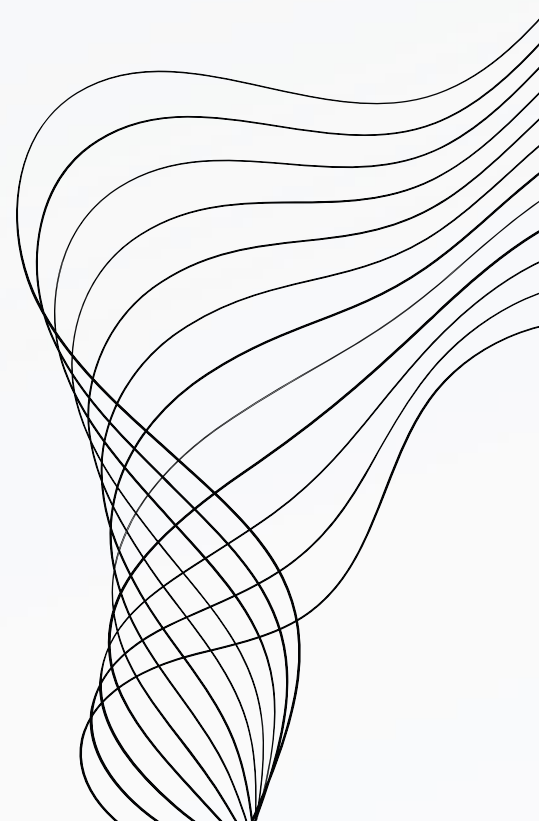




THE PARENTAL GAMBIT
MORAL LUCK AND LIVES WORTH LIVING

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01. MORAL LUCK

MORAL LUCK

Smith drives to a party. Smith gets drunk and drives home. Despite several scratches to his car from his drunk driving, Smith makes it home safely without incident.

Jones is the same person as Smith, but in a counterfactual world. In this world, Jones drives to a party, gets drunk, and drives home. Jones is the same person, drank the same amount, drives the same car, and takes the same route as Smith. However, as Jones is driving home, a little girl dashes in front of his car. Jones fails to react in time and fatally runs over the little girl.



MORAL LUCK AND CONTROL

Question

Are Smith and Jones equally blameworthy for drunk-driving?

Well...

If we are morally assessable only for things that are within our control, then it seems that they are.

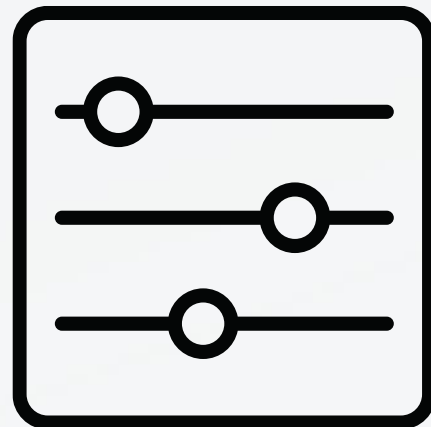
But...

This raises conflicting intuitions. How can Jones, who is responsible for the death of a little girl, be equally blameworthy to Smith?



CONTROL PRINCIPLE

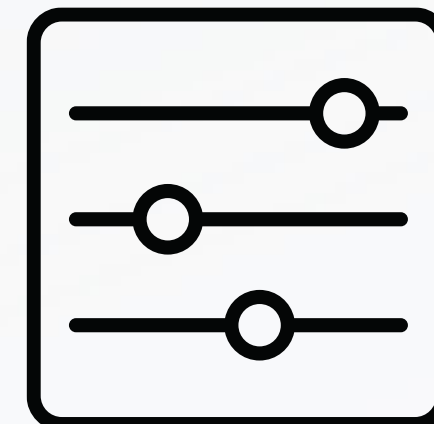
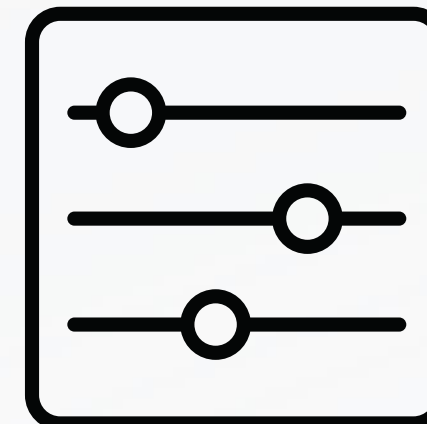
Control Principle (CP)



We are morally assessable only to the extent that what we are assessed for depends on factors under our control.

