond the scope of this dissertation; and yet, if there is a supercessionist note in his thought, it would stem from this relegation of the presuppositions of Christ's action to a secondary sphere. This principle also holds for the organic, material presuppositions of bodiliness, which necessarily precede any kind of active history of encounter between God and humanity. Barth's prioritization might be consistent with his description that procreation only provides the 'physical possibility' of the *imago Dei.* But it leaves open questions about whether the organic, material conditions that stand beneath the origins of human life in the world are attributed sufficient theological significance for Barth.

5.3.1 The Relativization of Procreation in III/4: Barth on the Ethics of Marriage (§54.1)

Barth builds his special ethics of marriage and parenthood in III/4 on the foundation he establishes in III/1 and III/2. Unsurprisingly, he forcefully contends the obligation to procreate

[105] *CD* III/2, 321.

[106] If Barth does fail to respect this principle, it is doubtlessly because he fails to consistently place the covenant as primary to the constitution and creation of humanity—which would make Eve's position *from* Adam determinative for her being in a way that his understanding of the human being does not allow.

has been removed by Christ's advent. The "problem of posterity" that dominates the Old Testament's understanding of marriage and its corresponding emphasis on mothers and fathers are both dissolved. Marriage now has an eschatological consecration in Christ and the church, which procreation lacks. Such an approach risks reducing procreation to a surd, so that the reasons to perform it are unavailable to theologically motivated moral deliberation.

While Barth thinks that marriage is the central locus of the I-Thou encounter that demarcates humanity, he also works to ensure that the erotic impulse is not apotheosized into any kind of natural transcendence. Instead, marriage and sexuality are realms governed by the command of God, which demythologizes them and directs humanity toward its creaturely freedom. This subjects the male-female encounter to a "radical relativisation," rather than its "negation or destruction."[107] Theologically speaking, approaches that apotheosize marriage—like Schleiermacher's—go awry by collapsing the distinction between Christ and the church. The analogical relation of the Church instead becomes an "identity," leaving humanity without an independent referent "to whom he can look and from whom he can expect help as man expects it from God."[108] Marriage must thus remain a matter of creatureliness, rather than being exalted into "something metaphysical and absolute."[109]

In addition to emphasizing marriage's creaturely context, Barth argues that the command of God as disclosed by Jesus Christ relativizes marriage through introducing celibacy as a vocation—yet without abrogating marriage's position as the paradigmatic form of the I-Thou, male-female encounter. Marriage remains the *telos* of the sphere of male and female, even if it is not the only form of life the command allows. Everything in the sphere of male and female "must be judged by the criteria which apply to the married state," so that what is good or bad in the narrow sphere must also be good or bad in the broad. The 'relativization' celibacy introduces does not "mean the suspension of this rule."[110] The two vocations are instead mutually complementary, as humans are "oriented to marriage and determined for it even though temporarily or even finally they do not contract it."[111]

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[107] *CD* III/4 121.
[108] Ibid., 125.
[109] Ibid., 124-25.
[110] Ibid., 140.
[111] Ibid., 142.

This eschatological relativization of marriage goes hand-in-hand with a destabilization of procreation. The unmarried state in Israel was "a terrible disgrace for both male and female," because they would not partake in the "procreation of children." However, the reason beneath Israel's obligation to procreate was *not* the "general one that man is obliged to share creatively in the process of making new life," but rather the "special" reason that the "hope of Israel must be carried forward from one generation to another."[112] The birth of the Messiah loosens the clamp of marriage, making it only "one possibility among others."[113] But it does so through severing the link between marriage and procreation.

The necessity of marriage and procreation, then, stand and fall together. The removal of the obligation to procreate is inextricably linked to the relativization of marriage and by the eschatologically oriented vocation of celibacy. And yet, only marriage receives a "new consecration" within the New Testament. Because marriage is founded upon the prototype of Christ and His community, it becomes a "representation of humanity's determination as the covenant-partner of God."[114] The eschatological intrusion of Christ casts a shadow over the institution of marriage by revealing that it belongs to the passing world. This relativization turns marriage into "a special spiritual gift and vocation" alongside celibacy.[115] Yet Barth also contends that the eschatological standpoint also reveals marriage's true ground and determination—conferring upon it its "true Christian meaning."[116]

Procreation receives no such special consecration, however. In fact, the eschaton emphatically dissolves the (ostensible) Jewish burden to procreate. The Old Testament "problem of posterity and heirs" has no theological significance in the Christian community.[117] What now matters is being born "of God," as the Child the people of God were waiting for has been born. Barth insists that this relativization not entail a "subordination and devaluation of procreation and marriage," which remain a "natural possibility."[118] Humans continue to participate in human nature after the advent of the Christ. But whatever distinctly theological significance it once had has now come to an end.

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid., 143.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., 148.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., 143.
[118] Ibid.

While marriage receives an eschatological consecration that procreation lacks, that does not mean marriage is a self-enclosed, impermeable sphere. While the marital union is exclusive, the establishment of a home makes it possible for third parties to enter and leave. In this way, marriage is "fruitful outwards and also richer and more active within."[119] Such an external dimension is a requirement, as marriage is "not permission to establish an egoistic partnership of two persons," but rather a commitment to "active participation" in the external world. As such, the marriage "may and must be significant and fruitful, an outward witness and help, as the inner fellowship of these two persons…"[120] However, procreation is only one form such a 'fruitful' marriage takes. While marriages must build up a "common world," there is no internal necessity which would impel a couple to presumptively choose children. Marriage "implies" an "inner readiness for children," but is "in no way conditioned by the co-existence of children." Because of the termination of the problem of posterity, "husband and wife form a sphere of fellowship *independent of* child or family."[121] A married couple should take the fruitfulness of procreation "in all seriousness." But rather than develop this, Barth immediately pivots toward considering the social and theological significance of the wedding.[122] Barth's account of marriage thus offers few, if any, theological reasons to which a couple might appeal in deciding to procreate.

5.3.2 The Relativization of Procreation in III/4: Barth on Procreation in 'Parents and Children' (§54.2)

Barth's ethics of parents and children goes much further toward establishing a presumptive pro-natalism than we could see or establish from his ethics of marriage. Barth acknowledges that being born and bearing others is a part of humanity's "creaturely status."[123] The relationship between parents and children is not a 'structural differentiation' like male and

[119] Ibid., 195.
[120] Ibid., 225.
[121] Ibid., 189. Emphasis mine.
[122] Ibid., 226. Barth's discussion of the wedding focuses on parental authority over their child's marriage. It says nothing about whether this origin contains a reference to the emergence of a similar parent-child relationship.
[123] Ibid., 240. Barth will later suggest that fatherhood and motherhood "always confer a *character indelibis,* introduce an irrevocable turning point in the life of the individual and bring about an indissoluble relationship to the third party, i.e., the child now born." Ibid., 277.

female, but is based upon such a relationship. Humanity is a child by necessity: "There is no man without parents…"[124] Yet the "necessity with which he is a child, and a son or daughter…is bound up in the fact that he is male or female, and the one or the other on the basis of this structural differentiation."[125] Parents are the "presupposition and starting-point" of a child's life-history; they are an involuntary 'given' for the child, a relationship that is "special, exclusive and lasting."[126] But if humans are necessarily children, they are only contingently parents. This difference seems to stand beneath his suggestion that the standpoint of the child has "more direct [theological] significance" than the question of whether we will conceive and bear children.[127]

Barth reiterates the contingency of parenthood when he turns to God's command for prospective parents. First, he acknowledges those who are involuntarily childless will "all feel their childlessness to be a lack, a gap in the circle of what nature obviously intends for man…" Such a feeling will be proportionate to how grateful they are "for the gift of children."[128] Yet we also cannot speak of a childless marriage as a "misfortune": it may still be "fruitful" in a non-physical sense. Moreover, the obligation to perpetuate the species from Genesis 1 is no more: in the New Testament there is "no necessity, no general command, to continue the human race as such and therefore to procreate children." Instead, procreation continues that the "joy of parenthood may still have a place." The "anxiety about posterity" is "removed from us all by the fact that the Son on whose birth alone everything seriously and ultimately depended has now been born and has now become our Brother." In this way, parenthood is simply a "free and in some sense optional gift of the goodness of God."[129]

[124] Ibid., 240.
[125] *CD* III/2, 286.
[126] *CD* III/4, 241, 240.
[127] Ibid., 241.
[128] Ibid., 265-266.
[129] Ibid., 266. Barth's understanding of the relativization of procreation has two attitudinal correlates for those without children. Their lament "can have no justification in the community of the new covenant." And they are forbidden an attitude of neutral resignation. Instead, they "must set their hope on God and therefore be comforted and cheerful." Barth's pastoral recommendation, which he suggests will be heard only where the "great message of divine comfort is known and received," is that such childless couples should recognize they are "all the more called and empowered to build up their life-companionship with particular care both outwardly and inwardly." Barth also raises the possibility of a 'fatherliness' and 'motherliness' that are available to all, regardless of whether they are parents or not.)

Barth expands this description of why procreation continues *post Christum natum* in addressing the licitness of negative forms of birth control.[130] After reiterating his claim that the "unconditional command" to procreate has been undone by Christ, he suggests procreation still happens under "God's longsuffering and patience, and is due to His mercy, that in these last days it may still take place."[131] Curiously, this description seems to entail a higher justificatory threshold for the practice after the advent of Christ than before it. It also depicts God's attitude toward the practice in surprisingly pallid tones. Nor is it clear that such an explanation for procreation could count as a reason for any married couple to procreate. God's reason for allowing procreation to continue is not the equivalent to a married couple's reason for procreating.

Barth, though, also appeals to the "confidence in life" that is founded upon faith to explain procreation. It may sometimes be the "duty of the Christian community," he writes, "to awaken either a people or section of a people which has grown tired of life and despairs of the future, to the conscientious realisation that to avoid arbitrary decay they should make use of this merciful divine permission and seriously try to maintain the race."[132] This confidence should give "birth control" the positive connotation of the "joyful willingness to have children and therefore to become parents," rather than only indicating the negative means of abstention or prevention. Barth specifically points *away* from the socio-economic basis of this confidence, noting that the loss of such confidence is commensurate with improving living standards—an observation that holds true today.[133] The "positive choice and decision" for having children "ought to be made far more often than they are to-day on the basis of this confidence in life grounded in faith," even if it is not an obligation.[134] This exhortation is the nearest Barth's ethics comes to expressing any kind of pro-natalism.

However, Barth's understanding of the theological quality of sexual intercourse also establishes a presumptive affirmation of procreating by a couple. As Barth thinks marriage is a form of life-fellowship independent from children, so he suggests sexual intercourse has a value

[130] This is the nearest Barth comes to addressing the question of voluntary childlessness on the part of married couples.
[131] Ibid., 268.
[132] Ibid., 268-269.
[133] The literature on economic rates and fertility is widespread: improving economic conditions correlate with a decreasing birth rate. See, among many other places, Jonathan Last's *What to Expect When No One's Expecting* (New York: Encounter Books, 2013).
[134] *CD* III/4, 272.

independent of procreation. Sexual intercourse can indicate "love relationship of the two partners and exclude the conception and birth of children."[135] But Barth also emphasizes the dual, divine-human agency at work in sexual intercourse. Such an act, he suggests, can be "not merely human action, but an offer of divine goodness made by the One who even in this last time does not will that it should be all up with us."[136] Contracepting can be "a refusal of this divine offer" and a renunciation of the widening of the sphere of marital fellowship. As long as marriage includes sexual activity, the possibility of parenthood is a "natural consequence." As such, it seems the couple should remain presumptively open to procreation: a couple "must have valid reasons if the gravity of this renunciation and seriousness of this threat are to be dispelled…"[137] It is a decision about which there can be no "frivolity and expediency."

Parents are not freed from their responsibility for procreative decisions, though, by the presumptive affirmation of intercourse's procreative dimension or by the 'free and optional' quality of parenthood. As procreation is not "merely the inevitable consequence" of sexual intercourse, it requires a responsible "choice and decision between Yes and No."[138] Neither chance nor providence are sufficient grounds for procreating: the decision requires a response to the specific question "May I try to have a child?"[139] Such a question means there can be wrongdoing in the sphere of procreating. Negatively, an "actual divine gift may be refused," and a child "who might have been the light and joy of its parents is not generated and conceived and come into existence."[140] Barth also allows for wrongdoing in the other direction. And a "child may be generated of whom it might well be said from the parents' standpoint that they would have been better without it."[141] Barth does not specify on what basis parents might know whether or not they are wrong to pursue a child—such specificity is difficult to attain on any account, as we have seen. However, this intensification of responsibility in procreating fits uncomfortably with his previous emphasis that humanity's 'Lordship'—rather than his procreative capacity—is peculiarly dangerous for its proximity to God's creative power. Barth's special ethics of procreation hints at the Godlike possibilities of creating other human beings.

[135] Ibid., 269.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid., 270.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid., 271.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.

Still, the weight of Barth's understanding of procreation falls on two complementary claims. First, the advent of the Christ destabilizes both marriage and procreation, making both optional for Christians. Second, marriage and procreation are now two independent spheres, so that the former can be had without being conditioned by the latter. While the eschaton dissolves both marriage and procreation alike, marriage has a theological referent procreation lacks: only marriage receives a "new consecration." Procreation remains a "natural possibility" for the couple—but it is by no means inevitable, much less obligatory, that a couple will pursue it. Moreover, as 'natural' it seems to stand outside the domain of theological significance that Barth draws marriage into. While marriage must be an expanding circle of fellowship, Barth's emphatic interest in the I-Thou quality of the union, his understanding of the *imago,* and his suggestion that there is no further completion *beyond* the climax of the covenant means children have a gratuitous quality. As Jonathan Tran writes, "Children serve no purpose [for Barth], in that they of themselves do not offer meaning; they simply exist as God's goodness; God does not signify his blessings through children, since Christ sacramentally denotes the infinite endurance of God's presence and blessing as displayed in the church."[142]

At the same time, procreation's position as an 'independent sphere' from marriage clearly does not mean it lies beyond the command of God. Barth's account obviously rests on a complicated understanding of how human and divine action relate. Whether and how Barth manages to hold them together without confusing them, though, is a serious question. On the one side, Barth emphasizes procreation's status as 'natural': in procreating parents do not participate in the creation of new individuals made in the *imago Dei* but make them physically possible. On the other side, sexual intercourse can be a divine "offer"—but one which a couple can use to wrongly bring into existence against the command of God. It is difficult to overcome the impression that the two forms of action are not properly correlated in Barth's special ethics of procreation. The absence of a theological *significance* or *meaning* to procreation threatens to bifurcate the divine and human acts in generating new life.

Barth's emphasis on the independence of marriage from procreation seems to be at least partially motivated by pastoral concerns for involuntarily childless couples: they are the people he addresses first in his specification of what the command of God means in this realm. But

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[142] Jonathan Tran, "The Otherness of Children as a Hint of an Outside," *Theology and Sexuality* 15, no. 2 (2015): 207.

Barth's account of celibacy and marriage may provide a template for seeing how procreation might fulfill marriage without diminishing or stigmatizing infertile couples as second class. Marriage is the *telos* of the sphere of male and female, including celibates. Marriage thus conditions everyone's life, even if they never marry. But a similar structure might obtain for marriage and procreation. When Barth suggests that marriage is "in no way conditioned by the co-existence of children," he elides the distinction between the theoretical or theological description of the institution and a concrete, childless couple. But if the sphere of male and female is inherently conditioned by marriage, marriage may likewise be conditioned by children—regardless of whether a concrete couple is given them. Barth might allude to this possibility in suggesting that childless couples are "all the more called and empowered to build up their life-companionship with particular care both outwardly and inwardly."[143] Such sound pastoral advice indicates Barth recognizes all marriages are 'conditioned by' the fruitfulness that ordinarily takes the form of children, even if his theory rejects it.

5.4 Procreation in Barth (so far): Appreciation and Critique

Barth's understanding of procreation consistently subordinates it to other theological concerns. To use his terminology, Barth depicts procreating as a presupposition that makes divine action technically possible—but not more than that. Procreation does not transmit or intrinsically engender an individual made in the *imago Dei*. The 'Lordlike' dimension of humanity's power over creation is especially dangerous, but humanity's procreative powers are merely animal-like. The only "structural differentiation" of humanity is male and female—the relation of parents and children is subordinate to it. Christ's humanity is constituted by the dual divine and human *for*, which are founded upon his divine *from*—but Barth has almost nothing to say in his anthropology about Christ's human *from*. When the woman comes to the male in Genesis 2, there is no need of a "further completion." The genealogical "succession of father and son has no theological significance after the birth of the Son."[144] Marriage receives a new consecration in light of the eschatological union of Christ and the church—but procreation does not. Nor does procreating correspond to or carry on God's work of creation. Gary Deddo

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[143] *CD* III/4, 267.
[144] Ibid., 242.

suggests Barth fails "to bring out the interpersonal dimensions of procreation which give it its relativized value," considering it instead "almost exclusively in terms of the biological event."[145] Given where Barth locates procreation within his theology, such a judgment seems right.

While there are questions about the theological structure surrounding procreation, then, there also seem to be grounds for something like a Christian pro-natalist presumption within his special ethics. Barth's appeal to the "confidence in life grounded in faith" and to sexual intercourse's character as "divine offer" of human life indicates that a default presumption on behalf of having children is warranted. Moreover, this presumption does not entail that one may procreate without reasons. While contracepting might be a refusal of the "divine offer" and parenthood is a free and optional gift, procreating still requires a positive reason that does not reduce to chance or providence. Barth's claim that procreation must be a decision demands an openness to saying Yes, but also an openness to renouncing procreation. But while procreation requires reasons, an agent also need not be neutral toward it such that the reasons for and against procreating are weighted equally. Because sexual intercourse enables the widening of marriage, the priors for deliberation seem to shift, making procreation presumptively licit.

Barth's description of the attitude underlying a Christian pro-natalism as a "confidence in life" both builds upon and deepens the dialectic of optimism and pessimism the previous chapter explored. As we saw there, Barth contrasts the self-confidence of Leibniz and other optimists with the confidence of those "whom God has first drawn into his confidence," a confidence "continually renewed" with a certainty "continually achieved and confirmed."[146] Only this Christologically grounded confidence can take the shadow side of creation seriously without devolving into a pessimistic nihilism like Schopenhauer's. Similarly, Barth's 'confidence in life' could be read as endorsing a presumptively positive attitude toward procreating, without eliminating the possibility of abstention for married couples.

This correlation of optimism and pro-natalism becomes sharper when we see that Barth attributed both to Judaism. For Barth, reducing the 'confidence in life' into an inviolable obligation to procreate is a "very heathen or even Jewish type of thought."[147] Similarly, Barth had disavowed the "ancient Hebrew optimism whose triumphant song could later give way to

[145] Deddo, *Theology*, 349.
[146] *CD* III/1 411, 388.
[147] *CD* III/4, 272.

pessimism (like that of the followers of Leibniz after the Lisbon earthquake)."[148] Barth's association of optimistic (natural) theologies with pro-natalism is understandable given the social and political context surrounding his development of the doctrine of creation. Yet while Barth's account of the goodness of creation critiques the Marcionite tendency to divide the Old and New Testaments, his procreative ethics thrives upon a sharp distinction between their understanding of parenthood and children. Whether Barth is able to sufficiently fund 'confidence in life' on theological grounds might turn upon whether he is able to avoid reducing the eschatological 'relativization' of the (purportedly) Jewish optimistic pro-natalism into an abrogation of it.

One reason to be skeptical of Barth's view is that his depiction of the Old Testament's understanding of procreation might rest upon distorted emphases, which empower a sharper discontinuity between the Testaments than would otherwise exist. The interplay of blessing, reproduction, and life that emerged in Barth's analysis of the first creation account plays a marginal role *at best* in his special ethics of marriage and parenthood. There is good reason to think that fertility was predominately associated with blessing in the Old Testament, but Barth replaces the concept with his intense focus on the Old Testaments' description of procreation and posterity as an obligation, burden, or problem.[149] Additionally, Barth's emphatic depiction of the birth of the Christ as an end-point of Israel's procreative activity potentially truncates Israel's vision. They looked for a Messiah that would fulfill the promise that Abraham would be the "father of many nations." Such a formula indicates that there may be a completion for Israel *beyond* her union with the Messiah, a fruitfulness that is not arbitrary or a surd but intrinsically grounded in the union of the bride and groom. Such alternate depictions would minimize the discontinuity between the Jewish and Christian outlooks on procreation—and potentially provide more robust theological grounds for affirming a pro-natalist outlook *post natum Christum* than Barth has access to.

Barth's suggestion, though, that a 'confidence in life grounded in faith' stands beneath a pro-natalist outlook calls for closer investigation into his ethics of life, which we shall undertake

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[148] *CD* III/1, 122.

[149] For a comprehensive treatment of the use of the fertility blessing in Genesis 1:26 by the rest of the Old Testament, see Jamie Viands' excellent *I Will Surely Multiply Your Offspring* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014).

in the subsequent chapter. As we saw in Chapter Three, there are significant questions about the relationship between biological relatedness and parenthood. Barth's ethics of parents and children frames procreation as happening under the mercy and patience of God, but also indicates—in a phrase I did not develop above—that it happens so that the "joy of parenthood may still have a place." Given Barth's stance that posterity no longer has theological significance, though, there is a question about why on his view 'parenthood' should be undertaken procreatively—a question that we considered in moral philosophy as well. Addressing such questions from the standpoint of 'life' will help deepen our understanding of the place humanity's biological constitution has in Barth's ethics—and subsequently the significance of procreation as well.

Such an exploration will draw upon and deepen a number of themes that have emerged in this chapter. Specifically, it will query whether the intrinsically reproductive quality of 'life' that Barth develops in his reading of the first creation account has any purchase on his theological anthropology—or whether it disappears beneath the crushing weight of the phenomenological I-Thou framework. It will also offer a similar recapitulation of the theme of 'blessing,' and reconsider the divine "offer" of life and the human action of procreating. Properly developing this theme will also prompt renewed attention to the *from* for theological anthropology, albeit in a more general, non-Christological key than I considered above. And finally, evaluating Barth's ethics of 'life' will require further attention to the way ecclesiology relates to the genealogically-based Judaism that Barth repudiates.

Chapter Six

Respect for Life as a Reason to Create

The previous chapter argued Barth's account of procreation leaves it dangling in a precarious theological position. Procreating does not secure the *imago Dei,* nor does it offer a further completion of marriage. Marriage is eschatologically consecrated, but the significance of genealogy is dissolved. Barth's account of procreation allows it to be a natural possibility for a married couple, who plausibly may adopt a presumptive willingness to procreate. But even the couple who has this presumptive willingness must be able to specify the reasons they have for procreating, rather than leaving the practice up to chance or providence. One question that emerges from this, then, is how Barth understands the 'life' that a pro-natalist stance finds confidence in. As we saw in Barth's discussion of optimism, Barth is deeply invested in grounding the confidence of faith within the 'expanding circle' of *God's* confidence. Barth's understanding of the life within humanity's constitution develops this confidence, albeit from an anthropological standpoint.

This chapter considers, then, whether Barth's ethics of life supplies deeper grounds for a presumptive pro-natalism.[1] How Barth's prioritization of the covenant structures his understanding of humanity's constitution and the time that conditions it shall occupy us in the first two sections. Barth's approach to humanity's constitution ascribes it a durability on the basis of its aptitude for the covenant—even though Barth says nothing about reproduction as a marker of life. Additionally, Barth's account of the *whence* of humanity and its ecclesiastical reconfiguration of the 'blessing' of procreation will clarify the grounds upon which Barth prioritizes one's ecclesiastical and baptismal identity over procreative bonds. However, it will also demonstrate that this relativization is commensurate with an *intensification* of life's value, as it locates the individual against the backdrop of God rather than their non-existence (as we saw moral philosophers do). The evaluation of Barth's understanding of humanity's constitution and origins in III/2 and III/3 will prepare us for considering his special ethics of life in III/4, to

[1] As we saw in the previous chapter, Barth's first creation account specifically points to humanity's constitution as a sign of God's action. This chapter will expand on that reading.

see whether the respect for life Barth thinks is demanded on the basis of God's command entails a presumptive pro-natalism for married couples.

6.1 Theological Anthropology and the Human Constitution

Barth's theological anthropology locates Christ's physical body in a secondary position to His office as Messiah and Savior—a position that does not entail a diminution in its value. Even though the New Testament is interested in the concrete person of Jesus, we are not "given a complete, much less a concrete, picture" of His bodiliness. While male and female are the basic form of humanity, within the New Testament an "impenetrable veil of silence lies over the fact that [Jesus] was a male."[2] Even so, the New Testament depicts Jesus as a differentiated whole: He is "one whole man, embodied soul and ensouled body."[3] Such a wholeness means Christ exists as a "cosmos, a formed and ordered totality."[4] There is thus a higher and a lower in Christ—soul and body—but the lower is not associated with Christ only "externally and accidentally."[5] Soul and body are asymmetrically related, such that human action occurs "from soul to body and not *vice versa.*"[6] But body and soul cannot be separated or evaluated independently of the other. The body "never plays an independent role," but there is "no logic" in Christology that "is not as such physics, no cure of souls which is not as such bound up with cure of bodies."[7]

Christ's perfect union with the Holy Spirit entails that the differentiated order and wholeness of His human constitution is "structured and governed from within"—and thus belongs to Him in an irrepeatable way. As Barth puts it, the order of Christ's body and soul

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[2] *CD* III/2, 330. The "substance and nature" of Jesus' corporeality "remain fundamentally hidden," and can only be supplied by "an imagination whose methods have nothing in common with what the New Testament has to say to us." Graham Ward contends that Barth's failure to permit same-sex sexual acts is founded on an illicit appeal to natural theology at this very point. See Graham Ward, "The Erotics of Redemption—After Karl Barth," *Theology and Sexuality* 4, no. 8 (1998): 52–72. Faye Bodley-Dangelo raises the same complaint, albeit in a more thorough form. See Bodley-Dangelo, *Veiled*, 2016. For an early version, see Jaime Balboa, "'Church Dogmatics,' Natural Theology, and the Slippery Slope of 'Geschlecht,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66, no. 4 (1998): 771–789.
[3] Ibid., 327.
[4] Ibid., 327, 332.
[5] Ibid., 327.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 339, 328.

"derives from Himself."[8] That Christ possesses such life entails He can bestow it upon "many others without it ceasing to belong to Him and to be His life, without its being diminished or lost to Him."[9] It is as the perfect recipient and bearer of the Holy Spirit that Christ has "life in its fullness" which ensures His "soul and body is personal life, permeated and determined by His I, by Himself."[10] Such a permeation begins at the conception of Christ by the Spirit, which indicates that Christ's whole being is one "in which chaos is left behind and cosmos is realized, and in which the flesh is slain in its old form and is quickened and comes alive in its new—and all this by and from out of itself."[11] It is this union with the Spirit as the Messiah that is the fundamental ground for the wholeness of the man Jesus; the asymmetrical union of body and soul are only analogous to it.

The Spirit similarly governs the derivation from Christ's irrepeatable constitution to a general anthropology. If Christ's union with the Holy Spirit is complete, humanity receives only a "transitory and partial bestowal" that in no way entails that the Spirit is our possession.[12] Three axioms govern Barth's general anthropology: humanity is not God, he is not without God, and he only exists as "he is grounded, constituted, and maintained by God."[13] Spirit names this final reality. What Christ has of Himself, humanity has of God. Specifically, humanity *has* Spirit without being Spirit. Instead, the Spirit is the "the operation of God upon His creation, and especially the movement of God towards man."[14] Strictly speaking, the Spirit does not have an independent existence but is the "powerful and exclusive meeting initiated by God between Creator and creature."[15] This Spirit means that God is "there for" humanity, and that humanity stands in need of a "freedom to live which is not immanent in him but comes to him."[16] That the Spirit forms the basis of humanity's life means that humanity lives only insofar as we are the recipients of grace. Because the Spirit is the "event of the gift of life whose subject is God," it "must be continually repeated as God's act if man is to live." In that way, "Spirit is the *conditio sine qua non* of the being of man as soul of his body."[17] As the Spirit makes "possible

[8] Ibid., 332.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 335.
[11] Ibid., 337.
[12] Ibid., 334.
[13] Ibid., 346.
[14] Ibid., 356.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 362.
[17] Ibid., 359.

[humanity's] being as soul of his body," he performs *ad extra* the role Barth had ascribed to Him *ad intra,* namely providing the "pre-existence" of the creature in God's life.[18]

The prioritization of the Spirit for Barth's understanding of humanity's constitution corresponds to his methodological prioritization of the covenant over creation. Humanity "is determined by the one grace, that of his creation, for the other grace, that of the covenant; and he is referred by the one to the other."[19] But the Spirit indicates that the covenant is the "original and model to which the natural constitution of man must succeed and correspond," rather than the other way around.[20] Because of this, the extrinsic basis of humanity's life is distinct from a general creaturely dependence upon God: other animals "lack that second determination by the Spirit which is primary and peculiar." Or, as Barth puts it, "Men and beasts can be born, but men alone can be baptised."[21]

However, the prioritization of the covenant makes humanity's constitution durable, not formless and malleable.[22] As the "likeness and promise of the divine covenant of grace," humanity's "special constitution corresponding to this calling is determined by the fact that he owes it to the God who is the Lord of this covenant of grace."[23] On this basis, humanity's constitution is a "saving fact": it derives from God and is therefore "unshakeable." Such an account entails that humanity cannot permanently alter its constitution in such a way that it becomes a different kind of creature. But it also entails that humanity's constitution has an intrinsic content and order. Because humanity "has an inner relation to God's turning towards man and to the salvation which God intends for him," he thus intrinsically and unwittingly represents "in himself…the good intention of God towards him, without himself being guarantor for this good intention of God."[24]

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[18] Ibid., 363. Barth notes that the non-identical intimacy of the Spirit with humanity does not relate to his body and soul in the same way. See 364-365.
[19] Ibid., 349.
[20] Ibid., 357.
[21] Ibid.
[22] As Eberhard Busch writes, as God precedes the creature, there is "no neutral existence, no randomly manipulable existence. For the *love* of God for the creature *precedes* its existence. It cannot enter into existence without being loved." Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion*, ed. Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 182-83.
[23] *CD* III/2, 347. Both Cortez and Viazovski adopt 'covenantal ontology' as a fitting description of Barth's view. See Yaroslav Viazovski, *Image and Hope* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 207; and Marc Cortez, *Embodied Souls, Ensouled Bodies* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 99 ff.
[24] Ibid. Faye-Dangelo critiques Christopher Roberts' reading of Barth's treatment of sexual differentiation for his appeal to 'biology.' According to Faye-Dangelo, "Barth never names 'biology' as the material presupposition of the covenant, but rather creation, and 'creation' is a history, a sequence of divine acts that

Such an unwitting representation of God's intentions takes the form of a differentiated, asymmetrically ordered wholeness of soul and body, two "moments" that analogously repeat the dependence of the whole human upon God. Humanity's constitution is in this way "a representation of the whole of created reality" of heaven and earth. Humanity lives in a 'twofold mystery': he "lives as bodily organism, and…his bodily organism is ordained to be the bearer and the expression of his life."[25] Such an ordination does not mean the body itself is the source of its life. Instead, that humanity is a soul means "he is the life which is essentially necessary for the body." But the soul is not above or beyond the body. Instead, soul and body are asymmetrically ordered, indivisible moments: humanity is a "besouled body."[26]

Barth's depiction of human bodily life thus includes and comprehends the physical dimensions of the human organism even while transcending them. As he writes, "Life is life of the body, and while it is this it is more than this." Specifically, it is "freedom, apprehension and control of the body."[27] Such a life is unremittingly dependent upon God: having a soul does not mean that life is humanity's possession. Rather, humanity is dependent upon an "event over whose occurrence he has no control," namely, the event of God meeting him as a creature (Spirit). The soul is not an intermediary or third principle between God and humanity: "As he really lives, and is thus soul of his body, [humanity] is always and immediately of God."[28] Yet the freedom and control of life allows a kind of independence. Human life is a "spatio-material system of relations…which is lived and quickened by [soul], and which by the self-contained life of this subject is alive for its own part, i.e. one in which the self-movement, self-activity and self-formation of this subject fulfils and realises itself, and which thus acquires a share in this life of which in itself is not participant."[29] On this basis, Barth distinguishes between the

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include God's production of a human actor whose own sequence of activities (seeking, recognizing, electing, and naming Eve…but notably and explicitly not sexually reproducing himself via Eve) are central to Barth's theological framing of sexual difference and male precedence." See 139 ff. While it is right that Barth does not appeal to biology *per se* to explain sex differentiation, his contention that such a constitution is adapted to the covenant and is durable may entail that his overly hasty repudiation of same-sex sexual orientation is not an indication of his capitulation to natural theology, as she contends. For Roberts, see Christopher Roberts, *Creation and Covenant* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007).

[25] *CD* III/2, 352.

[26] Ibid., 351.

[27] Ibid., 353.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 376.

material body and the organic body, the latter of which is "besouled and filled and controlled by independent life."[30]

Barth's development of humanity's adaptation for the covenant allows him to build an ethical dimension into humanity's constitution, through enfolding humanity's bodily nature into the structure of rationality. Barth acknowledges the similarities between human and animal life, but contends that only the "life of man, and man alone, is for us the object of a true and direct knowledge."[31] However, this self-reflexive dimension does not entail human self-knowledge is a closed circle. Instead, humanity is aware that he can "be responsible for himself" only because "he is capable of meeting God."[32] If such responsibility is true for animal life, the distinctiveness of human responsibility "emerges only in the fact that the continuation of the story is the history of the covenant and salvation, not between God and animals, but between God and man."[33] Because we can be covenant-partners with God, humanity is also a "subject of his own decision," as one who "posits himself in relation to God."[34] Such self-awareness is primarily associated with the soul, not the body, which "are distinguished from each other as subject and object, as operation and work."[35] Humanity is both a percipient being and a partner in "self-reflective responsibility before [God]."[36]

However, if this (theocentric) rationality primarily refers to the soul, it also pervades humanity's organic existence. Barth strikes a strong Aristotelian note in contending that "[an individual's] body also has a full participation in his rationality" by virtue of his soul.[37] However, from any standpoint outside the revelation of the word of God this rationality only has the credence of a 'hypothesis.'[38] Barth acknowledges that humanity appears rational in both its actions and failures, but argues such evidence is indefinite. Instead, humanity is a "rational being because he is addressed as such by God."[39] Only in this way can humans categorically secure their rationality (contra Kant). However, rationality's grounding in the divine address

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[30] Ibid., 378.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 396.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 396-97.
[35] Ibid., 398. The self-reflexive awareness in which humanity grasps their life is "wholly and at the same time both a soulful and a corporeal act, or, more accurately, a soulful act which directly includes a corporeal." (376).
[36] Ibid., 406.
[37] Ibid., 419.
[38] Ibid., 420.
[39] Ibid., 422.

establishes rather than abrogates human nature: Humanity should "value and respect the obvious fact of his rational nature…, that in his being and conduct he should take account of this nature of his and therefore of the law of his better self."[40] In other words, the divine command that determines humanity seems to be human-nature responsive: it is how human nature is revealed and known. Such a command requires "the affirmation concerning his being or non-being," so that humanity cannot stand in "neutrality" between them but faces a choice "between life and death."[41]

Barth's account of human 'life' thus treats bodiliness as a secondary but essential aspect of humanity's constitution. However, Barth includes no mention or consideration of humanity's reproductive powers with respect to life—despite his recognition of their relationship in the first creation account. Such a lacuna seems deliberate: the maleness of Jesus is irrelevant to a theological account of humanity's constitution, which seems to eliminate any special theological significance for humanity's reproductive capacities. However, such an approach introduces a tacit individualism that his depiction of male and female as the basic form of humanity explicitly aims to avoid. Organic human life is formed through the bilateral matrix of male and female—yet Barth's discussion of humanity's wholeness as a bodied-soul creature includes no mention of this presupposition. Instead, the human constitution is evaluated in such a way that the asymmetries between male and female reproductive powers are obviated and their mutual orientation to each other are ignored. The problem is, if nothing else, one of consistency for Barth: the individualism that seems to be at work in his consideration of humanity's constitution indicates that he fails to follow through on his claim that male and female are the only "structural differentiation" of humanity.

6.2 Theological Anthropology and Time

Barth's account of humanity's constitution brackets humanity's reproductive powers, but he develops an intricate appraisal of the theological significance of humanity's origins in his discussion of how time conditions human life. Such a bracketing is commensurate with Barth's formal theological anthropology, in which the *from* of Jesus' humanity takes a secondary

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 423.

position to the twofold *for* God and *for* humanity. When he takes up the question of the *whence* of human life, Barth continues this method of prioritizing life's covenantal dimensions over its temporally prior, organic material conditions. This method establishes a dialectic between the individual and the religious community that simultaneously seems to intensify the value or importance of the individual organic life, even while subordinating biological origins to ecclesiastical considerations. In this first subsection, I consider the nature of human life as an 'offer' from God before turning in the next to examine how Barth develops an ecclesiastical answer to the 'whence' of human life. I then conclude this section by considering the 'whence' of organic life in Barth's account of providence.

6.2.1 The Offer of Life and the Grace of God

If humanity had no time, we would "have no life."[42] Ever vigilant to ward off a natural theology, though, Barth contends that we know this only on the basis of Christology, rather than by reflecting on human nature or action as such. The irrepeatable life of Jesus as *for* God and *for* humanity means that His time is the center and beginning of all other times—He is the Lord of time, and so His time is contemporaneous with our own.[43] While the resurrection sets the terms for how we understand the limits of birth and death, it does not allow us to do away with those limits. The "simplest and most obvious consideration" is that we cannot abstract the content of God's eternal life from the form of Christ's temporal existence. Easter cannot "cause us to miss or to forget or to depreciate this form" of humanity's life, which happens from birth to death.[44] The incarnation protests against the "loss of time" that characterizes humanity's life under the fall, but also discloses the "truth of human nature as God created it; the truth of our being in our time."[45] That God becomes incarnate means that "God takes and has time for us."[46] And it means humanity is a creature necessarily conditioned by time. The humanity of Jesus

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[42] Ibid., 437. In III/1, Barth wrote that time is the "form of existence of the creature"—and as such, the time of Jesus Christ is the "true counterpart" and prototype of the time of creation. See III/1, 74, 76.
[43] On the 'Today' of Christ's time, see Ibid., 466-473.
[44] Ibid., 440.
[45] Ibid., 518.
[46] Ibid., 519.

shows time is the form of human existence and life; time is real, and it is both noetically and ontologically inextricable from 'life.'[47] There is an "inextricable unity of man and time."[48]

For Barth, time clarifies and reinforces the extrinsic basis of human life and existence. Humanity's inability to take possession of time—we cannot make the future past, or the past future—indicates that we are "ordained by a higher power than existence itself," that we do not "have [this] existence and nature autonomously, but as they are given by God."[49] In this way, time functions as an "exact parallel" to the role the Spirit plays in humanity's constitution. This givenness of life that time indicates necessarily comes to us within the limits of birth and death.[50] Just as having a body requires a definite place, human life exists in an "allotted span," the "limited space, which he needs for this fulfillment [of his life] and which is given him for this purpose." Human life is ordered by both our resistance to and affirmation of such limits. On the one side, the "abstract desire for life, life hungering for life" protests against limits. While Barth rejects the legitimacy of such a protest on the basis of any kind of naturalized account of 'life,' he does argue that humanity's determination by God and other humans grounds a legitimate demand for duration, such that it would be an "unwarrantable denial of itself" for the creature "not to demand duration."[51] However, this sanctioned discontent with life's limits is not the final word: Barth contends it is a part of humanity's creaturely status that he live within the boundaries of a beginning and end. The eternal life of God is "self-grounded and self-creative, welling up from within itself." But the extrinsic basis of human life requires that it have a life in which "beginning and end are distinct, and therefore constitute its boundaries."[52] Consequently, the sanctioned discontent with these limits cannot undermine the affirmation of such boundaries as part of humanity's creaturely life.

Such limits are not negative or even neutral features of life, but rather indicate that human life is a definite 'offer' from God. Because humanity's completion and end is *God*, a life of endless duration could not constitute the creature's perfection. Such a life would supply only permanent unrest, rather than real satisfaction.[53] However, when our limits are seen against a

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[47] Ibid., 522.
[48] Ibid., 524.
[49] Ibid., 525.
[50] As I have previously considered his reflections on optimism and pessimism (in chapter four), which are located here, I pass over these aspects. See Ibid., 527-553.
[51] Ibid., 557.
[52] Ibid., 559.
[53] Ibid., 562.

theological backdrop they lose their character as threats and even provide an assurance humanity will find what it seeks. Such a reconfiguration means life is not simply a "series of opportunities" with only the "possibility of satisfaction." Instead, Barth suggests that "an offer [*angebot*] must be made which is greater and more powerful than its deepest need or the most urgent question to which it is an answer." When life becomes such an 'offer,' it is "upheld and sustained…and finally satisfied." Only when life takes on this definite, irreversible, and guaranteed character as a limited life from God can one have "full satisfaction" in the "realisation of its determination" for the covenant.[54]

This intensification of life's significance through the theological reconfiguration of its limits is accompanied by a clarifying of God's graciousness to humanity. Life only become unremittingly positive when we are confronted by the "God who limits it," rather than by abstractly reflecting upon our birth and death. Yet birth and death have an irreplaceable heuristic significance for clarifying God's gracious action to us. Barth has no interest in articulating the value of an individual's life through a comparison to non-existence, as moral philosophers are wont to do; it is God, rather than the void, who we face at the "frontiers of our time."[55] The longing for infinite duration is only completely extirpated when we realize that limits are necessary if God is to be our "Counterpart and our Neighbor." Such limits thus become an "expression of the divine affirmation under which we stand." This is only possible, however, if we are met at our limits by the gracious God, rather than an abstract deity.[56] Pursuing such a question through reflecting upon our limits forces a stark binary upon us: either "the gracious God (and He alone) is for us, or nothingness is the abyss from which we have emerged and to which we shall return." That God is for us is "clear and essential" to us at the limits.[57] Human nature is thus intrinsically limited, and these limits disclose the "proximity of [God's] free grace in this clarity."[58] How this plays out in the context of origins is the theme of the next subsection.

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[54] Ibid., 563. For German text, see *Die kirchliche Dogmatik,* vol. III/2, (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), 684. Citations to the German texts abbreviate the title to *KD* and the relevant volume.
[55] Ibid., 564.
[56] Ibid., 567.
[57] Ibid., 569.
[58] Ibid.

6.2.2 The Ecclesiastical 'Whence' and Natural Parenthood

For Barth, asking about the *whence?* of humanity means "even from my origin I am threatened by annihilation, being marked as a being which can advance towards non-existence."[59] While Barth argues such a possibility lies beneath the interest in history, we "derive from this God." As Barth puts it, we "certainly come from non-being, but we do not come from nothing"—from the chaos that stands in hostile opposition to God because God has negated it by uttering His Yes to creation.[60] Instead, we come from the "being, speaking and action of the eternal God who has preceded us" in time.[61] In this way, the "inner life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is the "content of the time before our time, the meaning of the pre-history before our history."[62] The nature of our beginning becomes a kind of promise, such that it indicates He will "surely guarantee the whole of our life."[63]

As our knowledge of humanity's origins is governed by revelation, it is mediated by the people of God. Barth's prioritization of the covenant requires such a move, and thrusts his account of humanity's *whence* into the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. Barth's treatment of Christ's time emphasizes the continuity of the two communities' posture of *hope*. The New Testament confirms and ratifies Israel's expectant waiting for the Messiah, the "Yesterday" of Christ's life.[64] The resurrection provides the apostolic community a "foretaste of their inheritance and a glimpse of the new creation." Christian hope thus grasps the "promise implicit in the origin of their existence," and from this beginning lives "with a view to its continuation and completion." The church is necessarily, then, a "gathering in this hope."[65] The apostles who saw the hope of Israel fulfilled "began to wait as never before, together with the fathers of the old covenant…"[66] The Christian thus stands, in Barth's understanding, between "two choirs singing antiphonally—the apostles on

[59] Ibid., 574. There is a correspondence between the creature and Christ in this respect, namely that the *from* materially impacts the *for*: the answer to our 'whence' is intertwined with our determination for the covenant.
[60] Ibid., 576.
[61] Ibid., 577.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 475.
[65] Ibid., 489.
[66] Ibid., 493.

one side and the prophets on the other."[67] For the church, that song is one of "patient joy and joyful patience…" as it waits the return of the Lord.[68]

Yet this emphasis on continuity disappears in Barth's discussion of the individual's *whence*. Instead, Barth argues the New Testament transposes the Old Testament's depiction of parents as mediators and progenitors into an ecclesiastical key. For Israel, mothers and fathers have an exalted position because they are either "the direct witnesses or the accredited narrators" of Israel's calling by God.[69] They "serve as [the Israelite's] sureties." In this way, natural parents stand between the individual and God: while life in the land depends on "the *prius* of [God's] election and covenant…father and mother are the concrete, visible embodiments of this divine *prius*."[70] The individual thus finds meaning and significance in their "participation in this history and in the accompanying mediation of the divine promise and command from generation to generation."[71] However, such security is founded not upon natural generation *per se*, as that would violate Barth's argument we saw in III/1 that procreation does not intrinsically secure the *imago Dei.* Rather, parents may bestow an Abrahamic blessing, which indicates "the word, spoken in power as God's own Word, of election, covenant, salvation and hope…" stands behind every Israelite's life.[72] Such a blessing is "never a self-evident reality or natural condition," but must (alongside circumcision) "be declared afresh with every generation." This freedom to bless and receive blessing, Barth suggests, is the "Old Testament's answer to the *whence* of humanity's natural life."[73]

In transforming the 'blessing' into baptism, however, the New Testament relativizes the status of natural parents and emphasizes ecclesiology in their place. Despite the apostolic communities' intense interest in Christ's "Yesterday" of the Old Testament, there is no blessing of one Christian to another as in the Old Testament. Instead, the "divine word of blessing, as the New Testament sees it, has been uttered once and for all in the incarnation of the Word of God…and therefore cannot be repeated."[74] The individual Christian thus "lives directly by the beginning" of Christ's advent, and the church mediates *only* this beginning without building on

[67] Ibid., 496.
[68] Ibid., 492.
[69] Ibid., 579.
[70] Ibid.,.
[71] Ibid., 583.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 580.
[74] Ibid., 582.

its antiquity—as Israel's transmission of the Abrahamic blessing does.[75] The completion of the covenant in Jesus Christ is "now the *prius* for every human life," rather than mother and father.[76] The baptism that displaces the blessing is an exclusively individual affair, as it identifies a "direct relationship of the individual Christian to Jesus." In salvation, "no man can stand proxy for him."[77] Barth's wariness about infant baptism is founded (here) upon the individual's immediate origins in God; such a practice confuses the Church with a "natural and historical entity like Israel."[78]

Barth's ecclesiastical reconfiguration of the Abrahamic 'blessing' corresponds to his transformation of 'fruitfulness,' a category that disappears after the discussion of the first creation account in III/1 but which reappears here. The church's life is marked by whether it "understands and takes seriously and turns to good account"—makes fruitful—its "present existence under the lordship of Jesus in the form of the Spirit as considered in relation to the future."[79] However, such fruitfulness does not become the Church's possession, as the blessing is Israel's. The Church mediates the individual's origins in Jesus Christ's resurrection—without standing between it and the individual.[80] Moreover, the resurrection that founds the church announces "the end of time…" Time continues only to allow people "to repent and believe the Gospel…"[81] Barth seems to indicate that the present fruitfulness of the church is tied to its position waiting for this end. The church will not always have a future; as "the event of creation took place in a present without a past, so this event is that of a present without a future…"[82]

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[75] Ibid., 584.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 585.
[78] Ibid. Barth notes in III/3 that God preserves the creature indirectly, not through a direct or immediate act. Yet his emphasis there falls upon the preservation of the species, whereas his description of humanity's *whence?* intensely focuses on the immediacy of each individual's origins in God. See III/3, 63 ff.
[79] Ibid., 505. Barth's appeal to Matthew 26:29 here suggests he is using organic rather than procreative imagery. However, the association of ecclesiastical 'fruit' in such close context to the language of 'blessing' also corresponds to his description of the fruitfulness of vegetative life as a precedence for human procreation in III/1.
[80] As Travis McMaken writes, the church "points individuals back to their eternal election in Jesus Christ," but the "mode of mediation is different" from Israel. Eberhard Jüngel writes that the "Church represents Christ by renouncing any self-representation." It is precisely this feature that animates Barth's understanding of Mary, as we shall see. W. Travis McMaken, *The Sign of the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 126, quoting Jüngel.
[81] *CD* III/2, 622.
[82] Ibid., 624. The "Easter story," Barth writes in I/2, speaks of "a present without any future, of an eternal presence of God in time" (114).

When Christ returns the "secret of Calvary will be revealed," but "nothing further will follow from this happening…"[83]

Barth's ecclesiastical reconfiguration of the 'whence' of human life is motivated by the prioritization of the covenant over the temporally prior emergence of organic human life within the womb. Such a reconfiguration takes over the Old Testament's account of the Abrahamic blessing and ecclesiastically reframes the fruitfulness to which humanity is ordered. The primacy of this ecclesiastical answer, though, risks leaving the natural origins of human life theologically insignificant or empty. Such an account thus clarifies the reasons why he thinks natural family bonds are relativized—and it indicates the discontinuity between the New and Old Testaments with respect to procreation is not as sharp as Barth's emphasis on the New Testament's abrogation of the duty to procreate would indicate. While baptism replaces the blessing as the answer to the whence, Barth suggests the latter is not secured by procreation *per se*. Rather, the blessing is an act by which the child is inducted not only as a member of Israel as a natural people but of Israel as bearers of the covenant. Such an approach is consistent with the idea that the *imago Dei* is not transmitted through procreation. Yet it also leaves both procreation and one's natural origins theologically inert.

6.2.3 Creaturely Limits as Natural Signs

While the primary answer to the humanity's *whence* is ecclesiastical (namely, baptism), Barth's doctrine of providence in III/3 affords humanity's limits special prominence in indicating God's Lordship over creation. In III/2, Barth argued humanity's life in time bears witness to God's action and presence—even if we do not realize it. "Time as the form of human existence," he writes, is "always in itself and as such a silent but persistent song of praise to God."[84] Barth even proposes that if we are "to speak of prevenient grace it is difficult to see in what better form it may be perceived and grasped than in the simple fact that time is given to us men."[85] Barth develops this theme in III/3, suggesting that the limits of human life are among

[83] Ibid. As Nathan Hitchcock writes, it is "not at all clear as to how Barth sees human flourishing to continue in any real way at the return of Christ." Jesus "seals and ends all activity," a position that makes Barth's view "cousin to the family of panentheists." Hitchcock, *Resurrection*, 168-169.
[84] Ibid., 525.
[85] Ibid. Time is a "secret rustling of the Holy Spirit," such that in this form of our existence we are "actually confronted by the presence and gift of God's grace."

the “certain constant elements” that stand in a “special relationship to the history of the covenant and salvation.”[86] Such constants—which include the history of the church, of the Jews, and of Scripture—are “signs and witnesses” that the world is really ruled by God.[87] Barth acknowledges that including humanity’s limits of birth and death risks moving theology into the “equivocal sphere of creaturely occurrence in general,” which would introduce an untenable natural theology.[88] To avoid this, Barth makes his argument conditional: if humanity’s limits bear witness to the Triune God, they have the advantage of being “contemplated directly.”[89] The other signs are not “present to any of us so continuously and naturally and self-evidently.” The recognition of such limits as bearing witness to God still hangs on special revelation—but regardless of whether humanity realizes it, “each individual man as such is a sign and testimony in this respect.”[90]

On this basis, Barth recapitulates and expands upon the various ways humanity’s *whence* and *whither* bear witness to God’s action in Scripture. First, both birth and death signify novelty: in them “takes place something absolutely unpredictable, something entirely new, something that was never there before.”[91] However, it is not novelty *per se* they indicate but rather the irrepeatable acts of God: birth and death are “unique and incomparable” because they “reflect the two great acts of God at the beginning and end of all things, the creation and the consummation.”[92] Second, birth and death both indicate that human spontaneous action and freedom is bounded by God’s Lordship, as they reveal that life is “something which I myself cannot take, or give, or maintain; something which is ordained and given to me.”[93] Barth contends that it makes no difference whether we call “this ordination permission or command; as permission it is command, and as command permission.”[94] That human life is “disposed and limited” reveals that “there are divine decrees.”[95]

The limits of birth and death are also essential, though, for understanding the irrepeatable character of each individual and the dynamics of their history. In both, the individual is “utterly

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[86] *CD* III/3, 199.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., 226.
[89] Ibid., 227.
[90] Ibid., 228.
[91] Ibid., 229.
[92] Ibid., 230.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 231.

himself, absolutely original, and absolutely alone."[96] Such limits reveal the "once-for-allness" of life, in that they set the "particular place and function" that belongs to an "irreplaceable, indispensable and non-interchangeable" individual. Such irrepeatability, Barth contends, reflects the "eternal singleness of God Himself."[97] But it is the differences of birth and death that allow life to take on the character of history. Development and decay between the frontiers are "both repetitions of the new fact of our birth and anticipations of the new fact of our death."[98] The drama of the wrestling with these two forces makes life a definite decision, a "true history."[99] And in the history of a particular life there "takes place *in nuce,* but very truly, all history."[100]

Barth's account of the *whence* and *whither* thus comes within a hair's breadth of allowing for a natural theology. Birth and death do not intrinsically generate the recognition of their quality as natural signs and witnesses to God's Lordship; they are revealed as such only by Jesus Christ. Yet within that context, they are uniquely potent natural signs that illuminate the irrepeatableness of every individual and force upon us the realization that our life is surrounded and determined on every side by God, rather than non-existence or chaos. However, Barth's account of the providential significance of *origins* includes nothing about the meaning or significance of being begotten by and from *parents*. The absence is commensurate with the rest of his view: Barth is evaluating the way in which the question of origins stands as a natural sign for God's Lordship, and pointing to natural parents would risk collapsing them together in a way that would return him to an (allegedly) Old Testament, Jewish way of thinking. But the occurrence of this gap alongside Barth's *ecclesiastical* reconfiguration of the *whence* in III/2 makes such an absence even more palpable. Though Barth's approach to providence recovers the theological significance of our natural origins, it develops it almost exclusively along two lines: the individual and the church, with nothing in between.