Two people ought not to be morally assessed differently if the only other differences between them are due to factors beyond their control.

CP-Corollary (CPc)



ONE UPSHOT OF THE CPc

“—

“Moral agents are to be judged in the light of the knowledge available to them **at the point of decision to act**, given an acknowledged underlying condition of universal fallibility in the pursuit and deployment of knowledge”

(Rosebury, 1995, p. 524)

—”



THE CPc AND ANTE-HOC KNOWLEDGE

Smith is not praiseworthy for making it home safe, because drunk driving is morally impermissible



Jones is blameworthy because he drove drunk, and a (very) negative outcome accrued



THE

Smart
practices
may
become
driving
imp



THE CPc AND ANTE-HOC KNOWLEDGE

Having *ante-hoc* (that is, *prior*) knowledge about the possible negative outcomes of a gamble has an important upshot:

A gambler is not praiseworthy if a gamble pays off, but

A gambler remains blameworthy if a gamble does not pay off.





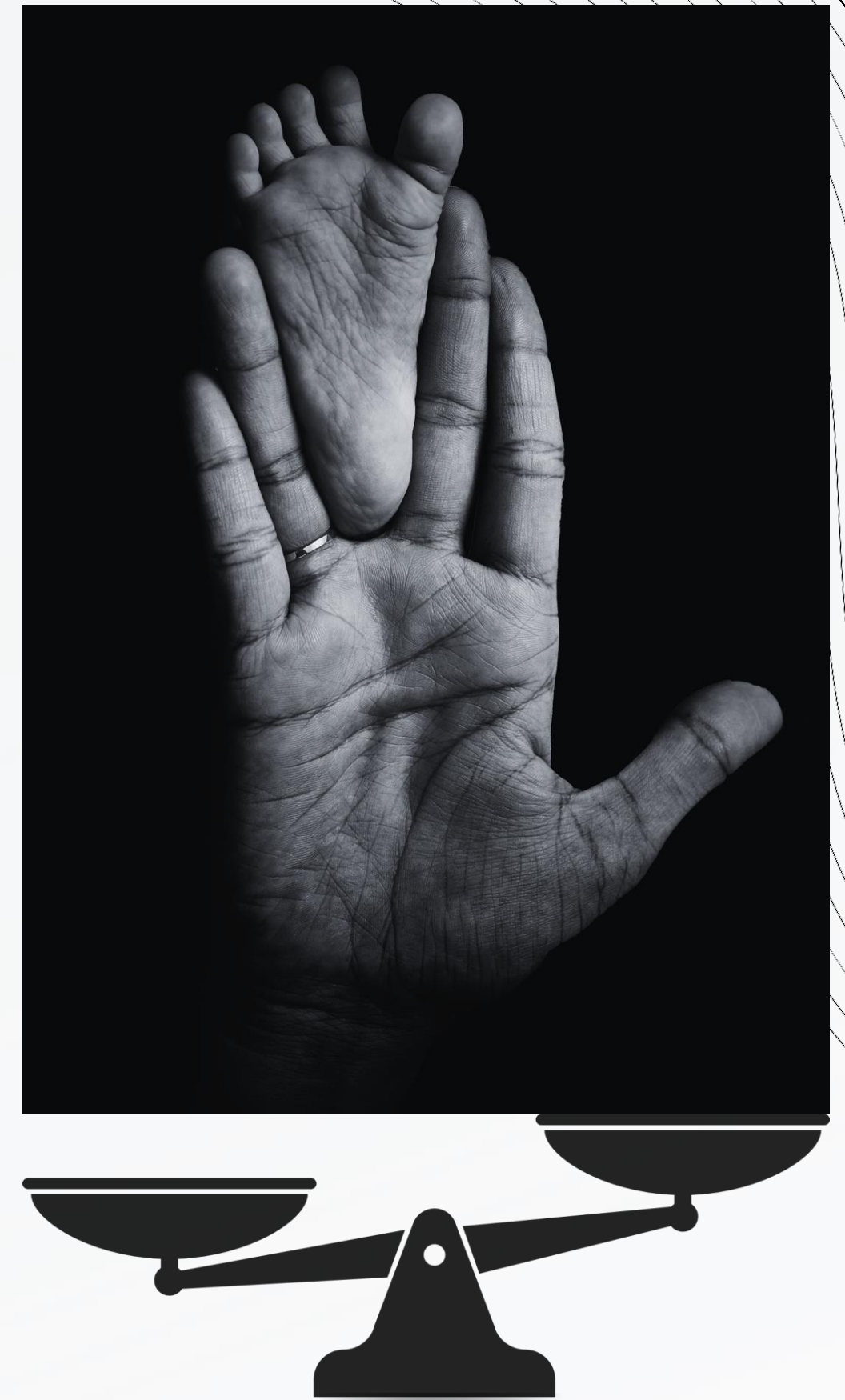
02. THE PARENTAL GAMBIT

PARENTHOOD & ANTE-HOC KNOWLEDGE

Likelihood Asymmetry

All existence necessarily contain suffering.
However, all existence does not necessarily contain
the requisite features of a life worth living.

Reasons for a life worth living are retrospective
evaluations that cannot be foreseen, but all lives, as a
matter of pragmatic or realistic necessity, contain
suffering.

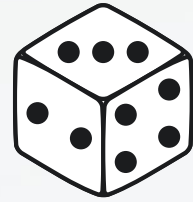


WHAT DOES A PROSPECTIVE PARENT KNOW?

PRE-BIRTH