However, Barth's evaluation of human limits still adds a valuable line of thought to this thesis, namely, that birth and death *intensify* the significance of life, rather than corrode it.

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[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., 232.

[98] Ibid., 230.

[99] Ibid., 233.

[100] Ibid., 234. Compare with Barth's suggestion in III/1 that history's emergence happens through an encounter with something that transcends an object, so that it is "compelled and enabled to transcend itself in response and in relation to this new factor." (III/1, 158) Here Barth seems to present this 'new factor' as entirely internal to an individual life.

Barth's methodological commitment that time is the intrinsic and inescapable form of human existence entails that the resurrection sanctions life's limits, rather than undermines them. Additionally, locating the individual against the backdrop of God rather than non-existence means there is no neutrality beneath or behind humanity's life: the status of every human being as 'given' by God means their life is fundamentally and ineradicably a benefit or good. The theocentric basis of human life gives it the character of an *offer* from God, which makes it uniquely and irreplaceably valuable. As Barth writes in the III/4's special ethics of life within its limits, because "this unique being in temporal limitation is an offer made to man" by God, it is "surely worthy of honour, attention and reflection, even though its significance may not be immediately apparent."[101]

6.3 The Respect for Life and Reasons to Create

The ethics of 'freedom for life' in III/4 demands respect toward humanity's organic constitution—which Barth had described as a "saving fact." Even though Barth's theological anthropology had deliberately (and perhaps inconsistently) omitted any mention of humanity's reproductive powers or the sexual dimorphism that precedes the origin of new human life, his ethics of life contains resources to defend a presumptive willingness to procreate.

For Barth, the particularity and irrepeatability of each human life is linked to the specificity of the divine command. The command of God with respect to life takes the distinct form of the freedom to exist "as a living being of this particular, i.e., human structure." Such a freedom presupposes the freedom for God and fellow-humanity, yet accentuates the particularity of the individual and their constitution (which is a presupposition of their encounter with God). It is the freedom for life that preserves the other freedoms from remaining "singularly majestic but also singularly problematic and docetic." In other words, the command of God reaches 'all the way down' into humanity's constitution: it includes humanity's "psycho-physical act of being as such." Were that not the case, there would be a 'private' realm into which humanity might retreat, an "ethical vacuum."[102] Barth's ethics thus cannot be divorced from the organic structure of individual life, as separating the natural and the moral

[101] *CD* III/4, 572.
[102] Ibid., 325.

undermines the ability to "ward off the danger that, in so far as the life of man is below that point, however excellent the ethics above it, it is surrendered to a naturalistic ethics of opportunism and expediency."[103]

Barth's recapitulation of life's theological significance reaffirms its extrinsic basis in God, and its character as benefit or good for the recipient. Barth opens with the claim that life "is a loan," which depends "entirely on the fact that God addresses him."[104] Such a loan has the form of the differentiated wholeness as soul and body, which are held together by the "quickening Spirit."[105] The confidence we have in humanity's rational constitution is not secured by the constitution itself, but by "the fact that God addresses him as a rational creature…"[106] As a loan, however, humanity is held responsible as "a particular individual, this man." The command of God claims individuals in their particularity—and by doing so "confirms" them in that particularity.[107] As it is stretched across time, life cannot be a possession, but can "only become constantly real in virtue of the free action of the life-giving divine Spirit."[108] Humanity has independence: the Word of God "presupposes a productive subject, a being capable of making for himself a new beginning with his being."[109] Yet such spontaneous and free movement is commensurate with the fact that humanity belongs to God. Such 'belonging' is constituted by the fact that humanity has its origin in God's address—that we are *from* God. Yet Barth suggests that this "origin is also the goal," so that even from the outset humanity's life is an "existence orientated on His service and praise, on the search for Him and the doing of His will."[110] This Godward determination is, as we have seen, commensurate with the determination toward our fellow-humanity. But it also gives the particularity of the divine command a universal dimension or aspect, as it requires solidarity with all others whom God has similarly addressed. Each individual addressed by God "recognizes himself in the other." The "natural and historical relations" are only the "concrete conditions in which this solidarity achieves form, and is visible, and becomes a problem, to him and them."[111] Such an approach entails a

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[103] Ibid., 326.
[104] Ibid., 327.
[105] Ibid., 328.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., 330.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid., 331.

convertibility of the reasons ‘life’ provides: what the command of God requires for an individual who receives it includes a recognition that all other human beings have been similarly addressed. But such a theocentric basis for life also means that its recipients do not stand beneath an “obscure fate or neutral decree” but “in receipt of a divine benefit.”[112] While a penultimate good, created life is still a benefit because it provides the “one great opportunity of meeting God and rejoicing in his praise.” Anywhere we “have to deal with a living soul, we have to do *eo ipso* with this divine miracle of grace.” Such an unmerited blessing calls into question whether we will make our life both active and fruitful.[113]

Barth specifies the form the command of God takes toward the loan of life around ‘respect.’ Respect is the response to the Word of God within the realm of life: life “does not itself create this respect. The command of God creates respect for it.”[114] Specifically, Barth contends the “birth of Jesus Christ as such is the revelation of the command as that of respect for life.”[115] This notion of ‘respect’ is distinct from the juridical, formalistic connotations that the term sometimes acquires. Instead, Barth suggests it means the “an adoption of the distance proper in face of a mystery.” Though humanity lives in the limits established by God, within these limits it “must always be honoured with new wonder.”[116]

However, ‘respect’ also requires a practical character—and here Barth’s ethics of life echoes the ‘confidence in life’ he endorses in his procreative ethics. Respect demands life must be “affirmed and willed by man.” Such an affirmation and willing is inclusive of both one’s own life and other human beings, as “egoism and altruism are false antitheses…” Additionally, affirmation is not only attitudinal but active. The affirmation of life consists in “our making the use [of our life] prescribed by its nature as seen in these points.”[117] The will affirms the value of life through active and responsible obedience, which must be intentional: we cannot live “accidentally, irresolutely, without plan or responsibility.” But this contention that an active, responsible affirmation of life is an obligation turns immediately to the exhortation that we “cannot and must not seriously tire of life” (*des Lebens nicht ernstlich müde werden*).[118] Such a

[112] Ibid., 336.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., 339.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., 341.
[118] Ibid. *KD* III/4, 387.

formulation evokes Barth's prior claim from his ethics of procreation that it is sometimes the "duty of the Christian community to awaken…people [who have] grown tired of life…" (*bestimmten lebensmüden*) to the value of procreation.[119] Here, this 'wakefulness' to life depends upon grasping its theocentric character. Evoking discussions of the intensified value of life within its limits as given by God, Barth reasserts that life is "always an offer waiting for man's will, determination and readiness for action."[120]

This practical affirmation of life includes and extends to humanity's 'sexual' impulses and powers, in such a way that a presumptive rejection of contraception seems warranted *if* Barth means to include the reproductive dimensions of such powers. Barth's anthropological investigation bracketed humanity's reproductive powers from consideration, but his ethics of life seems to reintroduce them. Respect for life positively means respecting the "requirements of metabolism and the impulses of sexuality."[121] These impulsive or vegetative aspects of life must be affirmed *humanly.* They are not absolute; they have no "independent right and dignity."[122] Instead, they must be exercised "only in co-ordination with the rational actions of the human soul…"[123] Yet as they are exercised in alignment with the command of God, they may really be actualized. The command of God means that a life humanly lived not only "may but should" be lived in such a way that the animal impulses are "lived and not denied." Asceticism might be demanded by God. Yet such impulses deserve "conditional respect," so that this dimension of human life "can claim validity within those limits and until a clear command to the contrary is heard from the One who really knows and rules it."[124] In other words, the weighting of the reasons with respect to sexual impulses makes their use presumptively licit, such that denying them requires an explicit command to the contrary.

However, there is a question about whether Barth's affirmation of these animal impulses includes their procreative dimension. Barth ties the affirmation of such powers to the recognition that life is a unique 'offer' from God. In his ethics of procreation, Barth had written that sexual intercourse "as the physical completion of life-partnership in marriage can always

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[119] Ibid., 268. *KD* III/4, 301.
[120] Ibid., 341.
[121] Ibid., 344.
[122] Ibid., 345.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid., 346.

be, not merely human action, but an offer of divine goodness…"[125] Barth's suggestion that sexual intercourse *can* always be an 'offer' of divine goodness suggests there are conditions in which it is not such an offer. So there is an open question, from that angle, about whether the animal impulses Barth has in mind in this affirmation include its reproductive dimension. However, his understanding of the command's pervasiveness for humanity's organic existence provides some reason to think every instance of fecund sexual activity has this character. Barth argues humanity's constitution is 'adapted' to the covenant, that it is a 'saving fact,' and that it "has an inner relation to God's turning towards man and to the salvation which God intends for him."[126] If God's command does not float above our gametes, as it does not float above our bodies, then a "conditional respect" for life would entail a morally significant difference between abstaining from beginning a reproductive process through intercourse and contradicting it through contraception—and a corresponding presumption against the latter.

6.4 The Prospects and Limits of Barth's Account of Life

Barth's account of the nature and theological value of human life helps sharpen the argument for a presumptive, theologically-animated pro-natalism *post Christum natum*—and also demonstrates the limits of Barth's resources for that task. Humanity's organic existence is dependent upon the gracious gift of the animating Holy Spirit, who makes possible human life as such. While Barth brackets humanity's reproductive powers while emphasizing our orientation to the covenant, his defense of the integrated, differentiated wholeness of body and soul entail no reaches of humanity's organic existence are safe from the commanding presence of God. This depiction of the 'given' or 'extrinsic' basis of human life was sharpened through Barth's discussion of its limits. While birth is an involuntary event, the primary answer to humanity's *whence* is baptism, rather than the active blessing from natural parents (which takes the Abrahamic form in the Old Testament)—a move that construes the question of life's origin in theological and ecclesiastical terms, rather than phenomenological or biological terms. Such an account helps explain why the similarities of Israel and the Church's hope in the Messiah does not translate into continuity in how they approach marriage and parenthood: by locating

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[125] Ibid., 269-270; *KD*, III/4, 302.
[126] *CD* III/2, 347.

the answer to *whence* in baptism, rather than the Abrahamic blessing, Barth relegates natural parenthood to a sphere that is secondary to the church. As parents no longer transmit the blessing, they can no longer stand as surety for children, as in Israel. The association of blessing and procreation that Barth notes in his first creation account thus disappears from view.[127] Barth's contention that the New Testament does away with the obligation to procreate is matched by his argument that the New Testament abrogates the parents' mediatorial role toward the child. When Barth returns to our origins in his doctrine of providence, he leaves natural parents out of his analysis. The answer to humanity's origins is developed in individualistic and ecclesiastical terms, not genealogical ones.

Still, reflecting on our natural origins intensifies the value of each individual life. At our limits, we encounter *God*—not non-existence. The difference raises the stakes for such encounters, and the life in between. Locating life within its limits against a theocentric backdrop alters it into a series of 'opportunities' to an 'offer' from and to God. In that way, the *whence* and *whither* of life are mutually implicating: it is because we have our origins in God that we return to Him. The "gift" of life (primarily) is described as a loan in Barth's ethics, for this reason: what we have received will be returned. The 'life' humanity is commanded to respect is not reducible to its organic existence—Barth's analysis of the command to respect life includes extensive reflections on health, power and joy, though I did not take them up here. But it at least includes life's organic dimension, including humanity's reproductive powers. Such an account entails that a presumptive affirmation of reproductive powers is incumbent upon us, such that it takes a special command in order to remain voluntarily childless.

This attempt to ground a pro-natalism within an affirmation of life has its virtues. If nothing else, it requires qualifying Gary Deddo's critique that Barth frames procreation "almost exclusively in terms of the biological event."[128] Such a description certainly seems to fit Barth's account of procreation in his doctrine of creation, his formal anthropology, and even his

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[127] Kendall Soulen objects to the semi-gnosticism beneath Barth's account that the eschaton brings time and history to a close—a closure that correlates with the dissolution of genealogy's theological significance. But it could also be correlated with the near-total absence of any kind of conception of natural procreation as an indicator of divine blessing or favor. The nearest Barth comes there to discussing children as a "blessing" is in full endorsement of Ernst Michel's suggestion that revealing the "full potentiality [of children] as blessing" requires the "responsible Yes of parents…" Barth's emphasis falls on the necessity of responsibility in order to receive that blessing fully. (III/4, 271.) See R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 115 ff. Soulen's critique that Barth's account of the eschaton as ending time is tacitly semi-gnostic has been made more robustly by Nathan Hitchcock. See Hitchcock, *Resurrection*.
[128] Deddo, *Theology*, 349.

doctrine of sex and marriage. Nor does Barth's account of the *whence* of humanity, with its prioritization of the covenantal answer and its corresponding bracketing of natural parenthood do much to alleviate the concern. However, from the standpoint of the covenant and the command there can be no hint of it being "*merely*" a biological event. Humanity's organic life in time is a "saving fact," a "silent but persistent song of praise to God," an indicator of God's prevenient grace. From the standpoint of the covenant, human life within its limits takes on the character of an 'offer' from God—as can sexual intercourse. This quality of human organic life is intrinsic to it: Barth repeatedly argues humanity bears witness to its life in God without realizing it. However, this witness is only known as such in light of the revelation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ.

Additionally, the durable resilience of humanity's constitution supplies grounds to challenge Barth's argument that marriage and procreation are independent spheres. As we saw in the previous chapter, Barth argues that every individual's life is conditioned by marriage, whether they marry or not. The command of God takes distinct forms in marriage and procreation, as the former is possible without the latter. As we saw, Barth does not consider whether every marriage is *conditioned by* procreation. But if the divine offer of life is 'built in,' so to speak, to humanity's reproductive powers, then it inherently structures sexual acts—whether through the positive affirmation of such powers or their repudiation. Much then hangs on whether sexual acts 'can' be a divine offer of life, or whether they necessarily are such.

At the same time, locating the pro-natalist affirmation of humanity's procreative powers beneath the rubric of 'life' seems to dislocate the reason to procreate from the matrix of parenthood and childhood that gives it intelligibility (a problem we saw in Kass' account of life). In his discussion of the first creation account, Barth had observed the inextricable relationship between life and reproduction. While the link emerged first in a vegetative context, Barth allowed that it was a precedent for human procreation. Yet his treatment of humanity's constitution and organic life downplays this intrinsically reproductive dimension, a move buttressed by Barth's suggestion that the New Testament is uninterested in Jesus' maleness. The absence of this reproductive dimension of life corresponds to Barth's emphasis on humanity's origins as deriving immediately in and from God, rather than our natural parents. While Barth's reintroduction of our 'sexual impulses' in his special ethics comes near locating life within a genealogical matrix of reception and transmission, it is not clear that Barth had such an aim in

mind—or whether the independence of marriage and procreation he defends generates a corresponding independence of such 'sexual impulses' and procreation. Given the absence of life's reproductive dimensions elsewhere in his description of its origins and maturity, such a reading seems plausible. Against it lies Barth's association of the 'confidence in life' with the willingness to procreate. However, on either reading the theological dimensions of 'life' Barth develops seem to be untethered from parenthood and childhood as statuses that precede and inform the nature and content of humanity's organic existence.

Furthermore, Barth's reticence to argue for continuity between the Old and New Testament's approaches to procreation fails to fully integrate his methodological principle that the resurrection cannot mean the diminution of life's value within its limits. The resurrection reveals that life in its limits is penultimate, rather than ultimate. But such a revelation is also an intensification of the value of each life from a series of opportunities to an offer from God. Barth's suggestion sexual intercourse can be a corresponding 'offer' raises the possibility that the resurrection intensifies the affirmation and respect owed to humanity's reproductive powers—rather than entails their relativization and diminishment. Such an argument would push Barth's account, of course: his transposition of humanity's fruitfulness into an ecclesiastical key does not offer a corresponding theological affirmation of our procreative powers, leaving them inert with respect to work of the church. Theologically endorsing procreation also risks reverting the Church into a 'natural people.' The absence of an eschatological intensification of procreation thus fits Barth's wariness about infant baptism and his interest keeping the Church from a "very heathen or even Jewish" pro-natalism. But it seems incommensurate with his claim that the resurrection requires an intensification of natural human life. That is: if Barth is right about the resurrection's affirmation of life's natural limits, then there are grounds to think that procreation receives a 'new consecration' in the eschaton, which Barth thinks is reserved for marriage.

I suspect the absence of an eschatological intensification of reproductive powers, even though the child's origins are immediately in God, is tied to the asymmetry Barth develops between the significance of *being born* and of *giving birth.* For Barth, an individual's origins reflects the "beginning…of all things," the creation.[129] Yet as we saw in Barth's doctrine of creation, he explicitly distances procreating from participating in God's work of creation. Such

[129] *CD* III/3, 230.

an asymmetry calls into question whether the parents' reasons to procreate (life) are convertible for the child. To put the problem another way, there is a gap between the reasons progenitors have to actualize their own reproductive powers (namely, their recognition of the goodness of life) and the reasons or significance that governs the child's biological origins or existence. The progenitors have only 'life' to explain their actions, without any kind of theistic correspondence; but progeny explains their origins primarily through divine action, with human action in a secondary position. And, as Barth seems to indicate in his special ethics of parents and children, the child's existence is contingent for the parents (they could have had a different one), but the parent's existence is necessary for the child. Such asymmetries raise questions about whether parental reasons for procreating, and the significance of parental action, are equivalent for children.

The next chapter will thus take up the question of whether and how the eschatological irruption of Christ's birth affects our understanding of natural parenthood's positive significance. While this chapter considered the question of 'life' and humanity's biological constitution, the next will consider Barth's discussion of the value and limits of biological bonds. As we have seen, Barth thinks that the early church's investment in the time of Jesus Christ includes his 'Yesterday' of Israel and the Old Testament. However, the church has long had an intense interest in what we might call the 'organic Yesterday' who precedes Jesus' life: Mary. Exploring Barth's account of Mary will clarify why he is concerned to protect the asymmetrical nature of parenthood and childhood and will raise questions about how we understand the dual, divine-human agency at work in procreating. Barth argues that the affirmation of 'life' takes the form of responsible action. Considering the theological significance Barth ascribes to the biological presupposition of Jesus' life—Mary—will help reframe the question of the value of procreative bonds away from biological correspondence or similarity toward how they manifest a peculiar form of human agency. The completion of this argument, though, will not emerge until Chapter Eight.

Chapter Seven

Mary and the Eschatological Confirmation of Procreative Bonds

While Barth's account of procreation's theological significance emphasizes its relativization *post Christum natum,* the previous chapter uncovered reasons within his theological anthropology and corresponding ethics of life to adopt a presumptively pro-natalist stance. Such an account, however, is narrowly focused on acknowledging the due import of the sexual and reproductive impulses—and says nothing about whether the bonds formed through procreation themselves might bear theological weight or significance. As we saw, Barth's understanding of a person's origins emphasizes the immediacy of an individual's life in God, as demonstrated by the blessing in the Old Testament and baptism in the New—which corresponds to Barth's distinction between generation and forming the *imago Dei.* The primacy of baptism as an explanation for the 'whence' of humanity destabilizes the role of parents, undoing the Jewish blessing, which is bestowed through family lines. This marginalization of the broader sphere of 'genealogy' still leaves open questions about the narrower sphere of parents and children, and the position of procreation and being born between it.

Barth's ethic is founded upon his prioritization of the covenant for understanding creation's significance, and the corresponding attempt to found general anthropological norms and divine commands in Christology. It is thus surprising how little Barth makes explicit use of the peculiarities of Christ's conception as a human to inform his special ethics of parents and children. Barth is aware of the possibility of doing so: he notes in his discussion of the Virgin Birth that it would have been simpler and more valuable for Christian ethics had Christ become incarnate through ordinary procreation, as the "natural fruit of an elect and specially blessed" married couple.[1] But as Dustin Resch writes, Barth "does not address the difficulties that he suggests the Virgin Birth presents for these themes."[2] One possible explanation is that the gap fits Barth's priorities in his formal anthropology, which emphasizes that Jesus is *from* God and *for* God and His fellows—leaving the claim that he is *from* His fellows to a secondary or

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[1] *CD* I/2, 190.

[2] Resch, *Interpretation*, 88. While Christ's conception by the Holy Spirit could plausibly be used to fund a critique of abortion, Barth instead argues the embryo is independent based on embryology. The nearest he comes to mentioning Christ's conception is his claim the "true light of the world shines already in the darkness of the mother's womb" (III/4, 416).

incidental position. Another possibility, though, is that Barth really does detect a certain kinship between Jewish and Roman Catholic approaches to procreation, and avoids funding his special ethics with direct consideration of Christ's human origins so as to not establish Christology and Mariology on an equal plane.[3]

But this lacuna is even more curious given Barth's theological prioritization of Jesus Christ. Christocentrism supplies at least one *prima facie* reason for treating Christ's birth as a reason to affirm procreation's theological significance: the second Adam has human parents, while the first Adam does not. That Christ has a mother from whom He is, in *some* sense, heir and biological kin raises the possibility that the eschatological disclosure of Christ's birth could be construed as an intensification of procreation and genealogy's theological significance, rather than their fulfillment and completion. It is easy to see how a Jewish pro-natalism and Roman Catholic account of Mariology might have much in common.

This chapter thus considers the value Barth sees in procreative bonds by putting Barth's treatment of Mariology and the Virgin Birth in I/2 in constructive dialogue with III/4's discussion of parents and children. I first consider Barth's concern to bracket Mary from having any capacity for God, before exploring his analysis of the twin claims that Christ was *born* and born *of a virgin.* Barth's concern to protect the primacy of Christ's conception for understanding the theological significance of the Virgin Birth keeps Mariology in a subordinate position to Christology. I suggest that Barth maintains this asymmetrical priority on children in his special ethics by considering the respect children owe parents. I also evaluate Barth's discussion of the 'borderline' case between parents and children, and suggest that the eschatological significance of God's command founds an intensification of the creational norm of natural parenthood, not its dissolution. As these two aspects require a reconfiguration of Mary's position within dogmatic ethics, I argue that there is room within Barth's theology to construe her as the first member of the new creation—a move that would ground procreation *within* the eschatological life, and so animate a much stronger pro-natalist presumption than Barth otherwise allows. I reserve the completion of this argument, and indeed this dissertation, until the next chapter, which will explore questions of procreative agency and the eschatological

[3] As quoted earlier, Werpehowski makes this association, suggesting that Barth's "limited treatment is a reluctance to endorse any but the most qualified 'pro-natalism' as over against, by his (perhaps mistaken) lights, Roman Catholic and Jewish thought." See "Reading," 404.

intensification of procreation's theological import for parents and children through the lens of Barth's understanding of honour.

7.1 The Primacy of Christology for Mariology

Barth's account of Mary's relation to Christology in I/2 is indicative of the challenge he faces in founding anthropology upon Christology without either allowing an illicit natural theology or admitting a corresponding preparation in human nature for God's grace. For Barth, the use of *theotokos* is a litmus test for whether theologians have properly understood the *vere Deus vere homo* of the incarnation—provided that such a description does not give rise to an "independent Mariology," but remains an "auxiliary christological proposition." The 'mother of God' correlates with the 'Word became flesh' in two ways. First, Mary's designation as Christ's *mother* means in the Incarnation we are "not concerned with a creation out of nothing." That the Word became flesh simply means that Christ was born. Second, that Mary is the mother *of God* indicates that He "who was here born in time is the very same who in eternity is born of the Father"—that the *Word* became flesh.[4]

Barth's repudiation of an 'independent Mariology' is linked to his concern that she might become an exemplar of humanity's intrinsic capacity for God's revelation. Mary's witness is pronounced precisely because her attention is "directed away from herself to the Lord." She represents humanity, but "in his reception of God." She is the one to "whom the miracle of revelation happens." But she has no intrinsic capacity that prepares her for this reception.[5] Barth criticizes Roman Catholic Mariology on these grounds, arguing it considers Mary the "principle, type and essence of the human creature co-operating servant like (*ministerialiter*) in its own redemption on the basis of prevenient grace…"[6] Attributing special dignities and privileges to her indicates a commitment to "her *co-operatio* in our salvation" which involves "a relative rivalry with Christ." For Barth the honour ascribed to Christ is non-reciprocal: humanity may honour God, but such honour "never, however indirectly, [redounds] to himself as well."

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[4] *CD* I/2, 138.
[5] Ibid., 141.
[6] Ibid., 143.

Faith requires "renouncing all reciprocity," and with it the natural capacity to stand in readiness for God that reciprocity depends upon.[7]

Mary thus stands as representative of humanity in its relationship to God—and like us, her human nature is constituted by its response to God in Jesus Christ. Barth is clear that Christ assumes "human essence and existence, human kind and nature," that which makes humanity human. Such a human nature is the "presupposition of His work." But the concrete reality of an individual human is distinct from that nature. As Dustin Resch summarizes, in Barth's Christology the Logos "unites himself with human *nature*, not a human *person*."[8] The only presupposition for Christ's incarnation is the "potentiality of being in the flesh, being as a man"—a potentiality that is actualized only through the assumption of human nature by Jesus Christ. God does not cease to be God in assuming human nature. Yet the assumption of human nature *anhypostatically* by Christ entails that human nature has no intrinsic content that it can claim to possess. And *enhypostatically,* the human nature of Christ assumes its "existence (subsistence) in the existence of God."[9]

This approach to the incarnation, however, threatens to reduce Mary's agency and the realities of birth to merely the technical or physical means of allowing the incarnation to happen—a problem that we saw threatens Barth's later account of procreation as well. Barth carefully protects human nature's position as presupposition for the incarnation by denying human nature (in Mary) has intrinsic capacity for God. 'Human nature' indicates possibility—but in Christ, it gains existence and subsistence *only* through the *enhypostatic/anhypostatic* union. It is unclear, though, what Jesus inherits from Mary in the incarnation. Barth insists the incarnation is not a second *creatio ex nihilo*—yet he also contends the actualization of the "special possibility of human essence and existence as that of the Son of God" is the "creation and preservation" of Jesus Christ.[10] This means, though, that Mary's human nature is *constituted* by her response to God's action, which helps explain why Barth's narrative, in Resch's description, "centers on the narrative of the Annunciation, in which [Mary's] passivity is

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[7] Ibid., 146.
[8] Resch, *Interpretation*, 44.
[9] *CD* I/2, 163. Von Balthasar suggests this notion of 'presupposition' is "the central problem in Barth's theology" at this later stage of his writing. On von Balthasar's understanding, there must be a capability for God that "does not adversely affect Christ's prototypicality." God's original act of positing requires that he "must presuppose something else *[voraus-setz]* in that very act." See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 119.
[10] Ibid., 150.

particularly evident."[11] By bracketing Mary as having any distinct content as the presupposition to Christ's humanity Barth makes the incarnation something much nearer a *creatio ex nihilo* than he admits.[12] As he says in his treatment of the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo,* the doctrine discloses that "even the potentiality of [humanity's] being does not lie within but outside himself."[13] Even Mary's potentiality as a human lies outside of her, in Christ. But what value is it that Christ is *born* if His assumption of human nature has no substantive connection with what he inherits from his mother? The answer requires closer consideration of Barth's account of the Virgin Birth.

7.2 The Virgin Birth as a Sign

The Virgin Birth for Barth is a 'sign,' and thus has a distinct epistemic function: while 'very God and very man' is the substance of Christology, the Virgin Birth points to the "mystery of that reality, the inconceivability of it." As such, it demands the need for a "spiritual understanding" of the incarnation, the "understanding in which God's own work is seen in God's own light."[14] The Virgin Birth is the form that gives the substance of Christology shape—but it does not for that play a constitutive or ontological function.[15] As Resch argues, Barth thinks the sign bears "epistemological significance for the person and work of Christ," but does not ontologically affect either the "identity of Jesus Christ" or alter the significance of His work.[16]

Barth's description of the Virgin Birth as a "sign" attempts to preserve it as an indispensable dogma without reducing its significance to the biological or historical events—

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[11] Resch, *Interpretation*, 203.
[12] This view comports with Barth's later emphasis on the immediacy of the individual's origins in God and the corresponding relativization of genealogies. Barth here argues that the genealogies leading to Christ's birth are not necessarily determined by procreation, but include adoptive relationships, such that Romans 1:3's 'being born of the seed of David according to the flesh' "need not altogether signify biological provenance." Ibid., 176.
[13] *CD* III/2, 152.
[14] *CD* I/2, 177.
[15] Ibid., 179. "Sign and thing signified, the outward and the inward, are, as a rule, strictly distinguished in the Bible, and certainly in other connexions we cannot lay sufficient stress upon the distinction. But they are never separated in such a ('liberal') way that according to preference the one may be easily retained without the other."
[16] Resch, *Interpretation*, 5. Resch seems to lean on Barth's treatment of the Virgin Birth in *Credo,* where Barth writes that the "miracle of the Virgin Birth has no ontic but noetic significance." Karl Barth, *Credo*, trans. J. Strathearn McNab (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1936), 69.

which fits his pattern of sidestepping biological reductionism. The Virgin Birth is a "pointer" to the new beginning of Christ's birth, and "not a conditioning of it."[17] Even so, Barth also allows that as a sign it must "have in itself something of the kind of thing it signifies; it must be in analogy with it noetically and ontically."[18] The Virgin Birth happens "in the unity of the psychical with the physical, in time and in space, in noetic and ontic reality," which means the mystery of the incarnation can be grasped only within this context. Even so, its significance is not *reducible* to its historical or biological features. While we cannot "separate form and content, sign and thing signified," neither can we "derive them from each other…by any method of calculation."[19] While the New Testament does not offer a "biological explanation" of the Virgin Birth, it also is "of such a kind as to belong to the area of biological enquiry." As in Barth's discussion of organic life, the Virgin Birth's 'biological' dimensions are necessary but not ontologically determinative of the *vere Deus vere homo*.[20] Epistemically, then, the sign is not the *explanation* of the substance: rather, the miracle of the Virgin Birth is explained by the mystery of divine revelation.

Barth specifies the Virgin Birth's theological content around divine freedom. The form of the Virgin Birth only matters epistemically to the doctrine's substance for this reason: the Virgin Birth does not causally affect or condition Christology because we "shall not say that God could not have given [the thing signified] quite a different form."[21] As the Virgin Birth is enacted by God "solely and directly," it is a "sign of the freedom and immediacy, the mystery of His action," and a "preliminary sign of the coming of His Kingdom."[22] It indicates that "God does it all Himself," that "God Himself has the initiative."[23] In this way, Barth frames the Virgin Birth as a safeguard against an encroaching natural theology, especially one that would attempt to derive theological claims directly from biology.[24]

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[17] Ibid., 189.
[18] Ibid., 182.
[19] Ibid., 189.
[20] Ibid., 183.
[21] Ibid., 189.
[22] Ibid., 181.
[23] Ibid., 182.
[24] In *Credo,* Barth argues that the doubt thrown upon the Virgin Birth stems from the failure to recognize its quality as a sign, and that as it might be "impossible to separate this content from this form, this form from this content," it is the "better course" to simply leave the dogma uncriticized. (72) In *The Faith of the Church,* Barth suggests the sign does not prove the substance of the doctrine but only communicates it, and raises the possibility that "God could have chosen another process, even as Jesus could have done other miracles to

This emphasis on divine freedom structures Barth's explication of the doctrine's internal content in ways that have important ramifications for the theological significance of sex and procreation. For Barth, the doctrine means that Christ is *natus*—yet this is unsurprisingly relegated to a tertiary position behind the primary significance of *conceptus de Spiritu sancto* and the secondary *ex Maria virgine.* The *natus* "states that the person Jesus Christ is the real son of a real mother, the son born of the body, flesh and blood of his mother, both of them as real as all the other sons of other mothers."[25] 'Being born' is an indicator of a common humanity—a theme Barth repeats elsewhere.[26] The irrepeatability of Christ's humanity is *so* "fundamental and comprehensive" that, paradoxically, it does not impinge upon the "completeness and genuineness of His humanity," which being born signifies.[27] However, as Resch notes, Barth is "careful to keep from stating that a human birth is itself constitutive of true humanity or even suggesting that it is the decisive factor." Instead, a human birth "is only an indication of genuine humanity."[28] As with both Barth's formal Christology in I/2 and his later theological anthropology in III/2, the *from* stands in a secondary position to the determinations *for* God and *for* fellow humanity that determine Christ's human nature.[29]

While the *natus* names Christ's solidarity with those who are also born, Mary's significance is determined by the "extremely concrete negative" of her virginity—which Barth configures as indicating her and humanity's incapacity for God. Humanity is present in the incarnation as "one of the principals."[30] Mary is not only a spectator, but is enabled by grace "to

signify the same Word." Yet he maintains we cannot have the substance without the sign. Karl Barth, *The Faith of the Church,* trans. Gabriel Vahanian (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 1958), 85.

[25] *CD* I/2, 185. See also III/2, 329.

[26] In his theological anthropology, Barth argues that the New Testament is "unambiguously and emphatically clear that we have to do with a real man," on the basis that Christ is 'born of a woman' is the "self-evident presupposition of all the New Testament writers." (III/2, 329) Similarly, while Barth does not think one's parents are a determination of a person, he opens his treatment of parents and children by arguing that "It is part of the creaturely status of man in his relationship with other men that he is conceived and born and is thus the child of a father and mother, and that he himself in his turn can conceive and thus become the father or mother of children." See *CD* III/4, 240.

[27] *CD* I/2, 184.

[28] Resch, *Interpretation*, 84.

[29] Barth notes in I/2 that living as a human means to "be related to man, to differ from him and to agree with him, to come from man and depend on man." However, his principle that we return to our origins leads him to immediately bracket the from as part of the definition of humanity because we "do not exist for our fellow-man, we exist for God." While Barth thus frames the *from* as indicative of humanity, it is by no means essential. (I/2, 42)

[30] Ibid., 186.

participate in an event which contradicts and withstands him."[31] However, she is not a partner to God's action. As the presupposition of Christ, she is the "old natural humanity" that prevents the incarnation from being a *creatio ex nihilo*. Granting her a position as representative of unfallen humanity would establish her as "God's partner," and admit a "creaturely self-glorification" and corresponding natural theology into the dogmatic system. Mary's virginity and its "positive background" of Christ's conception by the Spirit provide the "necessary safeguard" against this happening.[32]

Barth links Mary's virginal state on this basis *not* to God's judgment upon sexual activity *per se,* but to fallen humanity's incapacity to be the covenant-partner of God. Christ's birth from a virgin means there is no other way someone can become the mother of the Lord—which for Barth indicates that "human nature possesses no capacity for becoming the human nature of Jesus Christ."[33] Mary's virginity thus indicates she has no "power, attribute, or capacity" within her for God. Such an incapacity is tethered, in this instance, to humanity's fallenness: Barth here suggests disobedience goes to the "roots of [humanity's] being" and structures human nature. It is this fallen human nature that is "limited and contradicted by the *natus ex virgine.*"[34] Christ's "existence in our old human nature" does posit a conquest over original sin.[35] But the Virgin Birth is thus not the *cause* of Christ's triumph over original sin. It is only a sign and "pointer" to the new beginning offered in Christ, and supplies no "technical proof" of that conquest. The correlation between Mary's virginity and her incapacity for God does not reduce to a correlation between sexual activity and sin. Because humanity's disobedience exceeds our sexuality, the exclusion of the "sinful element in sexual life" is insufficient to demarcate the "exclusion of sin in the sense of *peccatum originale.*"[36] While the conception of Christ through a specially sanctified act of sexual intercourse would have simplified the "Christian doctrine of marriage and the family," it would not have secured the exclusion of original sin as *natus ex virgine* does.

At the same time, Barth's treatment of Mary's virginity as a metonym for humanity's sinful nature threatens to strip her of her agency and affects how Barth depicts natural

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[31] Ibid., 187. The shift in the gender of the pronoun is Barth's, and indicates Mary's position (with the Baptist) as "first man" of the New Testament.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 188.
[34] Ibid., 189.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 190.

generation—despite Barth's assertion that she is present for God's action not only as a spectator, but a principal. God's exclusion of fallen humanity in the Virgin Birth cannot float free of the event's form: to do so would be to imperil the interconnection of sign and substance Barth had defended. To preserve divine freedom, then, Barth argues Mary 'participates' as "non-willing, non-achieving, non-creative, non-sovereign man, only in the form who can merely receive, merely be ready, merely let something be done to and with himself."[37] Mary's 'readiness' is not an intrinsic property that is indicated either by her virginity or willingness. Instead, when the Word becomes flesh Mary concurrently "becomes the possibility, becomes the mother of God's Son in the flesh."[38] That is, in positing Himself in the incarnation God also posits the presupposition in Mary's capacity for God. Mary's "adaptability for God" is thus extrinsic to her: whatever readiness Mary has for God is a response to the Word's assumption of humanity in His conception by the Spirit, rather than being founded upon her virginity or any other property she possesses. Yet this way of approaching the Virgin Birth forces Barth to intensify the work-like character of human procreation: "Every natural generation is the work of willing, achieving, creative, sovereign man," he writes. Such a stance both leaves little room for the later depiction of humanity's natural generation as a "gift" and would, if true, seemingly inflate the importance of natural parents.[39]

Barth buttresses this depiction of Mary's virginity as indicating a non-willing, non-striving (sinful) humanity by introducing a gendered distinction into the agency of natural generation. The "human creaturely *eros"* the Virgin Birth contradicts is associated with the male, rather than with the labor of gestation and childbirth. Barth's discussion of why the Virgin Birth uniquely brackets the male combines his understanding of the *enhypostatic* character of Christ's humanity with a (dubious) principle of male prerogative that he derives from "world history." On his *enhypostatic* Christology, Christ's humanity has existence only in the "eternal mode of being of the Word or Son of God." In that sense, His being in time is identical to His existence as the eternal Son of the Father. Such a principle excludes having a human father, though, because it is "precisely the human father whom a human son has to thank for everything that

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[37] Ibid., 191.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Barth invokes a sharp bifurcation between agape and eros here, to suggest that human generation as an act of eros points "elsewhere than to the majesty of the divine pity." Ibid., 192.

marks his existence as belonging to him."[40] As such, a sign that describes the mystery of the *enhypostasis* requires the "actual elimination" of the sign of a human father. It is the male, predominately, who cannot be the "participator in God's work." While woman has a share in this active, willing dimension of human erotic life, Barth argues there is no equality between the sexes in this respect. Male action is uniquely significant for the "world history with which we are acquainted"—a fact that Barth suggests the biblical witness assumes, even if he grounds this super- and subordination of male and female with respect to active, achieving, and willing humanity in the sphere of the Fall.[41] It is a "divine ordinance" in such a sphere, rather than an "order of creation." But as divine ordinance, the pre-eminence of the male has a countersign in God's action in the Virgin Birth. The Virgin Birth means the "limitation of man and his sin," and so the "limitation of male pre-eminence."[42]

Barth does not match this emphasis on the negation of the male to a corresponding affirmation of the superiority of the female—even as those whose somatic constitution is capable of gestating and giving birth to human life.[43] The female is not "readier for God's work than the male-human." Barth nods approvingly (and perhaps begrudgingly) toward Roman Catholic Mariology, as it renders the female "as significant for human nature as such as the male is for human history," so that if the male *must* withdraw the female "can and must be there, there for God, if God on His part wishes to act on man and with man."[44] But in keeping with his rejection of any intrinsic creaturely capacity for God, and thus any natural theology, Barth insists it is only through an "act of divine justification and sanctification (at this very point, too) that human nature becomes a partaker of the divine nature."[45] Mary cannot represent an in principle openness to God within creaturely life; the female can be *theotokos* only "by grace and by a miracle of grace"—that is, by redemption. In that way, Mary's theological significance is extrinsic to her: it is founded upon the annunciation of the Word of God and the subsequent

[40] Ibid., 193.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 194.
[43] Faye Bodley-Dangelo argues that Barth's Christocentrism allows for only one pattern of human action, which is a "male prerogative, and consequently eviscerates the would-be female agent." She suggests that the 'barrenness' of the waters in Barth's reading of Genesis 1 is akin to Barth's treatment of the Virgin Birth, namely, that the "capacity of a woman's body to conceive might suggest a capacity of creaturely material for the creative work God does with it, which in turn might lend support to an anthropology in which human beings have a capacity for (or a point of contact with) the revelatory and redemptive work of God." See Bodley-Dangelo, *Veiled*, 121.
[44] Ibid., 195.
[45] Ibid., 196.

conception of Christ by the Holy Spirit, two divine events that encompasses and determines her virginity and procreative work.

Given such a backdrop, it is easy to see how Barth argues the *conceptus de Spiritu sancto* indicates the "ground and content" of the miracle of Christmas, while the virgin birth indicates the "form and sign."[46] Neither Mary's virginity nor her human nature has any independent meaning from the conception of Christ by the Spirit. While Barth had spoken of Mary's sinful human nature as the presupposition of the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit's role in the conception of Jesus means that we have to do here with a "pure divine beginning."[47] The Holy Spirit's presence in the conception of Jesus "achieves [the creature's] meeting with Himself in His Word…"[48] The "very possibility of human nature's being adopted into unity with the Son of God is the Holy Ghost."[49] In this way, the Virgin Birth forms the prototype for the birth in the Spirit of Christians, and of the baptism that indicates it.[50] However, this conception does not happen on any analogy with marriage or ordinary conception: the Holy Spirit is not akin to the human father of Jesus. Instead, the positive fact that it indicates is the "inconceivable act of creative omnipotence in which [God] imparts to human nature a capacity, a power for Himself, which it does not possess of itself and which it could not devise for itself…"[51]

Barth's account of the Virgin Birth thus prepares the ground for his later relativization of procreation. And his prioritization of the *conceptus de Spiritu sancto* stands in close continuity with his later focus on humanity's immediate dependence upon God, and the corresponding primacy of baptism. But his aversion to Roman Catholic Mariology forces him to adopt an account of natural generation that his later work seems to leave behind. Such an account, paradoxically, makes Mary a representative of humanity's passivity and incapacity before God and places the whole significance of natural generation on the male—even though the female is the one burdened with the work of gestation, labor, and childbirth. Additionally, Barth's attempt to hold together the sign-quality of the Virgin Birth with its necessity is strained to the point of contradiction. Barth allows that Christ could have become human through other means to secure

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 198.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 199. On this basis, Barth's description of Mary's human nature as the 'possibility' that God makes possible is an indicator that it is the Holy Spirit's working in her which forms the basis for her capacity to bear the Word, rather than an intrinsic capacity or property.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 201.

divine freedom—but then argues that Mary's virginity entails there is no other way through which someone might become the Mother of the Lord, basing the association of her virginity with the exclusion of original sin on that fact.[52] The notion of 'freedom' Barth here deploys is closer to an abstract possibility of acting otherwise, rather than God's conformity to His nature and essence.[53] Barth's division between the epistemic nature of the sign and its ontic and causal significance for Christology raises the specter of a *logos asarkos* behind Christ's incarnation, against which we can measure divine action within it. Yet apart from that dispute, the distinction Barth draws here imperils the integrity and covenantal significance of creation in its biological dimensions, as indicated by the claim the Virginal Conception "runs *counter* to nature in the biological sense," rather than being a highly unusual form of it.[54] Barth frames divine action here as a contradiction of nature presumably to emphasize its irrepeatable quality—yet doing so frames the incarnation nearer to a *creatio ex nihilo* than a pregnancy. Conception *without* intercourse is not conception *against* or *counter to* intercourse.

7.3 The Weight and Dignity of Biological Parenthood

Despite Barth's acknowledgment of how the Virginal Conception complicates the Christian doctrine of marriage and family in I/2, he makes little explicit use of Mary and Joseph in III/4's discussion of parents and children.[55] And perhaps for good reason: while his special ethics of parenthood bears important similarities to his construal of the Virginal Conception, Barth argues that the command of God's eschatological disruption to the parent-child relationship confirms and reestablishes natural, parental ties—rather than contradicts them. Articulating how Barth defends the importance of procreative bonds after minimizing their theological import throughout his work is the burden of this section.

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[52] Mary's virginity declares "that in any other way, i.e. by the natural way in which a human wife becomes a mother, there can be no motherhood of the Lord and so no entrance gate of revelation into our world." (188)
[53] This is a similar objection that Matthew Puffer puts to John Howard Yoder's construal of God's freedom in his understanding of the 'borderline' case. See Puffer, "Taking Exception to the *Grenzfall*'s Reception," *Modern Theology* 28, no. 3 (2012): 491.
[54] *CD* I/2, 187.
[55] Gary Deddo describes this as "perhaps the finest theological discussion of parenting available in the English language." (Deddo, *Theology*, xv). Matthew Rose demurs: "One comes to these sections of the Dogmatics with great anticipation; one often leaves with disappointment. Despite the unplumbable theological depths of this relationship, Barth's commentary must be counted among the most unsatisfying of his excurses." (Rose, *Ethics*, 161.)

Barth's discussion of the importance of procreative bonds is located in a theological context that narrowly concentrates on the relationship between parents and children, rather than the more expansive categories of family, genealogies, or peoples. Barth opens his treatment of parents and children by suggesting that being born and procreating are part of the "creaturely status of man in his relationship with other men."[56] However, the importance of this "creaturely status" seems to shift according to the relationships Barth puts it in dialogue with. Forgetting the first Adam, Barth emphatically affirms that humans are necessarily children: "There is no man without parents…"[57] Yet as Christ's humanity is not conditioned by His birth, so the value of 'being born from' is dependent upon the prior and more basic fact of male and female: the "necessity with which he is a child, and a son or daughter…is bound up with the fact that he is male or female, and the one or the other on the basis of structural differentiation."[58] Barth does not elaborate on the relationship between the two statuses, but the conditionality of parenthood and the irreversability of being male or female might mark one difference. The heuristic, non-conditioning character of 'being born' for human nature might mark another.

However, Barth *amplifies* the importance of the parent-child relationship when he sets it next to the broader conceptions of "family" or "peoples." 'Family' became a "fundamental concept for Christian ethics" only through the "Christianized heathen."[59] The "determinations" of human nature are limited to male and female, parents and children—which means the command of God uniquely bears upon them.[60] One's national and ethnic identity is only a "a presupposition of the divine command," rather than a "constant determination."[61] It must be taken seriously, as it specifies the content of the command: We must "seriously accept [the presupposition] as a direction to the place which we must occupy," lest we "fail to hear the command of God."[62] Yet parents and children are marked by an asymmetry, exclusiveness, and permanence that national identity lacks. Relationships to neighbors are instead "fluid"—that is, non-exclusive—and impermanent.[63]

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[56] *CD* III/4, 240.
[57] Ibid., 240.
[58] *CD* III/2, 286.
[59] *CD* III/4, 242.
[60] The "necessary determination of human nature by creation has its limit in the relationship between man and woman and parents and children." (304-305)
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., 305, 295.
[63] Ibid., 299-305. Barth reaches here for the language of 'creation orders' to mark the difference. Peoples are founded on God's "dispositions and ordinances," but they are not "permanent orders (ordines) of creation like

Within this concentrated field of vision, Barth argues the authority and honour of parents is founded not upon their status as progenitors but rather upon their correspondence to the being and action of God. For the child, they are "God's primary and natural representatives," such that children are "directed to assume a very definite attitude of subordination in relation to their parents." Parents have a "Godward aspect" for the child.[64] However, such a status is limited in several important ways. For one, the status as 'representatives' is indirectly acquired or inherited by parents. The Old Testament's prioritization of parents as mediators of the covenantal blessing meant the fatherhood of God had only an "indirect significance" to the Israelite, which entailed there could never be a gap between honouring God and parents. However, the immediacy of our origin in God through Christ makes the fatherhood of God "an independent fact alongside the existence of their earthly parents," which allows conflicts to arise.[65] Parents are only God's representatives indirectly, and so cannot assert their status as God's representatives to their children.[66]

The position of parents as 'God's representatives' is thus not founded upon any kind of intrinsic quality within "parenthood," but rather illuminates and clarifies those qualities. Barth specifies the theological significance of parenthood in a number of ways. First, he argues that because human parents stand in the light of the analogy to God's fatherhood, they have 'weight' or dignity and so are entitled to receive honour from their children.[67] Such a correspondence does *not* include standing in the position of Creator for the child, which is unsurprising given Barth's discussion of the origins of human life. Only God is the "real whence of [the child's] life."[68] Whatever causal role parents play, no "human father is the creator of his child, the controller of his destiny, or its saviour from sin, guilt and death."[69] Barth also argues the precedence of parents both in age and in the awareness of traditions functions as an indicator of

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the being of man and woman or parents and children." (301) Barth's use of 'creation orders' is sharply contested. For a substantive overview of the various positions and critical examination, see Paul Nimmo, "The Orders of Creation in the Theological Ethics of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, no. 1 (2007): 24–35.

[64] Ibid., 243, 245.

[65] Ibid., 248. Barth's relegation here of genealogy is unsparing: The "succession of father and son has no theological significance after the birth of the son [Jesus]." (242)

[66] Ibid., 278.

[67] "And the fact that the [human fatherhood] may symbolise the fatherhood of God in a human and creaturely form is what lends it its meaning and value [*Sinn und Würde*] and entitles it to respect." *CD* III/4, 245; *KD,* III/4, 275.

[68] Ibid., 246.

[69] Ibid., 245.

this *whence* (rather than the causal asymmetry of conceiving and being conceived). The parent's age and experience can "remind [the child] of the eternity and prior time of God from which they come," the "real whence" of his life.[70] Such a point is not simply temporal or individualized: rather, Barth associates the seniority of parents with their ability to form children in the ways of history and tradition that they themselves inherited. The ability to remind children of their origins in God this way gives parents "a dignity [*würde*] which children must [respect]."[71]

Parenting thus sits within an uneasy tension between divine and human action for Barth. On the one side, the "decisive action" children need is God's action, so that the human parents can only "witness" to it or "imitate" it. As parents imitate God, their children are "summoned to honour God by honouring [them]."[72] At the same time, this decisive action by God is one for which "the parents are responsible in relation to their children," and which they "must be content to accept."[73] The primacy of divine action does *not* eclipse the human responsibility for establishing the conditions within which God's action occurs. A similar logic (and terminology) is present in Barth's suggesting that there may be times when "it will be the [responsibility] of the Christian community" to awaken a people who are 'tired of life' to perpetuate the human race—even though divine action is necessary for it.[74]

Barth's depiction of "parenthood" as bearing witness and imitating divine action doubly relativizes biological similarity and kinship. The superiority of parents is a property extrinsic to them, which they have only insofar as they imitate and witness to divine action. This means the grounds and source of the parental relationship lie outside the biological presuppositions that accompany it.[75] Secondly, Barth contends that parental responsibility is not concerned with the physical relationship *per se* but "with a certain [privilege and mission] with regard to the

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[70] Ibid., 246.
[71] Ibid. The translators here render *respektieren haben* as 'honour,' which confusingly conflates what Barth keeps distinct. See *KD* III/4*,* 276.
[72] Ibid., 247.
[73] Ibid.
[74] As with the previous passage, Barth uses *aufgetragen* for 'responsibility.' See III/4, 268, and *KD* III/4, 301. The term seems to suggest an application, or a putting on to humanity. Barth elsewhere distinguishes between responsibilities and obligations, but uses different terms, e.g. this from II/2: "Because the God who claims man for Himself makes Himself originally responsible [*verantwortlich*] for him, [ethics] forms part of the doctrine of God. Its function is to bear primary witness to the grace of God in so far as this is the saving engagement and commitment [obligation—*verpflichtung*] of man." (*CD* II/2, 509; *KD* II/2, 564)
[75] The superiority of parents is "the brightness of a light which falls and rests upon them from outside, from above"—the light of grace. *CD* III/4, 245.

children which this physical relationship implies for the parents."[76] Such an oversight belongs to the "historical order," wherein parents really are elders and children are 'apprentices.'[77] As with Barth's broader anthropology and ethics of life, the biological dimensions of the parent-child relationship are only the occasion within which the historical relationship emerges.