All existence, as a matter of practical necessity, contains suffering.

The child would probably have a life worth living?



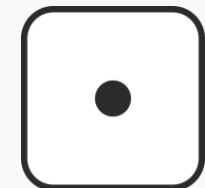
POST-BIRTH

Life worth living



POST-BIRTH

Life not worth living



WHAT DOES A PROSPECTIVE PARENT KNOW?

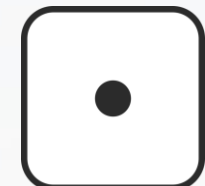
Resultant Moral Luck Asymmetry of Parenthood:

Because of the Likelihood Asymmetry, parents of children with lives not worth living are blameworthy for their children's suffering. However, parents of children with lives worth living are not praiseworthy for their children's happiness.

POST-BIRTH
Life worth living



POST-BIRTH
Life not worth living



ANGELA AND MICHAELA

Angela



Angela is born to a pair of loving, financially stable, and healthy parents. Angela grows up healthily and lives a life worth living that is otherwise unremarkable.

Michaela is the same child as Angela. However, at four years of age, an errant driver hits Michaela while she is walking home from pre-school. Michaela is subsequently quadriplegic. She is conscious and verbal, but otherwise dependent on a feeding tube and unable to perform basic tasks of daily living. Michaela thinks her life is no longer worth living*.

Michaela



*I have no intention of arguing that quadriplegia leads to a life not worth living.

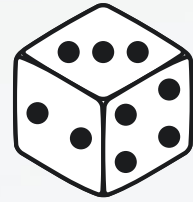
I acknowledge that this assumption is by no means a logical necessity, and people with quadriplegia certainly have lives worth living in the real world.

WHAT DOES A PROSPECTIVE PARENT KNOW?