Yet Barth also employs the same logic that relativizes biological bonds to establish and confirm them. Biological fatherhood, Barth writes, has "a weight and honour which physical sons must respect in the fact that it has as such a spiritual mission in execution of which it finds fulfillment."[78] This 'weight' that demands respect is no more an intrinsic property of the biological dimensions of life than the status as "God's representatives" is of parenthood. Instead, Barth founds the unity of the generative and formative aspects of parenthood on the disclosure of God's fatherhood in Jesus Christ. The New Testament presents God's fatherhood and his "characteristic action as Father" as a "single whole"—while the work of human birth and rearing are "two different things." Being born *of God* through believing in Jesus is the "original happening" between God and man. The priority of baptism for determining the 'whence' of humanity paradoxically *establishes* that procreation and parenthood "belong together, that in the relationship grounded in procreation this task is implied and established and is thus to be respected by the children."[79] Baptism does not weaken the 'biological bond,' but strengthens it by disclosing its origins *in God,* and not biology *per se.*

Barth's assertion of the weight or dignity of biological bonds here is hampered by a number of limitations. In the first place, the logic of Barth's appeal to the unity of God's fatherhood and His characteristic action to defend the unity of generation and formation in human parenthood is obscure. One way to reconstruct it is to apply Barth's descriptions elsewhere of what 'fatherhood' and 'sonship' mean. In *The Faith of the Church* he argues that in the Bible sonship "means a being who belongs to someone or to something wherein he has his

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[76] Ibid., 243. We shall return to the basis for this 'honour' in the next chapter. The translators here render "*Vorzug und Auftrag*" as "responsibility and oversight," but only a few pages later render them "superiority" and "mission." See *CD* III/4, 241-243, *KD* III/4, 272 and 274. I have opted for terms that I take are closer to Barth's own.
[77] Ibid. Barth's removal of the basis of parenthood from the properties intrinsic to it is partly explanatory of his later exhortation that children cannot be released from the command to obey failed parents. Barth even goes so far as to call into question the empirical basis of such a judgment, suggesting that children can have nothing more than the "strong impression" that their failures mean they are not parents—but not be certain they do so. See 256-257. This conservatism further indicates the eschatological orientation of the command of God is an intensification and commendation of the natural—rather than its abrogation.
[78] Ibid., 244.
[79] Ibid., 247.

whole origin. A 'son' is not to be understood otherwise than through what his father is and represents. In this sense, the child is equal to the father."[80] While such a line of reasoning explicitly stands beneath Barth's argument that Joseph must be bracketed from the Virginal Conception, it also tacitly supports his argument for the unity of procreation and parenthood. The characteristic divine action in Christ that makes God "Our Father" through regeneration is an immediate bestowal of and access to all the inner benefits of the Triune life that Christ himself enjoys—whereas the bestowal of the benefits of tradition and parental wisdom in human parenthood is conditioned by time and development.

The problem of obscurity is made more acute, I think, by Barth's asymmetry between the perspectives of the child and the parent. For Barth, the real *whence* of the child remains God—while parents stand as reminders of that. Barth's affirmation of procreative bonds is here predominately framed from the children's standpoint: "sons must respect" the indication of "divine representation" within the procreative relationship, even while parents cannot assert it. Limiting the conscious appropriation by parents of their status as God's representatives seems to also erode their freedom to assert the procreative relationship's importance. The asymmetry between parents and children thus seems to leave procreative parenthood on a par with adoption in a deliberative context, as the parent-to-child relationship is founded upon the *spiritual* mission—constituted by the history of forming the child in a tradition—rather than procreation. The integration of biology and the person Barth achieved in his theological anthropology and reasserts in his ethics of life seems here to find a limit.

Still, Barth's confirmation of natural parenthood seems to extend into Barth's discussion of how God's command relates to parenthood. For Barth, the "direct confrontation" between God's fatherhood and natural parents in the New Testament means an *intensification* of honour owed to parents, rather than an abrogation. Barth reads Jesus' interaction with Mary and Joseph in Luke 2 as not indicating a break between them but a stronger and more firm union. Though Jesus had acted "apart from and against them," He had not "really dishonoured but honoured them."[81] On this basis, Barth frames God's command not as the "weakening or suspension" of the responsibility to honour parents, but as indicating the individual "should obey his parents all the more seriously."[82]

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[80] Barth, *Faith,* 72.
[81] *CD* III/4, 250.
[82] Ibid., 250-251.

While much has been written about how the ‘borderline case’ (*Grenzfall*) relates to Barth’s description of general norms, in his treatment of parents and children it takes on a distinctively eschatological character.[83] The fulfillment of the Law in Jesus Christ means the “end of all human history and therefore of the parent-child relationship.”[84] On this basis, Barth considers the possibility some individuals are called directly and immediately to bear witness to the kingdom “without regard to the fact that they are also children of their parents.”[85] As celibacy is now possible because of the eschatological life, so there is “an orphaned state required for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” Such a person “must symbolize with his being and action…the new creation in relation to which the old has already passed away.”[86] This ‘sign’ of the prophetic renunciation of earthly parents on the basis of the command clashes with “the biological and social conventions of the framework within which this commandment is pronounced.”[87] In doing so, however, it issues a “general and generally authoritative clarification” of the parent-child relationship’s basis and grounds by revealing its creational and eschatological limit. Luke 14:26’s exhortation to hate one’s parents reveals the provisionality of the peace between parents and children—but this relativizing is not Barth’s final word. Instead, Barth argues that even the eschatological disclosure within the borderline case must be an affirmation of the parent-child relationship. Barth observes that the final word of the Old Testament and the first word of the New are that God will turn the hearts of fathers and children to each other (Malachi 4:6 and Luke 1:17)—a striking departure from his reading of Luke 1:17 earlier in his career.[88] On this basis, Barth suggests that the exceptional case is “not a question of the destruction but of the radical renewal of the child-parent relationship.”[89] Paradoxically,

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[83] Matthew Puffer’s excellent discussion of the *Grenzfall* frames it not as an unusual form of the command, but as an occasion in which the ordinary presumptions of what the command requires are not helpful for determining the right course. This reading is persuasive, though Puffer says nothing about the eschatological dimensions or disclosure within those borderline cases. See Puffer, “Taking Exception.” Whether these situations are ‘paradoxical’ or not, McKenny’s discussion rightly makes ample room for the eschatological dimension of the limitation of creaturely life that the borderline case introduces. See Gerald McKenny, *The Analogy of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 258 ff.
[84] *CD* III/4, 260.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., 261.
[87] Ibid., 262.
[88] In *The Great Promise,* Barth suggests this phrase is “not easily comprehended.” He reads it as meaning those who to enter the kingdom of God must become like children—but says quite literally nothing about parenthood and childhood. See Barth, *The Great Promise,* trans. Hans Freund (New York: Philosophical Library, 1963), 14.
[89] *CD* III/4, 262.

while the eschaton brings the "end of the parent-child relationship," it also re-establishes and intensifies its significance for the moral life.[90]

Even so, without an account of the distinctive value of generating procreative bonds in the first place, the asymmetrical relationship of parents and children Barth stresses leaves prospective parents without a reason to pursue them—and given the eschatological abrogation of procreation, potentially a compelling reason to avoid them. The givenness of parenthood for the child entails that the child owes it respect; but this relationship is contingent on the child's existence. As we have seen, the deliberative context for prospective parents makes an inference from the value of existing relationships to a reason to create difficult. Parents are not free on Barth's account to assert their standing as God's representatives *within* the relationship; but then it is especially challenging to see how prospective parents are free to pursue their procreative interests based on the value *of* the relationship. The decision to procreate seems to lie outside the reasons they have access to. If Barth's account of biological bonds is consistent with his broader theological commitments, it also thus indicates the limits of those commitments for those deliberating about whether to enter parenthood through procreation rather than adoption.

7.4: Conclusion: Toward a Protestant, Barthian Mariology

Barth's contention that the standpoint of the child is of primary theological significance comports with his prioritization of Christology over Mariology. However, Barth's argument that the eschatological disclosure both troubles and reaffirms natural parenthood also provides the basis for reappraising his treatment of Mary, and so moving toward an alternate account of the theological significance of procreation and human procreative agency. For Barth, the conception of Jesus Christ from the Holy Spirit is the primary fact upon which the virginity of Mary is based—rather than *vice versa*. It is not because Mary is a virgin that she is apt to be the mother of God—rather, it is because God announces the conception of the Messiah to her that she is a virgin. Such an argument follows Barth's line of reasoning that what comes second within the divine economy is primary in its importance, as the covenant is the inner basis of creation. Mary's 'becoming' in her human nature is a response to the Word's 'becoming' flesh. Yet this approach to Mary frames her virginity and her agency almost exclusively in negative terms: the

[90] Ibid.

male is excluded as a sign of Christ's *enhypostatic* nature, but in a way that requires the *contradiction* of ordinary procreation. Additionally, in bracketing Mary from having any kind of co-operation in the act Barth risks reducing her to a merely technical "host" for the incarnation of Christ.

Barth's argument that natural parenthood and its procreative bonds have been relativized has much in common with his discussion of life's limits in III/2. Specifically, *Grenzfälle* arise when the command of God contradicts ordinary conventions that are founded upon creation. But as we saw in Barth's discussion of parents and children, at least, its eschatological dimension can trouble those conventions in a way that intensifies and deepens the value of creaturely life, rather than abrogating it. In the same way, Barth's treatment in III/2 is unswerving in his commitment to the principle that the eschatological conditioning of creaturely life in the resurrection cannot undermine the value of either life within its limits, but must deepen and intensify that value. Though commentators have not made much of the correlation between life within its limits (*Grenz*) and the limiting case (*Grenzfall)*, it does not seem to be happenstance.[91] It thus makes sense that Barth's special ethics of parents and children, which leans on his treatment of humanity's *whence*, would apply the same pattern of eschatological intensification of creaturely life he developed there.

Such an approach opens up the possibility of reconfiguring Barth's understanding of the Virginal Conception, though, so it can provide a more robust framework for articulating and affirming the theological significance of natural procreation within the church. Barth's depiction of the Virginal Conception frames it as an eschatological disclosure that *contradicts* the ordinary, biological dimensions of procreation; but on the understanding offered above, it is plausible to think the Virginal Conception is a complementary eschatological *confirmation* of those ordinary means of procreation. The virgin birth as a miraculous disclosure of divine action may be alien to the biological and social conventions of procreation—but it is a complementary clarification of their true bases and grounds and an intensification of their value. It also allows Mary's agency to receive its due.

One way this reconfiguration might proceed is by framing Mary's virginity not as an indicator of sinful humanity's inability to be ready for God but as a *positive* response to the

[91] Puffer proposes either Bonhoeffer or Karl Jasper's *Grenzsituation* as the influences on Barth's discussion of *Grenzfall*. See Puffer, *Interpretation*, 499.

eschatological disclosure of Christ to the world. Such an approach would put Mary closer to those who undertake celibacy in bearing direct witness to the kingdom—per Barth's later discussion in III/4. Such an approach is not wholly unfounded for Barth: he locates Mary with John the Baptist between the Testaments: she is the "personal climax of the Old Testament," and the "first man of the New Testament."[92] Moreover, Barth suggests in *The Great Promise* that in her response to God in asking "how can these things be," Mary stands "representatively at the head of the whole Advent community and of the whole Church."[93] As Barth attempts to found a generalized anthropology upon the *sui generis* nature of Christ's humanity, so incorporating Mary's virginity as something besides a negation of humanity's sinful incapacity for God would allow it to bear positive—though not *independent* weight—for theological anthropology and thus also for ethics.[94]

If Mary does disclose the fitting human response to God's work in Jesus Christ, rather than the human preparation for it, it seems significant she *gives birth.*[95] Barth views the birth of the Christ as the terminus of the 'burden of posterity' on Israel. But if the eschatological disclosure of Christ is a confirmation and clarification of creaturely life, *giving birth* would be one form—and perhaps a pre-eminent form—the receptive response to God's Word might take within the church. In bringing the burden of posterity to an end, the birth of Christ would also signal the reaffirmation and intensification of the value of procreation itself. As with above, there is at least one hint in Barth's thought such a construal is not unknown to him: in *The Great Promise,* Barth writes the story of Elizabeth's blessing of Mary and John's leaping in the womb must be told because wherever "there are such people who have received the promise, such a Mary and such an Elizabeth, where the *Church* is, there is what is called pregnancy in physical

[92] *CD* I/2, 140.
[93] Barth, *Promise,* 32.
[94] For Thomas, as the "first to be redeemed by her divine Son," Mary's dignity is "like to that of the humanity of Christ, surpassing all other creatures." (*CD* I/2, 142) Barth's depiction of Mary as the "first man" of the New Testament comes near this. But describing Mary as "first redeemed" does not mean she indicates humanity is "capable, by prevenient grace, of preparing himself for genuine sanctifying grace, by uttering this *fiat.*" (144). However, framing Mary as akin to those who are called to celibacy would supply grounds for affirming Mary's perpetual virginity, a position common within Protestantism at one point, and do so without the rest of the Marian dogmas accompanying it—as Barth argues is inevitable. (143 ff.)
[95] In giving birth to Christ, she gives the possibility of childbirth to the Church.

life, there is expectancy and the presence of what is expected; there is not only a knowledge of grace, but there is grace itself."[96]

Framing Mary as the first member of the new creation this way has a number of important ramifications for our purposes. First, it more closely connects the New Testament form of 'blessing' in baptism with the Old Testament's association of blessing with fertility.[97] Barth's discussion of the 'blessing' that is transmitted by parents in the Old Testament frames it as an answer to the 'whence' of humanity which is transmitted intergenerationally, which the New Testament replaces with (non-infant) baptism. Yet emphasizing the ecclesiastical basis of our origins and the corresponding removal of the 'burden of posterity' eclipses the association of God's *blessing* with fertility and procreation. Barth's relegation of the blessing allows him to heighten the contrasts between the Old and New Testaments' treatment of procreation—yet it also allows him to downplay the significance of Elizabeth's "blessing" of Mary in Luke 1:42. Elizabeth does not bless Mary, but "recognizes and acknowledges her as an object of blessing."[98] However, this seems to be how God treats the fertility blessing in the Old Testament: parents are recognized as an 'object of blessing' by being entrusted a child, who then transmit the blessing to the child. Accounting for this dynamic diminishes the discontinuity between the two Testaments, and would give Barth more resources to articulate why the act of giving birth remains theologically significant and valuable.

This reconfiguration would extend to how Barth conceives of the "Advent community's" relationship to procreation. Barth's discussion of humanity's 'whence' emphasizes that the advent of Christ brings about the "end of time," such that the Church looks forward to realizing what has already been accomplished in Christ—rather than a "further extension of salvation history" or a "'Christian era.'"[99] For Barth, when the church forgets it comes from "the goal of all history" and understands the birth of Christ as "the beginning of a new epoch in history," it begins to act as a "natural community" that is bound together by procreative bonds.

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[96] Barth emphasizes in this passage taking Elizabeth's greeting of Mary literally. The church has *what is called* pregnancy—not pregnancy in physical life itself, which is reserved to families. Yet through having the primary referent, the church affirms the natural form: Mary's natural pregnancy and Christ's natural birth.
[97] The nearest Barth comes there to discussing children as a "blessing" is in his endorsement of Ernst Michel's suggestion that revealing the "full potentiality [of children] as blessing" requires the "responsible Yes of parents…" However, his emphasis is not on the blessing that children are—but on the necessity of responsibility in order to fully receive that blessing. (*CD* III/4, 271.) See Soulen, *God of Israel*, 115 ff.
[98] *CD* III/2, 582.
[99] Ibid.

Christendom and infant baptism thus stand together.[100] However, framing Mary as first member of the Church means her procreative activity is not only an ending but the opening of a new beginning. The Church on this score is "grounded directly in God incarnate"—but in such a way that its responsiveness to God incarnate takes the form of a procreative willingness that is the occasion for the special, unique divine action of generating human life.[101] Framing Mary's procreative act this way might require rejecting the "futureless" eschatology Barth is drawn to. But it would also supply stronger grounds for affirming that God's decision to still give his church and his world time is not simply a mark of his patience, but of his glad willingness to go on blessing his people.

There is one further implication of this revision, which I suspect would be more welcome to Barth than the above. Treating Mary as the first member of the new creation would give childbirth an eschatological correspondence, as Barth thinks the marriage of male and female has in Christ and the church. Such an approach would mean both marriage and procreation receive the same destabilization and the same confirming consecration—rather than being treated as independent, distinct realms. This similarity seems to entail, though, that the marriage of Mary and Joseph would be the presupposition of Christ's birth—rather than Mary's virginity *per se.* Barth rejects this, as it would entail the possibility that Christ could come into the world through means of a sanctified act of sexual intercourse. Yet Barth also thought Joseph had not received his due with respect to ecclesiology, and welcomed Vatican II's decision to include him in the canon of the mass.[102] By treating Mary and Joseph's *marriage* as the presupposition of Christ's birth—a description commensurate with Barth's discussion in III/4—there would be grounds for viewing Mary and Joseph as representing distinct yet equally important facets of ecclesiology. Even if the sphere of male and female is independent of procreation, the procreation of children is not a sphere independent of marriage—as Barth's account of the virgin birth comes close to implying.[103]

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[100] Ibid., 585-586.
[101] Ibid., 586.
[102] For Barth, Joseph was more suited as an image of the church than Mary, because his role was clearly and unambiguously that of servant. As Dustin Resch observes, Joseph stands in no danger of being construed as having an "innate capacity that qualified [him] for mutual cooperation with God." See Resch, *Interpretation*, 174 ff.
[103] One final implication: Mary's position as first respondent to God's grace in Christ does not simply limit male-pre-eminence, but establishes a positive female eminence. As women are the first bearers of the news of the empty tomb, so a woman is the first to bear the presence of the incarnate Son of God in the Holy Spirit. If this sign is not simply a treatment for original sin, but a disclosure of the peace which Christ establishes in the

These alterations to Barth's account of the Virgin Birth do not require granting Mary an intrinsic ability or capacity to be the mother of the Lord in a way that would open the door to Roman Catholicism's Marian dogmas—a conclusion that would not simply reconfigure Barth's theology, but replace it with an alien scheme. In fact, they turn on treating Mary as asymmetrically dependent upon Christ, so that what is true of the former cannot be known or understood without prior reference to the latter—and to this extent, reaffirms Barth's prioritization of the child's standpoint over the parents'. Such an account can be explained by the prioritization of the covenant for creation, and the way in which such a relationship structures human embodiment. Barth repudiates Thomas' understanding of Mary's unique dignity as indicating that, as first redeemed by her Son, humanity is "capable, by prevenient grace, of preparing himself for genuine sanctifying grace, by uttering this *fiat*."[104] It is Mary's *will* that establishes the basis of Roman Catholic Mariology.[105] On Andrew Louth's reading, Barth's account falls prey to thinking of Mary in "merely physical terms," bifurcating the physical conditions of Mary's pregnancy and her bridal relationship with God.[106] Yet if Barth does not frame Mary's willingness as a *natural* capacity for God, he need not assume the reductionistic physicalism that seems to animate his reading of her in the *Dogmatics*. Barth's later defense of the inextricability of soul and body, and his suggestion that prevenient grace comes in the form of time given to humanity, together raise the possibility that Mary's procreative powers and her bodily virginity are preparatory conditioning for the acts of God—as creation prepares for the covenant, even though it has no immanent power or 'natural' capacity for the covenant.[107] The primacy of the latter discloses the nature of the former—and similarly, the primacy of Christ discloses Mary's willingness as a *response* to God's election revealed in the Annunciation, rather than an indicator of humanity's natural capacity for God.[108] Mary indicates, as Paul Fiddes writes, that human beings are "open and receptive to God because he is

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eschaton, then it means not simply a qualification of male pre-eminence but its eradication. Such an inversion is entirely in keeping with Barth's principle that within creation, the last shall be first and the first—last.

[104] *CD* I/2, 144.

[105] Roman Catholic Mariology bases Mary's dignity not on her physical act, but on the "the accompanying bridal relationship to God expressed in her 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word.'" I/2, 144.

[106] Andrew Louth, *Mary and the Mystery of Incarnation* (Oxford: SLG Press, 1977), 16, 18.

[107] III/2, 525.

[108] As Hunsinger writes, "If divine precedence and human subsequence are complete…then the human partner receives a capacity it did not bring to the event. It receives a capacity that is not given except in the event by which it is actualized. The capacity is therefore a consequence of, and in no sense a condition on, grace." George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 216.

always opening himself to them, and in this constituting their very humanity."[109] While Fiddes turns to Barth's account of faith to defend this conception of prevenient grace, it has more resonance with Barth's construal of the theological significance of bodiliness, which stands as a witness to God's action in the covenant regardless of whether humanity consciously acknowledges or realizes it.[110] Moreover, if the conception and birth of Christ are 'proto-salvific' acts, in that they share a form with the atonement and Resurrection, there is no need to suggest that Mary's response somehow happens from behind the fallenness of creation, in its inner state. Her giving birth happens because she is first *redeemed,* not because the new creation begins the history of creation over again.

Mary and Christ remain asymmetrically ordered, then—as do parenthood and childhood. If Mary represents an intensification or clarification of the natural aspects of creaturely life, through disclosing that their operation depends upon divine action, she remains wholly in the second place to the conception and work of Christ Jesus. In this she stands for all human beings, who are in a similarly responsive and responsible position toward the divine address. And yet, this account parts ways with Barth's treatment in I/2 precisely at the point where Barth argues that honour cannot reciprocally redound from Christ to Mary. For Barth, the honour children are obligated to show their parents includes the relationship's biological dimensions—which Christ shares with Mary. Barth's understanding of the *Grenzfall* as deliberate orphanhood makes it clear honour is not identical to obedience, nor does it make parents the visible, concrete embodiments of God's election (as in Israel). However, the 'weight' or 'dignity' of parenthood that marks it as deserving of special recognition by children also seems to extrapolate to third

[109] Paul S. Fiddes, "Mary in the Theology of Karl Barth," in *Mary in Doctrine and Devotion*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 119-120. Fiddes founds his suggestion upon a purported "pre-history" of Mary, in which God is secretly bearing witness to her. Tim Perry, however, critiques this as unnecessary, suggesting that Barth's understanding of election is sufficient. My own account is an attempt to reconcile these two approaches, by framing the biological dimensions of Mary's readiness for God as visible manifestations of God's election—such that the sign of Christmas and the substance really do stand in an interconnection that Barth, when writing I/2, cannot yet discern for them. See Tim Perry, "'What is Little Mary Here For?' Barth, Mary, and Election," *Pro Ecclesia* 19, no. 1 (2010): 63 ff.

[110] Philip Rosato argues that any "natural capacity man has for being in a special relationship with God is the gift of the Spirit and not his natural possession." The ability within humanity to respond to God's command is the "work of the Holy Spirit who establishes the creature's being as body and soul." This reading of the Virgin Birth comports closely with this view. See Philip J. Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 99.

parties: if Christ honours his mother for giving Him birth, third parties are reasonably justified in doing likewise.

Reconfiguring Mary's position this way is not simply an abstract point of theological anthropology: rather, it indicates that the honour ascribed to procreative parents and the putative value of procreative parenthood are inextricably linked. While the above discussion attempts to reconfigure Barth's understanding of Mary in light of his later discussion about the value of bodily ties, it does not address the central matter in Barth's account of the Virginal Conception, namely, Mary's agency *vis a vis* the birth of the Savior. Overcoming such a gap is essential for grounding the reasons to procreate theologically, since such reasons are unique by virtue of being deliberative. As we have seen throughout this dissertation and again in this chapter, it is one thing to say that parents are owed honour when such bonds exist; it is another to say the honour parents are owed establishes a reason to enter parenthood in a procreative way. For Barth, 'honour' designates the intensified importance of both creaturely life and agency, when both are set within the nexus of the eschatological order of God's action. Exploring this will provide further grounds for reconfiguring Mary's role in moral theology, and provide further help in grounding procreation theologically. More importantly, though, a robust Barthian conception of the unique honour of procreative agency will also supply the (long-awaited) reasons for entering parenthood in a procreative way.

Chapter Eight

Honour, Agency, and Reasons to Procreate

Articulating and defending a pro-natalist presumption requires a range of interrelated arguments. There is a question about whether an agent can expect to find the world to be a benefit or good for the person created, and on what basis. Second, there is the question of the moral and theological significance of procreating. How procreation is determined by the theological context in which it appears will make the practice appear presumptively attractive and reasonable—or not. Additionally, there is a question about the reasons couples themselves might have to procreate, and whether those reasons contribute to their well-being. Consider the suggestion that the eschatological disclosure of Christ's birth heightens the theological significance of procreating. Such an account might supply the Christian community grounds for exhorting its members to procreate—but that reason seems distinct from one that would contribute to the parents' personal happiness. To put a blunt edge on the worry, should anyone want to procreate for the Kingdom of God?

This chapter uses Barth's account of honour to supply prospective parents with such reasons to pursue procreation.[1] Honour in Barth's understanding locates the intensified value of creaturely life within an ethical and deliberative key. It is intertwined with the recognition that God's command reveals humanity's limited life is an *offer,* and is thus worthy of urgent attention. But it also refers to the unique agency involved in procreating when couples open themselves to the offer of new life from God. As we shall see, Barth's concern for creaturely honour not only leaves room for human agency but treats it as commensurate within divine action: parents are honoured by God through and for their agency in procreating.

I begin this final chapter, then, by exploring how Barth's understanding of the command of God intersects with the limits of creaturely life. Specifically, I suggest his understanding of honour affirms the dignity of human agency in response to the divine command. I then turn to

[1] Barth's account of honour forms the end of his special ethics and his doctrine of creation, and corresponds to his discussion of life's limits in III/2. Outside an early essay from Stanley Hauerwas, it has received little attention. Hauerwas provides a thorough distillation of Barth's account, and critiques him for failing to articulate the "kind of societal ethos, the concrete community, that is capable of producing" honour in agents. As my argument here uses 'honour' for different ends, I do not take up Hauerwas' critique. See Stanley Hauerwas, "On Honour," in *Reckoning with Barth,* ed. Nigel Biggar (London: Mowbray, 1988), 145-169.

how honour structures Barth's understanding of procreative parenthood. I consider whether the uniqueness of the human action in procreative parenthood makes it a moment of distinct theological significance, which allows parents to be honoured for their role in God's creation of human life. As this understanding of human agency and honour are incompatible with Barth's Mariology, I extend the reconfiguration of that theme which began in the previous chapter. On this basis I conclude parents procreate for the honour of generating new life—and that parents are rightly honoured by the child and third parties for their agency. Moreover, I contend the social dimensions of this understanding of honour allow for a vicarious and reciprocal relationship between parents and children, in that the child's life redounds to the parents as the parents' life and honour falls upon the child. Despite its dangers, the constraints Barth builds into honour prevent it from being used to instrumentalize children for their parents' self-glorification.

8.1 The Honour of Human Life and Agency

Barth's account of honour arises from the question of whether the twofold limits on human life—the allotted span and the limits of vocation—are contradictions of human freedom or commensurate with it. As the deepest limit of human life is *God*, rather than the non-being that surrounds birth and death, Barth queries whether the relationship of command and obedience means humanity experiences a subordination and humiliation in which "God is active and man passive."[2] Barth retains the structure of command and obedience, but inverts its values: it is an honour to receive God's command, not only to give it. It is the "wonderful condescension in God" that is "man's wonderful exaltation and honouring in the demand for obedience addressed to him."[3] Through God's summons humanity is "honoured and magnified and respected by God."[4] Obedience thus loses any cold or impersonal overtones it might have: "To obey is to rejoice in our honour before and from God."[5] Barth's account of honour thus

[2] *CD* III/4, 647.
[3] Ibid., 649.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 650. Barth's affirmation of human agency here is impossible without his development of the doctrine of concursus in III/3. There he argues the arguments for a shared divine-human agency require overcoming the "fear-complex which suggests that God is a kind of stranger or alien or even enemy to the creature…" Barth is explicit that the activity by the creature within the realm of divine agency remains the creature's own: Because the activity of God is his free grace, it "does not aim at the destruction and suppression of the

brings together joy and obligations: in recognizing our obligations under the command of God, we experience the glad thankfulness that corresponds to God's grace.

Barth's account of human agency beneath the purview of the divine command corresponds to his affirmation of 'human nature' within the temporal and vocational limits God placed upon it. Barth opens his ethics of limitation by specifying how the creaturely conditions of human life prepare us for the appropriate recognition of God's command. There is a "specific correlation" between God and the individual, through which God makes the command recognisable; while humanity remains the possession of God, the relationship is characterized by a "reciprocal knowledge."[6] On this basis, humanity is "predisposed and orientated by God as his Creator and Lord to accept His command and become obedient to it."[7] Barth does not allow this 'predisposition' to become a principle independent of the divine summons, as doing so would allow there to be a capacity for God. The revelation of God still creates its own presupposition. But the command does not mean the negation of human nature, but rather the "most positive affirmation." The one hearing the command "must recognise his own nature and being in its correspondence to the command of God."[8] In his most succinct formulation, Barth suggests the command of God is the "authentic interpretation in the imperative mood of man's being and nature by its Creator and Lord."[9]

Barth carries out this correspondence of God's command with human nature by considering the latter in its limits of time and vocation—a discussion that recapitulates themes he had raised previously. With respect to time, Barth reiterates that birth and death distill every other limit; they are "unbreakable" and so indicate that life is "a loan on call."[10] Such a loan will

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creature but its affirmation, deliverance and glorification." III/3, 146, 149. Such a description calls into question Biggar's suggestion that for Barth, the military-esque overtones of the command put humanity "in the position of being less a moral agent than a servile subject," which does "not imply a very dignified picture of human being—nor, arguably, a very biblical one." See Biggar's essay "Karl Barth's Ethics Revisited," in *Commanding Grace*, ed, Daniel Migliore (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 30-31. Biggar is on much stronger ground in his discussion of how the freedom of the creature intersects with the unique opportunity of the creature's life. See *The Hastening that Waits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 90.

[6] Ibid., 565, 566.

[7] Ibid., 566.

[8] Ibid., 567.

[9] Ibid., 568. Matthew Rose argues for a 'Thomistic' interpretation of Barth's ethics, but suggests that Barth's argument for it is "mostly implicit" and "hesitant." However, Barth's discussion of honour seems to make his concern about the salience and integrity of 'human nature' for ethics very explicit. Given the poignancy of this specific quote from Barth, it is surprising that so few English speaking interlocutors have considered it. I have yet to find one who even mentions it. See Rose, *Ethics*, 109 ff.

[10] Ibid., 570.

not be repeated: life has a "staggering" uniqueness. While this limitation might be overwhelming, Christ's incarnation is humanity's "supreme honour," as it allows us to see the same "once-for-all and therefore single and unique" exalted life of God within our own limits.[11] As life is not simply a series of opportunities but an offer from God, it demands a heightened ethical response: what is "offered with such exclusiveness by God is surely worthy of honour, attention and reflection"—even if its significance is not immediately obvious.[12] We still need a "special revelation of God" to take our proper place in His world. Yet Barth reaffirms that this offer is "pointed directly to the grace of divine calling."[13] There is a "direction, orientation and disposition" in humanity's existence which allows for a "correspondence—no more, but a real correspondence—between the free and gracious calling of God and the existence of man in his strict singularity."[14] Reflecting on how the command bears on the limits of such a singular, irrepeatable life generates an "urgency" that "may rightly be described as eschatological." And because those two limits sum up every other, the "whole of Christian ethics acquires an eschatological tone and character."[15] The characteristic urgency of Christian ethics is founded not upon finitude, but on the special awareness that God meets us at the limits of birth and death. But the command is recognizable as such only because the life of human nature is limited in just the way it is.

Barth's account of vocation works similarly. For Barth, 'vocation' names the distinct possibilities before an individual, which make the second (and primary) summons of God to service recognizable to them.[16] In the special summons of God, the individual will "recognise himself as the one he already has been and become by the will of the same God."[17] Vocation specifies who the individual *already is* "as the new comes to him."[18] Barth on this basis can speak of the "vocation of man confronting and corresponding to the divine calling," the latter of which names the special summons of God.[19] Vocation is the place of "special responsibility"

[11] Ibid., 571.
[12] Ibid., 572.
[13] Ibid., 575.
[14] Ibid., 576.
[15] Ibid., 579.
[16] Biggar stands on solid ground in pointing to vocation as necessary for specifying the content of the divine command. Though I think Barth uses that particular term to specify the content of the presuppositions of the command while Biggar seems to use it to refer to the command itself within those presuppositions, this seems to be a semantic difference and not a substantive one. See Biggar, *Hastening,* 42-45.
[17] *CD* III/4, 596.
[18] Ibid., 598.
[19] Ibid., 599.

providence has led an individual into, which is structured by the temporal succession of aging, an individual's historical situation, their personal aptitude, and their ordinary, everyday sphere of activity.[20]

Given Barth's effort to show how the divine command is correlated with human nature and the particular presuppositions of providence, it is not surprising that his development of 'honour' imbues his divine command theory with a eudaemonistic flavor.[21] Honour takes two forms: 'improper' and 'proper' honour. The former is "entrusted to man as His creature," while the latter is bestowed upon humanity as hearer of the special summons of God.[22] Both are grounded Christologically. Scripture makes clear that "all honour of man is always God's honour."[23] The worth, weight and distinction of the individual "falls on him as a reflection of the honour of God Himself."[24] The Incarnation is the ontological foundation for the general, creaturely honour—'human dignity.' And it is the epistemic basis for attributing such honour to everyone regardless of their situation, as "the glory of God Himself was the honour of this man nailed in supreme wretchedness to the cross."[25] Yet such honour is not only the basis of a claim by those who are deprived or are suffering. Honour—in either form—has "often been called a 'good,' and even the supreme earthly good of every man." Unlike the naturalistic tradition of eudaemonist ethics, Barth's conception of honour retains its theocentric basis: honour can be safeguarded only by ensuring that it "does not fall out of the hand of God and pass into the hands of man."[26] Yet what falls on humanity from God is really ours: as honour "stands in Jesus Christ," it is "no less truly given him as his own."[27]

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[20] Ibid., 610.

[21] Biggar's discussion of Barth's understanding of the human good affirms its presence in his thought, even if it is "covert and incomplete." Biggar allows that Barth suggests the divine command must "correspond to the 'definite structure' of creaturely being." But he argues that this appellation means both that God will not reverse His decision to give humanity that particular good *and* that if it has a "stable, God-given nature, then in principle it is *there* to be known independently of direct reference to God." Yet this final claim does not obviously follow: it is plausible to think that, as it is a feature of human nature to exist in a particular kind of relationship with the Triune God, then it can be both true of human nature that it has a fixed and definite good and that the knowledge of the particular form of that good depends on divine revelation. See Biggar, "Ethics," 39. See also the discussion in Rose, *Ethics,* 95ff—a discussion I largely agree with.

[22] *CD* III/4, 650.

[23] Ibid., 654.

[24] Ibid., 663.

[25] Ibid., 654.

[26] Ibid., 663.

[27] Ibid. The converse is also true. As Kathryn Tanner writes, God "makes the acts of creatures God's own without jeopardizing their integrity." Tanner, "Creation," 124.

Barth coordinates these two forms of honour in such a way that the primary, proper honour of service to God clarifies and founds the secondary, improper honour of having an irrepeatable human life. Proper honour takes the form of the "service of witness," through which humanity responds to God's special summons. In calling humanity, God tells us He "needs [us] in a definite and concrete respect, that He has a use for [us]."[28] Being a witness is a superfluity to God—but it is a "superfluity of grace."[29] Such a calling is indispensable if human action is to be properly honourable: all "human action which lacks the character of service is either not yet or no longer honourable."[30] Yet this does not empty out improper honour. Rather, the individual learns the true basis of this improper honour through being called to God's service. The improper honour is founded upon the irrepeatability of the individual's life in its limits of birth and death. It is the "special honour of every man," Barth writes, that he "was and is and will be from and in the hand of God."[31] Barth's individualism on this score is emphatic: improper honour is not based on membership in the human species, or on membership in any other group or collective, but is founded "directly, personally and exclusively."[32] As Biggar summarizes, it makes the "human creature not just a specimen but an individual."[33] The 'once-for-all' character of life "belongs to the *character indelebilis* of his human existence." In this way, the improper honour of an individual's irrepeatability is neither "untrue or unreal." Instead, it is the "presupposition to which God reaches back" in His summons to service. Creaturely honour is the "form waiting for this content" of the covenant: it is an honour that inheres in creaturely life as such, and so should be "taken no less truly and seriously than the other."[34]

Every individual, Barth goes on to argue, is tacitly aware of the improper honour of their irrepeatability. The 'inner weight' of improper honour is "noticed by every man." Barth reprises the themes that had taken his thought to the cusp of natural theology: through reflecting on its limits, humanity sees "that he has something of his own which in his way has once for all and

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[28] Ibid., 657.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 659.
[31] Ibid., 652.
[32] Ibid., 655.
[33] Biggar, *Hastening,* 90.
[34] *CD* III/4, 653. Theological ethics must understand the honour of creaturely life and the honour of service as "unmixed in their distinction and yet inseparable in their relationship."

uniquely in and by virtue of his limitation."[35] An individual would not be 'a man' if "he did not recognise that he is already honoured." This recognition stands beneath humanity's action and their aspiration for more honour: individuals will "create this value in the eyes of others," which makes an individual's "reputation…his as the creature of God before God and from God."[36] But this outer reputation is not solely composed of an individual's self-assertion, but is partially tied to the social categories of honour within which we frame our lives. Without tacitly or openly adopting "preconceived views and opinions of honour, man could not be man."[37] The social aspects of honour are inevitable, but have only a "hypothetical and heuristic significance" for determining the shape of the summons of God. They are to be measured against the Word of God—rather than vice versa. The correspondence between the honour of humanity and any particular society's conception of honour is incidental and contingent.

That humanity's honour is derived from God builds crucial constraints into how it might be asserted and ascribed: humanity may "be honourable and have his glory" only in gratitude, humility, and humor—which Barth distills as *modesty*.[38] The requirement of such virtues sets honour apart from pride; they indicate that the distinction between God and humanity remains in place. Humanity's "honouring by God does not mean his deification."[39] These internal constraints on honour are not its negations or diminuitions. That would call honour into question when the "real need is to assert it."[40] Instead, that honour is a gift from God prevents one from asserting it as *one's own*, in any sense that would claim ownership or control. Pride is "an evil to be avoided because it does not make for honour but against it."[41]

Barth's understanding of honour subtly acknowledges that we might ascribe honour to a person vicariously, on the basis of someone else's actions—provided that we do not assert it in a possessive way. The futile pursuit of honour—vainglory—can be pursued vicariously, as when "one man boasts of another to whom he has attached himself, and may thus bask in the reflected glory."[42] Because the Corinthians do not "belong to" Paul or Apollos, their attempt to honour themselves indirectly through them is wrong. Barth's critique is limited, though, to the

[35] Ibid., 655.
[36] Ibid., 656.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 664.
[39] Ibid., 665.
[40] Ibid., 666.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 667.

assertive dimension of such honour—rather than its vicarious dimension. For Barth, honour is predominately received: honouring or exalting happens when one says "Friend, go up higher." But such a movement is only possible to the "one who has seated himself in the lowest place."[43] However, as long as modesty infuses honour there is no reason to think on Barth's account that it cannot accrue vicariously as its corruption, vainglory, can manifest vicariously.

Barth's account of honour has a number of important features for understanding the peculiar honour of procreative parenthood. First, it imbues creaturely life with a dignity that comes from corresponding with and predisposing one to the divine command. Second, it clarifies the texture of the divine command: when the divine summons is heard, it both exalts creaturely life and is a matter for joy. Obedience is rejoicing in the honour we receive from God, which gives divine commands a eudaemonist dimension. Third, improper honour is founded upon life's *once-for-all,* irrepeatable character as an "offer" from God. This character of life is especially illuminated when improper honour is situated next to the proper honour of serving God. Fourth, Barth builds important limits into honour to distinguish it from pride—the chief of which is that honour has an extrinsic, receptive character. The presence of modesty within an ethics of honour engenders what Barth calls a "final and profound unconcern" or disinterestedness about the honour one receives.[44] Setting honour apart from pride this way enables Barth to emphasize its passive character without denying that its presence animates action. Finally, though Barth refutes any attempt to indirectly accrue honour to oneself, he opens the possibility that honour might be ascribed vicariously. If there are illicit ways of seizing honour indirectly, presumably there are ways in which it is licit to gain honour in and through the actions of others. With this in place, we now turn to the honour of procreative parenthood.

8.2 The Honour of Procreative Parenthood

Barth's ethics of honour helps clarify the grounds on which Barth commends procreative parenthood. The centrality of honour in the Old Testament's construal of parents and children makes such a correlation inevitable. Barth's special ethics of parents and children focuses

[43] Ibid., 668.
[44] Ibid., 679 ff.

almost exclusively on the honour existing children owe to their parents. Yet as his later construal of honour is especially concerned with the value of human action, the concept is especially useful for understanding his brief but weighty description of the reasons procreators are honourable as parents.

Barth argues that procreation must be undertaken with a consciousness "both of the honour and also of the duty" involved in fatherhood and motherhood.[45] While parenthood remains a "free and optional gift," it is inalienable in the same way humanity's improper honour is inalienable: fatherhood and motherhood also "always confer a *character indelebilis*" and bring about an "indissoluble relationship" to the child now born.[46] Both the honour and obligations of parenthood persist in the 'borderline cases' of single parenthood. The unmarried mother is the "recipient of a special gift and a special charge from God, and is not an inferior kind of mother." Neither does the unmarried father escape his obligation [*verantwortlich*] to the child; he is "responsible [*verpflichtung*] for this event and therefore for the existence of this new person," and he will "remain responsible as long as he lives."[47]

The honour that endures within single parenthood is founded upon the claim that procreation is a special human act. In Barth's potent formulation, he proposes that the honour of procreative parenthood "consists in the fact that an individual is permitted to be immediately concerned, not simply as a witness but in action and suffering, in the miraculous event by which a new human being comes into the world as the bearer of his own flesh and blood."[48] The obligations arise from the agents' respective responsibility for the event and the ongoing existence of the new individual.[49] Each party should "feel both aspects": one cannot "assume the burden of obligation without feeling joy in the accompanying honour," nor can one "rejoice in the honour without taking to heart the seriousness of the obligation."[50] Yet Barth also

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[45] Ibid., 276.
[46] Ibid., 277. The *Grenzfall* here does not refer to the eschatologically oriented disruption of ordinary conventions, but the disorder of family life because of sin. However, both cases carry the same point: the *Grenzfall* is not a rejection of natural obligations, but their confirmation: obligations persist both when the ordinary social conventions of parenthood are voluntarily disrupted for the sake of the kingdom, and when those social conventions are disrupted due to disobedience or sin.
[47] Ibid. *KD* III/4, 311.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid. Barth writes about single fathers, "Because his child exists, this obligation exists." And he says below, the obligation consists "in the fact that he is responsible for this event and therefore for the existence of this new person, and that he will remain responsible as long as he lives."
[50] Ibid.

distinguishes them along gender lines, suggesting it would be a "proper and effective exchange" if the mother is more conscious of the honour and the father of the obligation.[51]

Situating Barth's description of the peculiar 'action and suffering' involved in procreation against the backdrop of Barth's understanding of divine-human action helps clarify the significance of Barth's ascription of honour to procreative parents. As we have seen, Barth is concerned about grounding the origins of an individual's life exclusively in God. Additionally, he is insistent that procreation neither perpetuates nor fulfills the *imago Dei,* but is the occasion in which God creates a new person in His image. The danger of such an approach is that it empties procreative agency of its significance and undermines human responsibility for the generation of human life. While Barth explicitly aims to avoid reducing procreative decisions to chance or providence, his account of procreation's theological status risks doing precisely that. As we saw, how procreative parenthood can be the "free and in some sense optional gift of God" whilst also being a matter of heightened human responsibility is a puzzle.

Yet it is a puzzle that his understanding of honour takes steps toward resolving. Barth's account of honour is arranged to explain the significance of human action without allowing it to be *solely* human action—which means one cannot ascribe honour to procreators for their "action and suffering" on the basis of their *independent* agency. The honour of procreative agency falls on parents from above. Framing human life and action in the context of divine action heightens its gravity and importance, rather than diminishes it. Barth describes both life within its limits *and* sexual activity as an "offer" from God—such that when people fail to recognize life's character as such, the willingness to procreate erodes.[52] In the same way, Barth's concern to protect God's agency in human life can be seen as imbuing sexual intercourse with a unique gravity: viewing procreation beneath the shadow of the eschaton does not require *abstention* or *renunciation* by humans, but a heightened importance and seriousness.[53] The eschatological shadow might remove the *obligation* to procreate—but it heightens the drama and *responsibility* for doing so. And as we saw in Chapter Six, the scope of that responsibility includes bringing individuals into the world when it would be better for the

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 269, 341.
[53] In this way, the recognition that our time is of a limited duration, and that at every point and at its limits we can encounter God, is a reason *to* procreate—rather than to avoid doing so.

parents not to. God so honours human action that he responds to it through bestowing the *imago Dei* on those who would not exist without our wrongdoing.

Even so, though, Barth conspicuously fails to implement crucial resources from his theology to describe the *unique* way divine and human agency come together in procreating. The positive decision to procreate must be a "venture" in faith, which is commensurate with responsible action and animates the "confidence in life."[54] Barth does not mention here, though, that within his corpus such 'ventures in faith' are specifically determined by aiming at what is unavailable to human control [*Unverfügbares*]. The association both pervades Barth's thought, and specifically structures his account of the love that grounds a sacramental marriage. As marital love has to do with a "divine joining together," it "intends something which only God can know about these two and do for them." That is, such love "aims at something which is not under human control [*Unverfügbares*]." As it aims at *divine* action, such love "ventures something which can only be ventured in faith in the divine wisdom and grace"—language that is nearly identical to his description of the decision to procreate.[55] In one of his earliest substantive uses of the concept in *Church Dogmatics,* Barth contends that the "[unavailability] of faith and its object guarantees that divine certainty cannot become human security. But it is this [unavailable] faith and its [unavailable] object which make possible the certain divine knowledge which is at issue in dogmatics."[56] The absence of the term within his treatment of procreation is thus curious, especially since he emphasizes the need for special divine action to create an individual in the *imago Dei*.[57]

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[54] In the positive decision to procreate, the "venture of faith and obedience are required." III/4, 271.

[55] Ibid., 218. Such love can only be an "intention, aim and venture," because it aims at *divine* action. *KD* III/4, 245.

[56] *CD* I/1, 12-13. While the translators render the term here "intractable," Barth mostly uses it to speak of that which lies beyond or outside human comprehension and control. See *KD* I/1, 11. In IV/1 Barth qualifies the term, such that to speak of that which is "unavailable" is "not by a long way to speak of God." But he also suggests that our lives are 'hid with Christ in God' "in a way that we cannot comprehend or control." God Himself is not reducible to those actions or events that are outside our control; but faith in its lived form is a venture which specifically has reference to them. (*CD* IV/1, 301, 356)

[57] On this reading, procreation is a form of human action which comes very close to Barth's account of action as invocation, the paradigmatic form of which is prayer. As Hunsinger notes, prayer represents the "mysterious concept of…double agency at its very epitome and height." Hunsinger, *How to Read*, 221. See also A. J. Cocksworth, "Attending to the Sabbath," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13, no. 3 (2011): 251–271. As Eberhard Jüngel observes, invocation is the point "where the distinction between divine and human action is experienced most clearly and sharply." While Barth sharply differentiates between divine and human action in procreating, it is distinct from invocation in that Barth's later work seems to grant humanity the 'Lordlike' possibility of procreating an individual whom God would not have otherwise brought into existence. See Eberhard Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, trans. John Webster (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 162.

Barth's concern, though, to protect the independence of marriage and procreation seems to keep him from drawing the obvious inference that both sacramental marriage and procreation aim at what is 'outside of human control' and so are a matter of faith—just as it seems to (even more shockingly) prevent him from describing parent-child relations through the category of 'love.' As we have seen, only marriage receives a new consecration from its correspondence with God's disclosure in Christ and the church's response. But this distinction relegates procreating to a secondary position, at least from the standpoint of those agents who undertake it. This independence of marriage from procreation seems to stand beneath Barth's willingness to describe the former in terms of love, but not the latter. Barth's depiction of sacramental marriage as a venture in faith is animated by trying to understand the "specific love which unites a man and women" beneath the command of God. The "controlling element" of marital love is the faith that ventures at something not under human control. Yet Barth says *almost nothing* about the love that parents have for children in his special ethics: parents loving their children is mentioned only *once*.[58] Additionally, Barth distinguishes human love from divine on the basis that it can only aim at existing individuals, as noted previously. As prospective children do not yet exist, they cannot be recipients of human love. Marriage is an expanding fellowship on Barth's view—but there is no basis in his special ethics for the conclusion that the love of male and female in marriage reaches out and enfolds the possible individuals who might emerge in the womb through the gift of God's grace. The electing love of marriage that corresponds to God's election of humanity cannot extend to procreation, given Barth's concern to treat the latter as independent.[59]

Such limitations aside, Barth's development of the unique significance of procreative parenthood around the honour of human agency is valuable for a number of reasons. For one, this reading suggests the value of procreative bonds stems from the coordination of divine and

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[58] Barth uses 'love' (*Liebe*) only four times in the section, a marked contrast from the dominant role it plays in his treatment of marriage. The first two times refer to the love a couple has for each other, which leads them to a sexual encounter that is procreative. (*CD* III/4, 241) The third refers to the wife's love for her husband, and the requirement of sacrifice that it entails. (276) Barth mentions the love parents have for children *only* once: the "seriousness and effectiveness of their love will depend [on] whether this witness [to God's position as the child's Advocate and Guardian] is given." (279) Barth *never* mentions children loving their parents. For the German text, see *KD* III/4, 269, 310, 314.

[59] In Barth's famous formula, because "the election of God is real, there is such a thing as love and marriage." (*CD* III/1, 318). On Deddo's account, "Procreation…is an election of the child in love of soul and body even before it is born." (Deddo, *Theology*, 348). But the attempt to add 'procreation' to the pre-existing framework of marriage runs against the grain of Barth's theological anthropology: it is distinct from the *imago Dei.* Barth may have been wrong to not extend marital love through procreation this way—but the choice was consistent.

human action in generating life, rather than from the fact that the new individual is "bearer of his own flesh and blood." Barth's aversion to the 'blood and soil' doctrines works hand in hand with this reading, as does his concern to limit the scope of God's command away from family toward parents and children. In Barth's terms, granting procreative bonds special significance *because* the individual shares our genetic or biological material is tantamount to pride: it is an assertion founded not upon the honour received from God, but upon our own identity. Parents do share 'flesh and blood' with their children. But treating that sharing as worthwhile because it is *my* 'flesh and blood' undermines Barth's understanding of the honour of parenthood and procreation. Emphasizing the privileged role procreators have in the divine action of creating human life diminishes this danger.

Second, this account indicates that for Barth procreation and parenthood are overlapping concepts, such that the former includes and leads to the latter—and cannot be properly understood without the latter.[60] The honour of procreative parenthood falls upon parents as a light from above; it is only because God has honoured the couple with a child that they have the honour of being present in "action and suffering" for its creation. There is in this way a deep correspondence between procreation and parenting, which makes them mutually illuminating. In parenting, the decisive event in the child's life is wholly on God's side: nothing the parents do can prepare the child for it. In the same way, the bestowal of the *imago Dei* upon the child in their formation is wholly on God's side as well. The limits on human agency in procreating thus correspond to the limits on human agency in God's summoning of the child. Such a correspondence indicates that those who procreate are honoured *as parents*: it is because they

[60] Gary Deddo reads Barth as saying procreation is "an actual participation in God's own act of giving life." He then infers on this basis that the honour ascribed to individuals for their agency in it gives procreation its own "wonder, value and meaning even apart from parenting." He proposes on this basis that procreation is a "reflection of our being created in the image of God," a stance he also attributes to Barth. (Deddo, *Theology*, 347) Yet there are problems here. For one, terms like "invocation" or "mutual co-ordination" would be more accurate than "participation" as a description of human agency. There are two actors in procreation, and Barth is concerned to keep them distinct but not separate, together but not confused. Second, Barth himself worked against associating procreation with the completion of or continuation of the *imago Dei.* Deddo's terms here are unclear: procreation "reflects*,"* is "related to," and "manifests" the *imago Dei*. However we read them, none applies to Barth's account. More pressingly, Deddo borrows the wrong lesson from Barth's use of honour to describe parental procreative agency: his point is not to say that it has a value *independent of* parenthood, but rather that procreation is *itself parental*: the same honour that is bestowed on parents belongs to those who procreate, because the latter is inextricable from the former. Such is the force of Barth's contention that the "two tasks" of parenting belong together and are mutually entailing.

have initiated this new life, with its promises, that they are responsible for seeing it develop as long as they are able.