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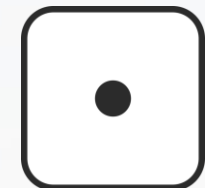
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POST-BIRTH
Life worth living



POST-BIRTH
Life not worth living

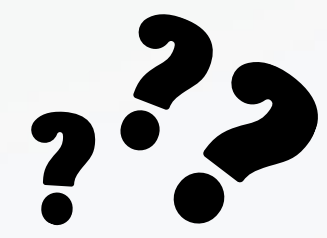
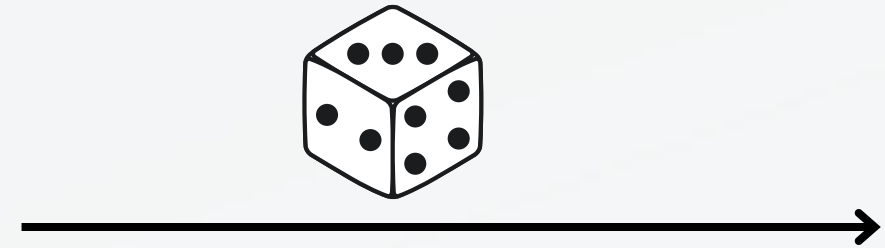


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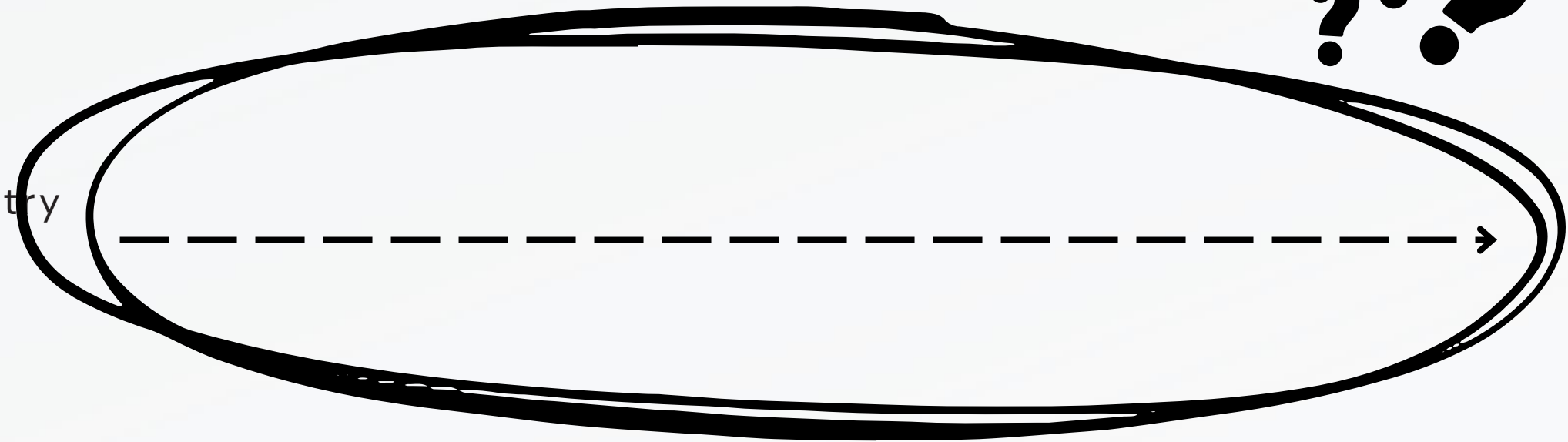
POST-BIRTH