Moreover, that honour is necessarily qualified by modesty provides intriguing constraints on the means by which prospective parents might seek to procreate. Procreation and parenthood are interdependent in this way as well. Regarding the latter, Barth argues that though parents are the 'natural representatives of God' to the child, they may only bear witness to the "fact that these young lives exist under the hand of God" without any "deliberate intention of adopting and asserting this status and role" toward their children.[61] This principle of non-assertion corresponds closely with Barth's understanding of modesty, in which honour is primarily recognized by others rather than asserted oneself. It is easy to see in this light how honour might similarly circumscribe the means of generating life. One way would be to raise the justificatory threshold for using alternate means of generating life if the ordinary course of events fails—if not say "no" to them altogether.[62] The attempt to possess the power of procreation undermines the honour that uniquely is bestowed upon it by God, an honour that includes the limits and form of life in which he has placed us.[63]

8.3 Mary and the Reasons to Procreate

The account of honour ascribed to procreative parents further supports the reconfiguration of Mariology in Barth's theology that began in the previous chapter. As we saw there, locating Mary as bearing witness to the eschatological life gave procreation a more positive theological significance than it otherwise has for Barth. This section extends that reconfiguration along two lines: through Barth's understanding of the dual agency at work in ordinary procreation, and through evaluating the social dimensions of honour that emerged earlier in this chapter. In doing

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[61] *CD* III/4., 278.
[62] Barth could clearly argue that some interventions—such as hormonal adjustments to increase the odds of procreating—are not alternate means of creating, but rather of restoring health to individuals.
[63] Affirming the value of the 'form' of procreative agency this way need not reduce it to the value of the 'content' which emerges from it, namely new life. The dialectic of form and content Barth develops in his treatment of the Virgin Birth thus has real salience for both identifying wrongs within procreative ethics, *and* for not treating those wrongs as grounds or bases for diminishing the worth of the children brought about from them. IVF and adultery are (by hypothesis) both morally wrong ways of creating life, as they reject the 'form' God has established for doing so—but God still makes his 'offer' within those wrongs to the child, securing their status as *imago Dei.*

so, it helps clarify how the honour of procreative agency might function as a reason for prospective parents to procreate.

Barth's suggestion that procreative parents are honoured for their "action and suffering" departs significantly from the picture of agency at work in his treatment of the Virgin Birth. Barth there describes acts of generation as arising from 'willing, sovereign, creative man' (male), which allows him to depict Mary's virginity as a negation of this striving. The Virgin Birth shows that "God does it all Himself," that "God Himself has the initiative." Barth's description of honour, though, requires reconfiguring this argument. If the Virgin Birth shows the true basis of giving birth, then it reveals that *God does it.* But this view also clarifies that God does not do it *all* Himself, that He does not bring about Christ's incarnation *alone.* Such a description fails to account for the way God honours human agency, even in the work of redemption. Similarly, Christ's conception happens exclusively through divine agency: but His mother's "action and suffering" is required for His birth.[64]

This reconfiguration could be pushed even further if Barth's special ethics retains hints of the gender-based distinctions at work in his understanding of the Virgin Birth. There is good reason to think it does: for Barth, the honour is felt more by the woman, and obligations by the man. His emphasis regarding single motherhood falls upon her reception of a "gift," while it falls upon the single father's responsibility. Moreover, Barth's couplet of "action and suffering" carries overtones of the association of "willing" and "striving" with the male that animated his treatment of the Virgin Birth. If the couplet does tacitly name the differentiated roles of male and female in procreating, then, it would associate the woman's position primarily, though not exclusively, with "suffering."[65] Such an account would mean honour is ascribed to Mary not for any role in Christ's conception, which remains God's act alone, but for her suffering in gestation and childbirth.[66] While there is no reason to view such suffering as intrinsically redemptive, it would indicate that childbirth is a natural sign of God's love in redemption. Where Christ's sacrifice is the prototype of such love, the suffering of childbearing is a type.

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[64] On this basis, giving disproportionate honour to Mary over Joseph seems reasonable, as the latter is bracketed from being involved in Christ's Incarnation in this particular way.
[65] Relative to the male's agency in generating life, the association is clearly apt.
[66] Such a reading comports with Dustin Resch's reconstruction of Barth's understanding of Mariology on the basis of Volume IV of *Church Dogmatics.* Resch writes that for Barth, "Mary actively participates with God in the economy of salvation. For both Barth and Rome, this participation is genuine human action that is elicited by grace." For Barth, Mary is "a picture of what Christian existence looks like in response to the grace of God in Jesus Christ as it is evoked by the Holy Spirit." Resch, *Interpretation,* 187, 196.

There is biblical warrant for understanding birth this way—John 16:21 uses labor and childbirth as analogues for Christ's death and resurrection. But there is also some basis within Barth's own thought: he puts the sign of the Virgin Birth on par with the sign of the Empty Tomb, a correlation that is strengthened if Mary's suffering and childbirth are an anthropological analogue to Christ's death and resurrection.[67]

This reconfiguration of Mary's position within Barth's theology can also be supported on the basis of the social dimensions of honour described above. Indeed, in its formal structure, honour is bilateral: it is given by God and received by humans. We have it only as its basis and foundation remains extrinsic to us in God. Yet despite this theological source, honour has a social dimension and edge. Honour is inevitably given to other humans—and when their lives contain modesty, it is rightly so given. In his defense of the honour of single parenthood, Barth writes that nothing can "take from [the single mother] the dignity which has been conferred upon her, not only in the face of her child but *in the face of all others*…"[68] Provided that it remains bounded by modesty, there are even conditions under which one can rightly defend one's honour. This social dimension of honour provides further grounds for reconfiguring Barth's Mariology—and for understanding how honour might function as a reason to pursue procreative parenthood—in three interrelated ways.

First, there is the question of the grounds on which on an individual is honoured *by others.* Barth's early understanding of Mary's significance for Christian theology emphasizes *her* Christocentrism to justify his own: Mary's attention is "directed away from herself to the Lord," and on this basis she stands as a witness.[69] This depiction of Mary is commensurate with Barth's later understanding of honour, especially as it includes strong cautions against reducing honour to a form of self-assertion. Yet it is also commensurate with *third parties* honouring Mary precisely *for* her self-abnegating witness. As Barth writes, there is "for man a real exaltation or honouring," in which one says "Friend, go up higher." But this, Barth carries on, "definitely applies to him only as the one who has seated himself in the lowest place…"[70] Though Barth points to the publican who prays for mercy, it is hard to avoid hearing echoes of

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[67] The origins and ends of Christ's life constitute a "single sign," so that the miracle of Christmas and the miracle of the empty tomb belong together. (*CD* I/2, 182-84)
[68] *CD* III/4, 277, emphasis mine.
[69] *CD* I/2, 141.
[70] *CD* III/4, 668.

the Magnificat: "He hath exalted the humble and meek, and the rich He hath sent empty away"—where the humble and the meek name, as Barth described her, "little Mary." As Mary stands as a witness and directs attention toward the Lord, she deserves honour for it—an honour that retains and recognizes its extrinsic basis and grounds.[71]

The second aspect is more elusive, but equally important. As we saw, Barth raises the possibility of vicarious forms of honour in a negative way with respect to the Corinthians' boasting of Paul and Apollos. I proposed the possibility of a positive vicariousness, but the point needs clarification. Consider Barth's treatment of what he calls the "curious, incidental remark" by Paul that the children of believers are "not as such impure but holy."[72] On its face, Paul seems to be suggesting that a vicarious transfer happens in parenthood, so that what is true of the parents accrues to the child. But Barth abstracts Paul's claim away from the relationship of parents and children: there is an "actual sanctifying power which men can exercise over their neighbors by the simple fact of their existence and presence as Christians." This "sanctifying power" does not entail that children are "born Christians and are thus to be baptised at once."[73] While Paul's point is obscure, a vicarious account of Barthian honour might help clarify it: the honour that falls upon parents as witnesses to God's action has an anthropological equivalent, in that their honour falls upon their children. Such an approach would require treating parents-and-children as related in a distinct and irrepeatable way, rather than being a contingent and temporal union of otherwise unaffiliated individuals.

This interpretation might be defended by considering Barth's description of parents as a "presupposition" for their children, a term that (like 'vocation') specifies the context in which

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[71] Resch argues against Risenhuber's similar proposal that Mary has a distinguished position as the "archetype of humanity" on grounds that ascribing this "neglects entirely the Christological center of Barth's thought." On his view, Mary's paradigmatic function depends upon the "*form* of the work of Christ's Spirit upon her." Yet in Barth's account of honour, we see reasons to think that Christocentrism and honouring others are not as incompatible as this formulation implies. See Resch, *Interpretation,* 196 n114.

[72] *CD* III/4, 278.

[73] Ibid. Barth's abstracting move here is very similar to his early attempt, noted above, to disentangle the claim that Christ will turn the hearts of parents and children toward each other from the actual content of parenthood and childhood. There is a hint here in Barth's thought that he reduces the parent-child relationship to one of neighbors, in which the duties and responsibilities of parents are generalized duties (if ecclesiastically grounded) that the parents bear as the most proximate neighbor to the child. In critiquing the use of 'family' in Christian theology, Barth argues that in the New Testament parents and children "are still emphasized…but as persons and for the sake of their personal connexions and duties." *CD* III/4, 242. Barth's unwillingness to allow personhood to be conditioned by parenthood *or* childhood means that he must construct the latter out of the former—clearly a difficult task. The individualism that lurks in this formulation is similar to that which emerged in Leon Kass' account: Kass subsumes the individual within the species, while Barth subsumes the individual into God and His church.

the divine command is heard. The 'presupposition' of one's historical location is not accidental, but is "prepared for [an individual] in wisdom and goodness." But it is *only* a presupposition—a "cradle." An individual must adopt everything that makes up his life, since they "represent to him the opportunity which he is given…" But humanity is also summoned *within* that by the command of God, which calls humanity to "freedom, reflection and resolution" and a deed that "will transcend the previous form of his situation."[74] In the same way, as the child's presuppositions, parents stand as natural signs of God's providence—which both parents and children are commanded to take seriously as such. Parents are commanded, though, to conform their behavior as presuppositions to the being and action of God—and in so doing *create* the occasion for the salvific act by God parents *cannot* bring about. As we saw in Chapter Six, Barth suggests that divine love is distinct from human love in that it "creates the presupposition" to which it conforms.[75] Parents are made the child's presuppositions through God's love in creating an individual through their action, and are tasked with bearing witness to God's actions in just this way. One danger of this formulation is that it might entail Mary's agency precedes and prepares for Christ—which would indicate she has a natural capacity for God, overturning what might be the core of Barth's dogmatic theology. However, Barth's account of parental honour does not entail that parents are the source of the light that falls from them upon the child—only that through living and acting in correspondence with God's action, and bearing witness to the fact that the child is immediately derived from God, they extend an "actual sanctifying power" to the child.[76] Barth could retain his focus on the Annunciation grounding Mary's responsiveness, and so bracket her from participating in God's action through any natural capacity of her own—while still suggesting that, as presupposition, whatever honour she is owed as 'mother of God' derives from the life of her Son Jesus Christ.

That honour might vicariously fall from parent to child, though, raises the question of whether it might also reciprocally move in the other direction. Barth vociferously repudiates any idea of reciprocity in his doctrine of Virgin Birth, as he thinks allowing it places Mariology on a

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[74] Ibid., 622.
[75] *CD* III/1, 95.
[76] One way to frame this would be to correlate the parents' status as presuppositions with the Holy Spirit's work, a reasonable correlation given Barth's founding of humanity's constitution and life in time on the Spirit. As we saw above, Barth associates the Spirit with the 'pre-existence' of the creature in God. Tying the strands together, one might argue that the married couple who unites bodily in a reproductive manner through the Spirit founds the 'pre-existence' of their child within their marriage, and thus are made by God's love the presuppositions of the same Spirit's special salvific work in the life of the child.

plane equal to Christology. But the above paragraph indicates that allowing 'honour' to redound from child to parents might (ironically) be more effective at emphasizing Mariology's *dependence* on Christology than denying such reciprocity altogether. One might argue, for instance, that Christ's incarnation means that His glory expands to *include* its presuppositions, as they are posited in response to and for the sake of his incarnation. This is commensurate with Barth, for whom Mary's agency is a response (through the Annunciation) to God's agency in the conception of Christ by the Spirit. But as the latter includes the former, the honour that God bestows upon humanity through the incarnation necessarily includes its presupposition—and so the honour of Christ seems to reciprocally redound to His parents, and especially Mary.

Admitting a reciprocity of honour from children to parents has some roots within Barth's later account. The child becomes to the parents a "figure" of their whole life-history—a visible manifestation of it.[77] The child's life thus seems to retrospectively shed light on the parents': the significance of the presupposition is only known when the child is born and dies. Parenthood becomes "an integral part of their existence"—but as its content is inherently relational, the quality of their existence as parents is contingent upon the child's life.[78] The child embodies the parents' 'external honour,' their reputation within the world. When the child lives in correspondence to God's commands, the honour the child receives remains extrinsic to the parents—just as its source remains extrinsic to their child. Their child is the one who lives, not they, so they have no more grounds to claim the child's honour for themselves than the child has for claiming the honour as his own. Yet as the child is a figure of their life-history, the quality of the child's life seems to rightly have some bearing on the honour the parents are ascribed, in a way similar to how their honourable action prepares the way for the child.

It is important to see how Barth's understanding of agency, though, protects such an account of vicarious honour from allowing parents to instrumentalize children for their own gratification or pride—and from allowing children to think their success is independent of their presuppositions. As I have argued, the honour afforded to parents is tied to their agency—but is not reducible to their causal role. Were it, such honour would not require the gratitude, humility, and humor of modesty. This modesty, though, also qualifies how honour redounds from the child's life to the parents'. The honour attributed to parents because of their child's life cannot

[77] *CD* III/4, 241.
[78] Ibid.

be *founded upon* the parents' agency in bringing about their child; modesty means they cannot assert their own honour through the child, as the Corinthians did with Paul and Apollos. Nor does the fact that the child shares their "flesh and blood" found such a claim to honour. To assert parental honour on the basis of one's causal role or biological similarity is akin to pride. But modesty is also required for the honour *third parties* ascribe to parents: the honour bestowed upon *parents* for their children's lives is only appropriately given, ironically, when it recognizes and respects the limits of their agency. Honouring parents vicariously on the basis of their child's life places them in the second position to the child. This modesty-constraint, then, keeps honour from being used to justify reducing children to a project of the parents' aspirations for glory, or treating them merely an extension of the parents' own lives—by the parents or anyone else.[79]

Does the non-assertion principle within honour allow parenthood to function as a reason for (married) couples to pursue procreation? I think yes. Both procreation and parenthood arise from a source extrinsic to the couple: this makes them uniquely honourable, and limits the scope or force of the reason they supply to a couple to pursue them. For Barth, the stance that married couples should have toward children is one of "readiness."[80] The term has the advantage of indicating that procreation requires dual divine-human agency, that sexual intercourse really has the form of an 'offer.' Such 'readiness' is reasonable given the intrinsically evaluative quality honour gives 'parenthood.' As an abstraction, parenthood cannot not function as a reason to procreate: instead, parents procreate for the limited, irrepeatable opportunity to be a recipient of God's offer of human life and thus a bearer of the honour He bestows upon those who are entrusted such a gift. Framing procreation around honour gives it a eudaemonistic dimension, making it reasonable for prospective parents to value it both for others and themselves. On the former, such a stance forms the basis for the couple's honouring of their and other parents, deepening their own pro-attitude toward the practice. But on the latter, parenthood can become a reasonably desirable state for themselves as well, so that they make themselves ready for it

[79] This is not to untether honour from the "causal" relation of parents and children, but rather to ensure that the causal relation does not become the basis or grounds for honour. The causal relation is only the "external grounds" of honour, while honour is the "inner basis" of the causal relation. Tying honour to causality together in this way helps explain why the sense of honour might dissipate as the causal relations become less clear (such that great-grandparents might be honoured, but distant great-great uncles might not be in the same way). The same point holds for 'biological relatedness.'

[80] "Marriage as life-partnership implies, of course, an inner readiness for children and therefore for the family to the extent that it is full sexual communion." *CD* III/4, 189.

through acts that open themselves to God’s offer of new life—but without reducing such honour to a claim, right, or assertion of their own value against God’s action. In this way, their aspirational pursuit of procreative parenthood is modest. Barth’s account of procreative parenthood as a manifestation of God’s honouring of humanity, and of humanity’s faith and a confidence in life, seems to entail a presumptively pro-natalist attitude: those who marry are to stand in readiness to procreate not reluctantly, but gladly, in hopes that the widened sphere of fellowship will come in this particular way, through permission to be present not only as witnesses, but in action and suffering, at the miracle of God’s creative activity.

8.4 Conclusion

God honours humanity by accompanying and preserving our nature and empowering our actualization through the gift of His Holy Spirit. Accounting for why Virgin Birth’s form matters in Barth is challenging, precisely because the notion of divine freedom he invokes stresses the possibility that God could have acted otherwise—which seems to call into question the form’s significance. Yet Barth’s account of honour invites and even requires a reinterpretation of the Virgin Birth around God’s honouring of the creature’s life and form of existence. Even if Barth is right that birth is only a heuristic for Christ’s humanity, the free honouring of it in the Incarnation imbues it with a durability that Barth elsewhere attributes to humanity’s nature and constitution. Like being the soul of this body, ‘being born’ is a ‘saving fact’: when understood within the primary account of our origination at baptism, ‘being born’ becomes a sign of divine action in and through the human action that brought us into existence. Like us, Christ originates as a human within the constellation of genealogical bonds that form His ‘presupposition,’ a cluster of relations that include obvious marks of a fallen humanity. A genealogical form of incarnation is thus itself an act of redemption, of taking into His own origins, and thus into His life, the failures of His people. He honours the creature by taking the fullness of our life into His own, including the presuppositions of our parentage—mixed as they may be.

This account of honour opens up the possibility for us, though, of joining with Christ in honouring the presuppositions of His life *as* presuppositions. As Barth makes clear in III/4, the content of a ‘presupposition’ is not neutral: it is instead a recognition that God has placed one

providentially in a place and time, which determines the specific content of God's summons to action for the sake of the Kingdom. When parental presuppositions make such a divine summons plausible through their imitation of God's life, they do not indicate that there is a natural or creaturely capacity for God—but only that they have heard the gracious command of God and are conforming themselves to how God has instructed parents to behave. Barth's injection of modesty into honour and his suggestion that parents may not assert their status as God's representatives against their children suggests it is appropriate for parents to behave *as presuppositions,* no more and no less. Moreover, as the lives that emerge from those presuppositions take shape, it seems reasonable to expect that honour would vicariously redound from child to parent, in a circle of mutual recognition and profound disconcern for accruing that honour in relation to giving it.

Barth's account of honour supplies reasons why a couple might reasonably pursue a child. We honour the 'sexual impulses' (as Barth describes them) because that is the form of creaturely existence God established and took on, a form that He imbues with new content and significance precisely by honouring it with His presence—rather than fleeing it. Barth's approach thus seems to leave considerable room for the 'natural' aspects of human life within theological ethics—yet with respect to reproduction, at least, he also seems to bracket those natural dimensions from fully functioning as signs and indicators of God's action within the world. Birth and death as the two great limits of our life clarify the irrepeatability of the 'offer' God has made us: in that way, encountering God at them imbues human life and ethics with a profound, 'eschatological' urgency. Yet while Barth suggests that sexual intercourse may be an 'offer' from God, he yet does not draw out or develop the theological significance the creaturely form that offer takes as a definite aim and venture in faith animated by marital love toward that which only God can do for a couple, and as such a profound recognition that the limits of human agency are a benefit or good within which the command of God is heard and recognized. In this way, the drama of birth and death does occur in the life between them, as Barth allows—and nowhere is that struggle more apparent than in the aim to procreate. Where Barth's ethics of limits emphasizes the eschatological intensification of life's value, Barth does not seem to carry out this commitment consistently.

Still, the recognition that one might be honoured by God by being allowed to bear witness to His inner life through the origination of a person from within marital love seems to supply a

strong reason for the Christian, at least, to procreate. The ‘awakening’ required to have a sufficient ‘confidence in life’ to procreate is a theological task: it requires showing how human action is situated within divine action, so that the definite ventures we undertake within the divine command will be brought to fruition—even if they take a surprising form. The ‘blessing’ upon reproduction Barth discusses in III/1 is required because of the fragility of human procreative action, a vulnerability that is intrinsic to the form of life within which God placed us. But it is just such fragility and vulnerability that God honours in the Incarnation, and that prospective parents honour when they stand ‘ready’ to receive God’s offer of a new irrepeatable, once-for-all human life to them as its presuppositions. The honour of having God offer His own life to a new individual in His image *through* our action and suffering supplies a strong reason to pursue parenthood by undertaking the definite aim and venture in love of conceiving and giving birth.

Conclusion

The question of whether a presumptive pro-natalism is warranted can be pursued on a number of levels. In the opening chapter, I considered whether there might be a moral presumption for or against procreating by way of evaluating responses in moral philosophy to 'The Asymmetry.' While moral neutrality toward procreating 'happy people' might be attractive, the risks of procreating and (putatively) existing duties to third parties together seem to entail that an abstract neutrality entails a practical presumption against procreating. Constructivist defenses of the 'parent-child relation' as a non-derivative source of reasons to procreate looked like a promising way of grounding an interest in procreating. Yet their weak articulation of procreation's value makes it difficult to see how 'parenthood' overcomes the presumptive skepticism about procreating they adopt on the basis of life's risks. If procreative parenthood and adoptive parenthood are on a par, one probably should not create new sources of obligations as long as existing individuals live in deprived conditions.

The subsequent two chapters thus considered philosophical arguments for specifically procreative parenthood, namely the idea that life is a 'gift' and the value of biological bonds. Defenses of the 'gifted' quality of human life emphasize the limitations on human agency in the act of procreating—limitations that seem to constrain what can be intended through undertaking procreative acts. Such limitations seem to play a subtle role in the response to the 'theodicy problem' of natural embryo loss. The force of that objection turns on the background commitments one has about 'nature' and the corresponding likelihood of doing harm in creating. The rejoinders to it seem to rest on limitations within procreative agency. But framing the interest in procreation around the 'gift of life' also seems to detach it from parenthood. Bifurcating the two concepts makes it difficult to argue from parenthood toward procreation. This problem reappeared in Chapter Three's discussion of procreative bonds, in which the various attempts to defend the value of such bonds over and against adoptive parenthood either seemed to establish an unwelcome disparity between them or reduce to social conventions. Placing adoptive parenthood and procreative parenthood on a par makes it nearly impossible to defend procreation by way of parenthood, as any argument that might be set forth has to happen on terms *outside of* parenthood. Philosophical attempts to defend procreative parenthood thus seem to evaporate into other, independent concerns. Such a tendency suggests there are

structural reasons for moral philosophy's struggle to articulate the putative value of procreation: the possibility of non-procreative parenthood means the defense of procreation dissolves it into goods available outside parenthood, making it impossible to see how procreation can founded upon parenthood in the first place (or vice versa).

The argument then turned to Barth's theology. It began by evaluating Barth's theocentric account of creation as the backdrop to procreative reasons. Barth argues that the confidence in God faith engenders rejects both optimism and pessimism—but only by taking them seriously. Barth argues that creation's value is grounded extrinsically within the covenant. Such a stance allows Barth to take seriously harm and suffering within creation, while preserving an asymmetrical prioritization of goods in light of the Resurrection. Grounding creation in God both epistemically and ontologically raises the justificatory threshold for securing its goodness in such a way that philosophical attempts cannot match it. But it also provides Christians a maximal confidence in the fundamental goodness of the world, and a context for their moral reasoning that escapes the inherent ambivalence of moral philosophy's 'contest of intuitions.'

While such confidence might seem to straightforwardly entail pro-natalism, Barth's account of procreation's value within the covenant makes such an inference challenging. The problems are various. As we saw, Barth differentiates between the act of procreating a human being and God's creative power in forming that individual in the *imago Dei*: the creation of new individuals in the *imago Dei* is wholly in the hands of God, while human procreating supplies the occasion for such an event. Moreover, the covenant's fulfillment and the disclosure of the prototype of the *imago Dei* in Christ and His church are specifically marked by the abrogation of the purported 'burden of posterity.' While the New Testament offers an eschatological consecration to marriage, procreation receives no such heightened significance. Children are instead now 'free and optional' gifts of God, and seemingly outside the domain of moral reasons. And the ongoing existence of the species is a mark of God's patience. Procreating thus seems to be suspended theologically for Barth. It lacks any reference *for procreators* to what Barth describes as the two great acts of God: creation or consummation. Yet such an account comports with Barth's theological anthropology, in which the paradigmatic relationship is the mature I-Thou relation of male and female. Humanity is primarily *from* other humans in this mutually-originating way, not in the asymmetrical relation of parents and children. Male and female are likewise the primary structural differentiation upon which parents and children are

based. Such an approach also eclipses the Old Testament's description of procreation as a *blessing*, which had structured Barth's reading of the first creation account but disappears from view thereafter. Barth had argued that creation's status as 'benefit' turns upon its inner relationship with the covenant: creation is adapted for the covenant, and the covenant is the completion of creation. This inner dynamic is grasped only by holding the Old and New Testaments together, rather than allowing Marcionism to generate a gnosticism. Yet the two Testaments' respective treatment of procreation is for Barth a paradigmatic mark of their *dis*continuity. Little wonder, then, that pro-natalisms that affirm an obligation to procreate are a "very heathen or even Jewish type of thought."[1]

Despite these challenges, though, Barth's contention that procreation is founded upon a "confidence in life grounded in faith" impelled us to consider whether his theological anthropology and understanding of 'life' provide a normative basis for a theological pro-natalism.[2] Here a more positive depiction of procreation emerges. Humanity's constitution is a 'saving fact,' in that it is adapted to the covenant. And by encountering God at life's limits of birth and death, life's once-for-all quality takes on a heightened urgency and significance, transforming from a series of opportunities into an *offer* from God. Humanity's temporal constitution thus bears witness to the covenant even without individuals being aware of it. The awareness of life at its limits thus brings Barth to the doorstep of explicitly allowing a natural theology into his dogmatics. Barth's commitment to the pervasiveness of the divine command for humanity's bodily constitution plausibly engenders a presumptive respect for its procreative powers, and a corresponding wariness toward contraceptive practices. That life is an 'offer' from God seems to animate the 'wakefulness to life' the Christian community might call a people to and the sexual act as an 'offer' from God seems to entail a presumptive skepticism toward contracepting. Yet the muted role life's inherently reproductive dimension plays in Barth's theology after the first creation account, and Barth's concern to untether the relationship of male and female 'as such' from procreation, challenge such a reading. While there might be good reasons to see within the 'respect' required for one's sexual impulses a presumptive willingness to procreate, Barth's theological framework works against such a standpoint.

[1] *CD* III/4, 272.
[2] Ibid., 272.

Barth's consideration of life at its limits also establishes an asymmetry between parents and children regarding procreation's theological significance, which then reappears in his special ethics. The Old Testament's answer to the 'whence' of humanity is founded upon the parental blessing (and not upon procreation *per se*), but in a way that makes genealogy an intermediary between the individual and God. The New Testament frames origins in terms of baptism, dislocating parenthood (and with it procreation) from having any special status with respect to extending God's blessing—as highlighted by Barth's concerns about infant baptism, which reverts the Church to thinking of itself as a 'natural' people. The answer to humanity's *whence* is thus given in either individualistic or ecclesiastical terms, with nothing in between. Yet this discontinuity between the covenants also grounds an asymmetry between parents and children regarding procreation. Children retrospectively considering their origins can see within their parents reminders of God's work in creating *ex nihilo*—yet parents cannot claim to participate in God's work of extending creation, nor can they assert their own status as reminders or representatives of God's act of creating the child. This asymmetry raises questions, though, about what significance the procreative bond might have for parents and children, respectively.