Life worth living



POST-BIRTH

Life not worth living



Likelihood Asymmetry



Ante-hoc



Resultant Moral Luck Asymmetry



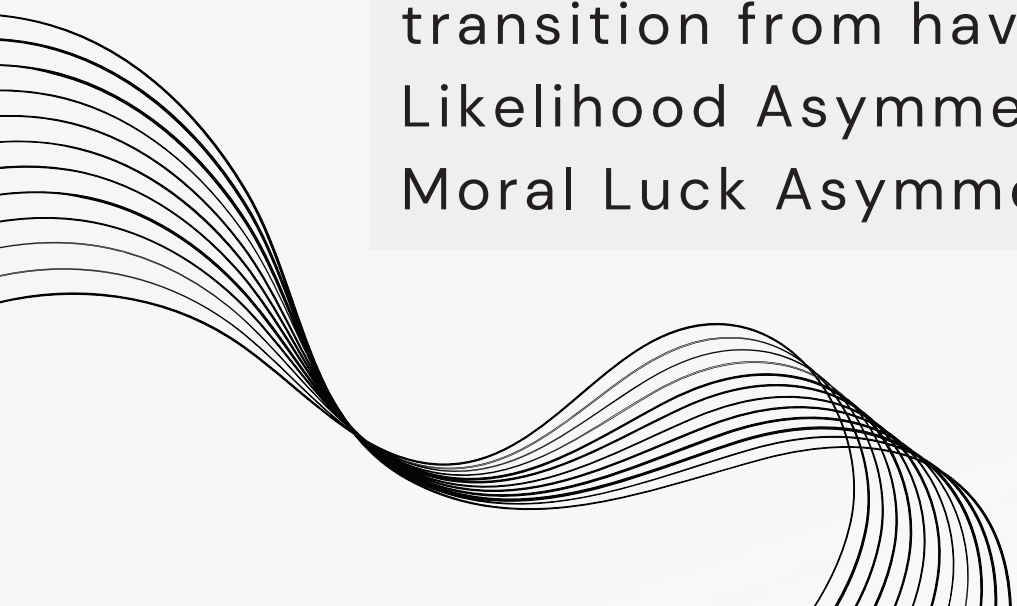
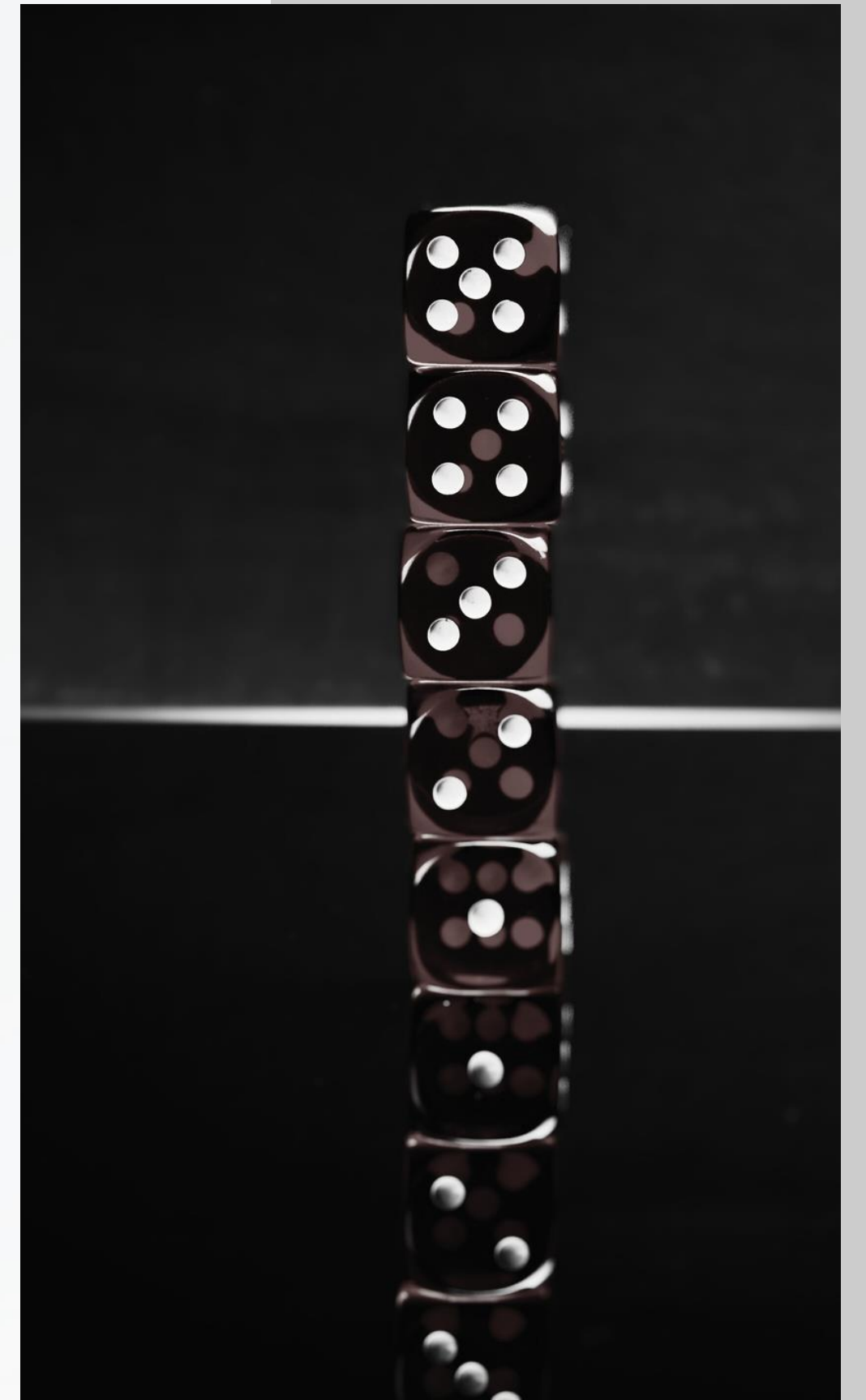
Post-hoc