To examine that question, I began by considering how Barth thinks Christ's own 'biological' origins structure his person and work, if at all. Barth's understanding of creation, anthropology, and the eschatologically-oriented significance of 'life' are all structured by his prioritization of Christology, a prioritization that animates an interest in Mary for procreative ethics. His discussion of the Virgin Birth is peculiarly concerned to keep glory from redounding reciprocally from Christ to Mary, framing her witness as exclusively focused on Christ. Moreover, Mary's virginity emphasizes her lack of capacity for God. While this approach fits Barth's tendency to reduce procreation to an act that makes God's actions technically possible, it also diminishes Mary's agency and makes the birth of Christ a contradiction of the 'biological' order, rather than a complementary clarification of it. However, while Barth's later understanding of parents and children preserves the asymmetrical emphasis on the child's standpoint and the relativization of biological bonds into historical relationships, it also supplies the possibility of an eschatological confirmation of parental, procreative relationships. The possibility of an eschatological intensification not only of humanity's organic existence, but of the parental sources of one's organic existence, allows for a reconfiguration of Mariology from

within Barth's own terms. I proposed on this basis that Mary's response to the Annunciation makes her the first member of the eschatologically-determined community. Her virginity thus signifies not a negation of human sinfulness, as on Barth's account in I/2, but the positive affirmation of humanity's eschatological life, as in Barth's understanding of celibacy in III/4. In this way, her childbirth not only functions as a *terminus* or *end* of the Jewish obligation to procreate but also the *beginning* of a new basis for procreation. Such a modification would mean procreation has an eschatological 'consecration' that Barth ascribes to marriage, specifically because the Second Adam outdoes the first by way of having parents. Moreover, this seems to mean the Virgin Birth is a complementary clarification of the natural, biological order—rather than a contradiction. This pattern corresponds to Barth's argument in his special ethics that biological bonds have a 'weight' deserving respect, and to his eschatologically oriented *Grenzfall* of deliberate orphanhood, which in the last analysis stands as a marker of the renewal and revivification of natural parental bonds.

This modification of Barth's Mariology from resources in his later work carried on into the final chapter, which attempted to construe the uniqueness of procreative agency around Barth's understanding of honour. Barth's understanding of the concordance of divine and human action, and the intensified value of life within its limits, combine to stand beneath the idea that the 'action and suffering' of procreative agency is a distinctly valuable disclosure of God's action within the world. This understanding furthered the formulation of a Mariology that remains secondary to Christology, but which also allows for a real—if derivative—reciprocal glory to extend from the child to the parent.[3] Having been honoured by God with the opportunity to be present through suffering for the Incarnation, Mary is rightly honoured by third parties. In the same way, God's honouring of parents with the irrepeatable offer to be present for the generation of an irreversible and irreplaceable life makes procreative parenthood seem uniquely significant and attractive. In their 'action and suffering,' procreative parents are the occasion for a divine act akin to Creation and the Incarnation in its irrepeatability. While they are not the child's Creator, it is their peculiar and irreplaceable honour to be instruments in service to God's creative power. A married couple's sexual intercourse takes the same form as

[3] The difficulties of understanding how a mother might be secondary in honour, even if prior in time, are familiar ones for Barth, for whom the first Adam is secondary in honour but prior in time. Perhaps the best distillation of this modified Barthian Mariology is from Matthew Bridges' description of Jesus in *Crown Him with Many Crowns*: "Fruit of the mystic Rose, As of that Rose the Stem."

the ‘offer’ their own lives have beneath the shadow of the eschaton. And the faith which aims at the ‘unavailability’ of God’s action in sacramentally uniting marital love *also* aims at the unavailable creation of a new person in the *imago Dei.* This ‘dual agency’ within procreation founds its peculiar value, rather than the identification of blood or biology that birth also allows. But because such an ‘honour’ is ascribed by God, it is also bounded by modesty—which prevents parents from asserting their status as God’s representatives to gain leverage over the child and from using children to simply enhance their own honour. Similarly, the vicarious ascription of honour to parents for their child’s life must also be governed by modesty: the honour parents vicariously receive is secondary to, and founded upon, the honour bestowed on the child. Such an account thus not only undergirds the reconfiguration of Mariology chapters Seven and Eight undertake, but supplies compelling reasons for treating procreative parenthood as uniquely and distinctively valuable within the purview of a Barthian theological ethics.

The Meaning of Procreative Fideism

A Barth*ian* ‘procreative fideism’ thus has a number of facets. It adopts the heart of Barth’s articulation of the reasons to procreate—the “confidence in God grounded in faith”—but modifies its surrounding theological architecture, albeit in ways that are derived from and aim to be consistent with Barth’s own work. First, it adopts the same confidence in God as the basis of creation’s goodness over and against optimism, pessimism, and the neutrality Barth thinks is the antithesis of both. In doing so, it attempts to take sufferings and harms of the world seriously—but without entailing that they do not cross a threshold and entail procreation is *presumptively* bad on the basis of the risks of suffering or embryo loss (or any other theodicy problem). Second, it intertwines marriage and procreation. Both sacramental marriage and procreation aim at what is ‘unavailable’ to human control; they are, in that sense, instances of what Barth takes faith to be. As marriage is the *telos* of the whole sphere of male and female, so procreation is the *telos* of the whole sphere of marriage—so that every marriage is conditioned by procreation, even if not every marriage is itself procreative in practice or potential. The “love” Barth suggests drenches marriage also structures the relationship of parenthood and childhood, in a way that it currently does not in Barth’s work. Marriage and procreation relate much as the covenant and creation do: they are distinct but inseparable, united but not confused.

Only they reverse the order: the covenant of marriage grounds the (pro)creation of a new life. This also means, though, there is an eschatological consecration to procreation alongside marriage. If Mary is the first respondent to the announcement of the eschaton's arrival, then the eschatological life seems to be animated by generativity or fruitfulness: the blessing of the eschatological consummation of Christ and the Church takes a form to which childbirth corresponds here and now.[4]

From the standpoint of humanity's constitution, 'procreative fideism' construes humanity's reproductive powers as apt to or fitted for the covenant. As observed above, there is no "neutral existence" for human creatures.[5] When enacted, humanity's reproductive process is the creaturely form of the covenant's content: the 'action and suffering' of procreation resonates with Christ's work of redemption and resurrection, imbuing the 'natural' phenomenon of conception and birth with a significance it otherwise lacks. Barth describes the 'Yes' of creation as conforming to the "archetype" of the Resurrection.[6] Similarly, the parental 'yes' to creation by generating new life conforms to the same archetype. Child*birth* really is a 'blessing' from God: it indicates the consummation of creation through the pains and travail of human labor—of Christ in the work of 'new creation,' and of the woman in the work of procreation. Barth correlates birth and death with God's two great acts of creation and consummation. The correlation that stands beneath procreative fideism, though, is that conception and birth correlate to God's acts of creation and consummation. By aiming beyond what is under human control, procreative actions tacitly and unwittingly embody the faith that is primarily disclosed in baptism—a faith that is transformed into hope when procreative agency is frustrated, and involuntarily childlessness arises. In that way, procreative fideism treats 'biology' as an

[4] Chapter Six's discussion indicated that for Barth 'fruitfulness' is a temporal category, which attaches to procreation in the time of the Old Testament and is transfigured into an ecclesiastical category *post Christum natum.* However, on Barth's 'futureless eschatology,' the consummation of Christ and the Church specifically does *not* have a future. If that consummation is the grounds of marriage, then procreating means marriage has a *history,* in that something independent or external to the marriage befalls it. However, transposing procreative fruitfulness into an explicitly eschatological dimension this way seems like it would require giving up the futureless eschatology, and allowing that the consummation of Christ and the Church do go into a new future which has a beginning that is *not* only an end. For more on this future, see Hitchcock, *Resurrection*. In Barth's ethics of limitation, he notes that the men of the New Testament are still in time, but "in a time which already bears its end in itself, so that, to the degree that it still continues, it hastens towards its birth…and therefore the revelation and realisation of its end." Barth's association of birth with the (temporal and teleological) end of a process ignores that it is also a beginning of a new process. III/4, 581.
[5] Busch, *Great Passion,* 182.
[6] *CD* III/1, 385.

ineliminable element of personal identity, a "saving fact." The constitutional conditions of human organic life cannot bring about the covenant; but from the standpoint of the covenant, their aptitude and order for it become clear. But this means that as the covenant is a 'fruitful' form of life, so human creaturely existence is ordered toward procreative fruitfulness—supplying a plausible reason to expect lower, rather than higher, rates of natural embryo wastage. The judgment of the risks surrounding procreating has to account for this disposition toward goodness and flourishing, which is 'baked in' to the human constitution.

'Procreative fideism' is also committed to a genealogized understanding of 'life' that corresponds to the inextricably relational content of 'parenthood.'[7] Barth's emphasis on the individual's origins immediately in God risks individualizing the person or collapsing them into their ecclesiastical identities. Eclipsing natural parenthood this way, though, makes reconstructing the distinct value of genealogy and procreative parenthood a serious challenge, and risks collapsing parenthood into a 'relationship' founded upon history, shared proximity, and general duties to transmit a tradition (ecclesiastical or otherwise) to a child.[8] In the same way, the near-disappearance of reproduction as an indicator of 'life' from Barth's theological anthropology untethers its theological significance (in its origins) from the parenthood that generates it. Parenthood is a particular kind of relational property: it cannot be instantiated without the existence of another, but when entered through procreation it also generates the existence of the other. An understanding of 'life' that has genealogy 'built in,' though, comports with the attempt to explain why the interest in 'parenthood' as an expression of one's own life might presumptively take the form of life's generation.

Such commitments mark the theological and anthropological landscape within which Christians make procreative decisions. They are part of the thick description of the moral world the church inhabits. But 'procreative fideism' also generates reasons for procreating that are more closely tied to the well-being of prospective parents. For one, it is founded upon a heightened urgency that arises when 'life' is evaluated within its limits of birth and death. The gratitude for and confidence in life—which is an irrepeatable 'offer' from God—animates a willingness to extend that offer to others, and to recognize and respect the character of sexual intercourse as inherently making such an offer available. Additionally, procreative fideism

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[7] This account overlaps with Ephraim Radner's description of life's irreducibly "filiated" quality. See Ephraim Radner, *A Time to Keep* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 75 ff.

[8] See above, Ch.8 n73, p. 222.

specifies the value of such an offer in terms of the honour a couple receives through being given the opportunity to be present for the divine work of creating a new, similarly irrepeatable once-for-all individual who comes from God and not non-being. Such an honour is extrinsically based: it falls on the couple as 'light from above,' as God gives a child to them. Yet as this gift establishes the 'spiritual mission' for the parents of bearing witness to God's action, it is possible that their honour might increase even more for their faithfulness to such a task. They can do no more than create the occasion for divine action within their child's life. Yet in doing so, they share in the honour their child is given, which falls on them as a light from their child. The honour ascribed to Christ redounds to Mary for her agency *and* self-abnegating witness, through which she and Joseph become fitting and fallen presuppositions for Christ's work. The honour of procreating opens up into the possibility of a vicariously ascribed honour on the basis of the child's life. Such honour is commensurate with the unique limitations on procreative agency and parental authority, as it is distinctively qualified by the gratitude, humility, and humor that Barth distills as 'modesty.' While such honour is predominately received, it might also be reasonably pursued within just these limits.

Procreative fideism, then, sets a default expectation for marital behavior and qualifies the form of agency procreation may take. Marital love stands in "readiness" for God's offer of new life, which entails a strong skepticism (at least) about contraceptive practices. And the gratitude, humility, and humor that must pervade any desire for the honour of procreative agency would ground a similarly strong skepticism of efforts to bring procreative agency within the purview of human control. While specifying the limits of procreative agency is beyond the scope of this dissertation, ordinary procreative practices have the advantage of bonding the "action and suffering" involved in procreation together with the love of the married couple as such, uniting marital love and procreation in a way that seems dubious with the introduction of third parties.

Karl Barth Among the Moral Philosophers, Revisited

Procreative fideism has a number of features that make it an attractive option *vis a vis* the various accounts on offer within moral philosophy. For one, the level of justification Barth's view offers procreation seems commensurate with its ubiquity as a practice. Those accounts within moral philosophy that were most attractive—the constructivist defenses of 'parenthood,'

which I dubbed a mitigating pro-natalism—try to overcome procreative skepticism by asserting the value of parenthood. Such accounts stay locked within the contest of intuitions that animates moral philosophy, which means that whatever justification they have can only be weakly founded. Additionally, philosophical defenses of the distinctive value of biological bonds nearly all try to *lower* the justificatory threshold from roof to plausibility—creating an odd situation where a practice that most people take as obvious except in extreme cases is only tentatively secured, and that by our pre-existing intuitions. Barth's strategy, though, is to adopt an extremely high threshold for justifying a particular outlook, and to do so in a way that includes an ethical dimension: pessimism and optimism are insecure in that they cannot offer the level of confidence we need to live and die based upon them. Procreative fideism, though, rescues the practices of procreating and keeping biological children and parents together through imbuing them with a confidence commensurate with their use. Procreative fideism does not strictly mean inverting the question from 'why have children*?'* to 'why *not* have children?' Instead, it indicates that an answer to the former that does not adequately 'save the appearance' of our ongoing interest in having children is *prima facie* dubious.

Moreover, procreative fideism offers a more robust explanation of procreative parenthood's unique value and distinctive agency than constructivist accounts. As Chapter Three indicated, how we construe the weightiness of biological bonds seems to depend upon what kind of value we allow biological constitution for personal identity. A theological anthropology that treats humanity's constitution as bearing secret witness to God's action in the covenant inscribes such a constitution with an unparalleled weight and dignity—and an account that treats humanity's procreative powers as honoured by God and as corresponding to His acts in creation and Christ imbues procreating with an exceptional theological significance. In this way, procreative fideism has something more to say about the nature and content of procreative bonds than the bland assertions that procreative parenthood is valuable because of the (vague and underspecified) "biological joys" it offers, or the correspondence of psychological or other traits available within it.[9]

The view also rescues a variety of intuitions and empirical phenomena. For one, it is commensurate with the intuition that there is no general, unqualified obligation to procreate—

[9] In the face of existing obligations to adopt, the possibility of discovering a child shares his mother's mannerisms or nose hardly seems like a weighty reason to procreate.

even if it requires ‘readiness’ by a couple and gives the church the basis for exhorting its members and society to do so. And it opens up the possibility of an intriguing explanation for why many developed societies are experiencing decreasing birth rates. If procreation is animated by a confidence in life grounded in *faith*—which is ordered toward what is unavailable to human control—we could reasonably expect decreasing birthrates to correlate with declining religiosity and increases in positive control over fertility.[10] Such an expectation would be counterintuitive; but if the natural means of procreating uniquely disclose joint divine action, we might expect God would willingly abscond in light of attempts to render His presence in the process no longer necessary.

While ‘procreative fideism’ is animated by explicitly theological concerns, there are intriguing points of contact between this reconstructed Barthianism and the discussion of moral philosophy. In the first place, framing procreative agency as a ‘venture in faith’ that aims at what is unavailable to human control comports well with Chapter Two’s discussion of the involuntariness of and within the procreative process. Trying to procreate is inversely proportional to the knowledge of which act was procreative, which makes describing trying to procreate as a venture of faith seem reasonable. Additionally, Barth’s discussion of life at its limits offers interesting possibilities for dialogue with the role *non*-existence plays in moral philosophy’s discussions of procreative ethics. David Benatar’s argument, for instance, assesses the peculiar value of our existing life through a comparison to non-existence. Such a comparison seems to heighten or magnify the drama of existence, by allowing the possibility that a life could be *better than* or *worse than* non-existence. Intriguingly, though, Barth’s discussion of life at its limits of birth and death allows a similar intensification of the value of each life—though not through a comparison to non-existence *per se,* but through arguing that we encounter *God* at our limits. Such a comparison also avoids evaluating life’s status on the proportionate balancing of goods and harms to make the ‘gift of existence’ seem like a plausible

[10] Barth affirms worries about overpopulation, noting that the population exploded during an age of *increasing* negative control over fertility. He also notes this increase in negative control correlates with declining “confidence in life.” Barth points to both social circumstances and a “certain degeneration and impoverishment of faith” as each playing a part in the loss of such confidence. One further question would be whether the attempt to exert *positive* control over fertility is similarly correlated with the declining birthrate and waning confidence Barth detected in his own day. Barth’s account gives us reason to think it might be. See *CD* III/4, 269 and 272.

basis for gratitude. Nor does it found the good of existing on the brute fact we have it.[11] Instead, Barth's account attempts to found the value of existing only within God. The awareness of life's 'once-for-all' character that emerges through such a comparison is closely correlated with the irreplaceability that structures the parent-child relationship when it arises. Such an emphasis is commensurate with Moschella's understanding that procreative parenthood is distinct because parents are the non-fungible causes of a non-fungible person. Yet it goes beyond such an account by framing such 'causation' within the dual, divine-human agency that secures it as a benefit to humanity. One further point of contact is worth noting: Jeff McMahan objected to prioritizing benefits to existing individuals over benefits bestowed through creating on grounds that space and time do not make a moral difference. However, Barth's understanding of our presuppositions suggests that space and time do not determine one's moral behavior (which are governed by the divine command), but also that the divine command is unrecognizable except within the space and time that God has placed us. Such a providentially ordered understanding of the world, if developed, would generate different intuitions about the relative weight of the benefits we bestow through creating and caring for existing individuals, by narrowing the range of the latter so that partial relationships are included within our assessment of our existing obligations. If the scope of agency matters for partiality, as it does on Barth's view, diluted agency diminishes obligations.

The appeal to honour, though, and its constraint by modesty are probably the most attractive features of procreative fideism. They also have the advantage of being the most readily adaptable to non-theological accounts. Such an approach allows for a non-instrumentalizing joy in one's children, which links up with deep intuitions about why people procreate: they desire the honour of being involved in an individual's life from its inception, so that they can stand in the *from* relationship toward them and experience the derivative, vicarious gladness of witnessing first-hand and up close such a life lived well. Such an account is liable to distortion into a prideful instrumentalization of a child's life for the sake of the parent's own honour. But the *from* relationship requires an asymmetry: children are from their parents, but are not reducible to their parents, nor are progenitors reducible to their children. Barth's understanding of honour preserves this asymmetry, as it indexes parental and child honour to a

[11] Meilaender's theologically informed argument contends that our gratitude for existence is founded upon the fact that there is something rather than nothing: "Before the sheer wonder of existence we must simply bend the knee." See Meilaender, *Should We Live,* 69.

standard or threshold outside of the relationship and limits parents to bearing witness, rather than asserting their status as God's representatives.

Does such an understanding of parental honour establish a troubling disparity between procreation and adoption? On theological grounds, at least, I suspect not. In their own way, each form of parenting goes beyond the other. Procreative parenthood exceeds adoptive parenthood regarding the transparency of divine action for the emergence of the child into a marriage, and for the peculiar opportunity it affords parents to be present in action and suffering for the divine work of creating a new individual—a work that, theologically, proleptically figures God's disclosure in the cross and resurrection. Yet while procreative parenthood emphasizes the sameness of the child to the parents, adoptive parenthood discloses the child's differences—differences that adoption folds into a loving relationship instead of eradicating. Moreover, procreative parenthood more transparently indicates the child's position as *from* the parents; adoptive parenthood more transparently indicates the child's position as coming *to* the parents. The latter is peculiarly susceptible to being instrumentalized as a result—and if adoption is treated as normative for relationships, it risks denuding the parent-child relationship into a common bond based on a history of those who are otherwise strangers. But it is no less valuable, especially in 'mixed' families, for this. Failing to acknowledge these differences seems to be false to the complexity of adoption: adoptive children have the occasion for alienation from their procreative families, in a way that procreated children do not. Because their existence as a person and their status as 'child of' can come apart, adoptive children may in a fit of anger deny the latter on the basis of the former. Yet by folding these occasions of alienation into the structure of the family, adoptive parenthood in its own way exceeds procreative parenthood: for the child, it eliminates any confusion about the primary significance of parenthood. It also corresponds to Christ's redemptive activity—where procreation corresponds to His creative and consummative works. Such an understanding recognizes a disparity between the two forms of relationship, and supplies grounds for why one might reasonably procreate rather than adopt—but without making that disparity a hierarchy.

However, Barth's understanding of honour and his underdeveloped understanding of procreative wrongness raises serious questions about the scope of responsibility and the nature of wrongdoing in this realm that demand further attention. The most serious limitation of procreative fideism as articulated so far is it does not seem to offer a threshold or criterion of

expected well-being below which it would be irresponsible to create an individual. David Benatar's perfectionist standard motivated his categorical anti-natalism. Barth's Christocentristic understanding of creation provides a plausible response to theodicy problems and an attractive explanation for why those under conditions of extreme deprivation or suffering still retain human dignity. But it raises the possibility that suffering can never generate a reason against creating, since the covenant and the resurrection secure the reality of goodness through sin and sorrows. Because God really honours human nature and action, Barth expands the scope of human responsibility within procreating to include rejecting God's gift of a child. Yet Barth indicates parents can only err in creating a child by failing to respect their marital union or their own health—rather than by intentionally undertaking a procreative act where considerable suffering within the child's life is plausible. In this way, procreative fideism seems to suffer from all the problems any other form of fideism suffers from—it undermines reason, which in this context is associated with 'quality of life' predictions. Yet such a limitation is not necessarily fatal to the view: it only indicates its current incompleteness. As Barth understands procreation to be tethered to an assessment of the value of 'life,' further consideration of his understanding of the appropriate resistance to sickness and death within his ethics of life might offer resources for constraining the form of procreative reasoning at work.[12]

Procreative fideism, then, not only presumptively permits the procreation of new individuals, but forms the basis for an exhortation to do so—without reducing procreation to a generally available obligation. In that sense, procreative fideism is the antithesis of procreative skepticism—but with a foundation that is secured much more deeply and broadly than the intuitions beneath 'procreative optimism.' Barth's own account is unremittingly theological. But it also supplies grounds for expecting similar conclusions through direct consideration of the world, even if those conclusions are less secure. The disclosure of Jesus Christ is the epistemic basis for our understanding of creation and human nature, but the limits of human life have a unique status as a sign of God's providential care, as they are immediately available to every individual. Barth repeatedly underscores that individuals act upon theological truths, and in that sense bear witness to them, whether they realize it or not. One aspect or effect of a theologically grounded pro-natalism would be to call individuals to an awareness of those dimensions and

[12] This is a project that seems underdeveloped in moral theology. While defenses of 'procreative responsibility' are manifold, few have offered meaningful guidance about the conditions under which procreation might be morally illicit.

make plain its grounds. As Barth allows, there may be times in which it is the Church's task to call people to the 'confidence in life grounded in faith'—a confidence that within the time we are given takes the form of conceiving and giving birth.

The Joy of Procreating

I conclude, then, by naming one final dimension of procreative fideism—and one final modification to Barth's theological ethics. As we saw, Barth specifies procreative parenthood around honour and obligation, both of which are necessary for procreative parents to feel. One cannot "assume the burden of obligation without feeling joy in the accompanying honour," nor can one "rejoice in the honour without taking to heart the seriousness of the obligation."[13] The possibility of rejoicing in such an honour requires setting off such procreative fideism from a Pollyannish optimism that might try to sound similar notes. For Barth, the 'life' that parents have confidence in is not *merely* or even *only* biological life. It is, instead, the "will for joy, delight and happiness." Joy is a moment of temporal arrest, a suspension of time that happens when we attain our goal. It occurs when a life in time "gives him no more trouble but offers itself as a gift."[14] Crucially, joy is unavailable to human control—even though, like procreation, the Christian does not treat joy as a matter of chance. As with procreation for married couples, the Christian "should continually hold himself in readiness for joy." That an individual stands in readiness for joy means the *expectation* that "life will reveal itself as God's gift of grace," and that there will be "provisional fulfilments of its meaning and intention as movement."[15] Such an expectation means action: it is ours to "create opportunities for [real joy] in anticipatory joy, but we cannot create or construct or produce or force it by various plans and measures."[16]

Barth's depiction of joy incorporates the critiques he had lodged against 18th century optimism. Joy does not mean avoiding the world's harshness, as optimism does, but leads to an "intensification, strengthening, deepening and elevation of the whole awareness of life which is necessarily more than joy."[17] There is no glancing away from the 'shadow side' of creation

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[13] *CD* III/4, 277.
[14] Ibid., 376.
[15] Ibid., 376-377.
[16] Ibid., 379.
[17] Ibid., 382.

here: when bounded by joy, the droughts that invariably afflict humankind "serve to refresh console and encourage" us.[18] Joy is strengthened, not weakened, by suffering. Because the 'little fulfillments' of joy here and now are "reflections of the great fulfillment" that has taken place in Christ's death and resurrection, the true test for our joy is that we "do not evade the shadow of the cross of Jesus Christ and are not unwilling to be genuinely joyful even as we bear the sorrows laid upon us."[19] Such 'little fulfillments' are real, but provisional and anticipatory: they must be received with gratitude, but only prefigure the joy we have in the "definitive revelation of the fulfilment of life accomplished for us and addressed to us by God."[20] In this way, joy takes the form of faith sustained by hope.

Here, then, lies final addition to procreative fideism—and the final modification to Barth. Where childbirth is a figure or type of the resurrection, and so receives the same eschatological consecration as marriage, it becomes for the parents a provisional and anticipatory joy. Such joy is distinct from the "biological joys" moral philosophers posited to explain a preference for procreation. Indeed, it is tied to the recognition that within giving birth there is an act of God that corresponds to His action at the consummation of all things. As the arrival of joy lies not within human control, so the creation of the child remains primarily and properly the act of God. Whence, then, the modification? Barth acknowledges that procreation still happens that the "joy of parenthood should still have a place."[21] But as we saw, his description of God's attitude toward procreation is more tepid: it is "under God's longsuffering and patience, and is due to His mercy, that in these last days [procreation] may still take place." The gap between the human and divine attitudes Barth names is striking. It is also worth rejecting. If the honour of procreative parents falls upon them from God, so must their joy. Procreation continues to happen because of God's patience, yes, but more so because of His abundant delight in continuing to bless creation and parents through extending His unique and irrepeatable offer of life through them. Parents who procreate thus joyfully echo the 'Yes' that God first utters to His creation, and to them: on this basis they stand ready for the blessing of new life that only God can bestow.

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 383.
[20] Ibid., 385.
[21] Ibid., 266.

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