A GAMBLE

Both Angela and Michaela's parents took a gamble on their respective children's lives. One gamble paid off, while unfortunately the other did not.

Presumably, both parents possess *ante-hoc* knowledge that their children might not have lives worth living despite their best efforts.

By entering into the gamble of procreation anyway, they transition from having *ante-hoc* knowledge about the Likelihood Asymmetry into being subject to the Resultant Moral Luck Asymmetry of Parenthood.



UPSHOT

Angela's Parents



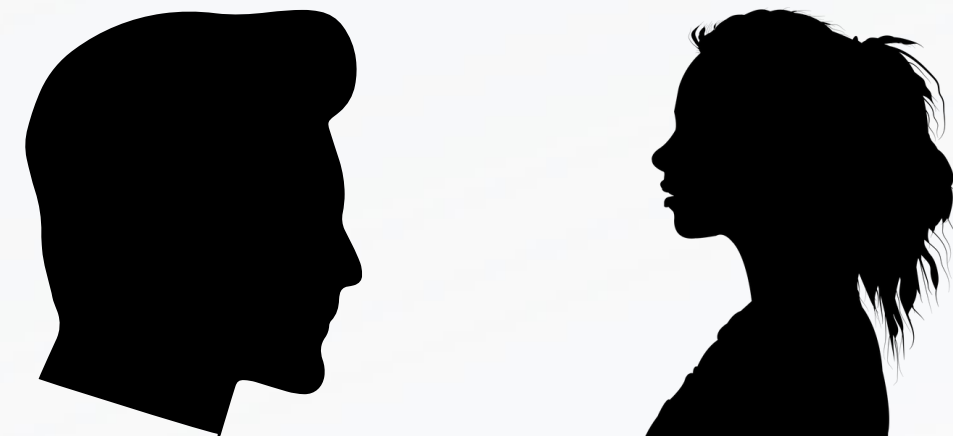
Angela's parents gambled on Angela's life. Since Angela's life is worth living, their gamble paid off.

But, since gamblers are not praiseworthy for winning their gambles, Angela's parents are not praiseworthy.

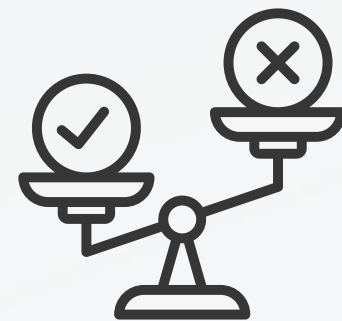
Michaela's parents gambled on Michaela's life. Since Michaela's life is not worth living, their gamble did not pay off.

Since gamblers remain blameworthy for losing their gambles, Michaela's parents are blameworthy.

Michaela's Parents



UPSHOT



As it relates to praise- and blameworthiness, childbearing is a zero-sum game.



Inasmuch as we are apt to avoid blame and pursue praise, it is rational not to birth children.



03. BLAMEWORTHY GAMBLERS?

ONE CONCERN

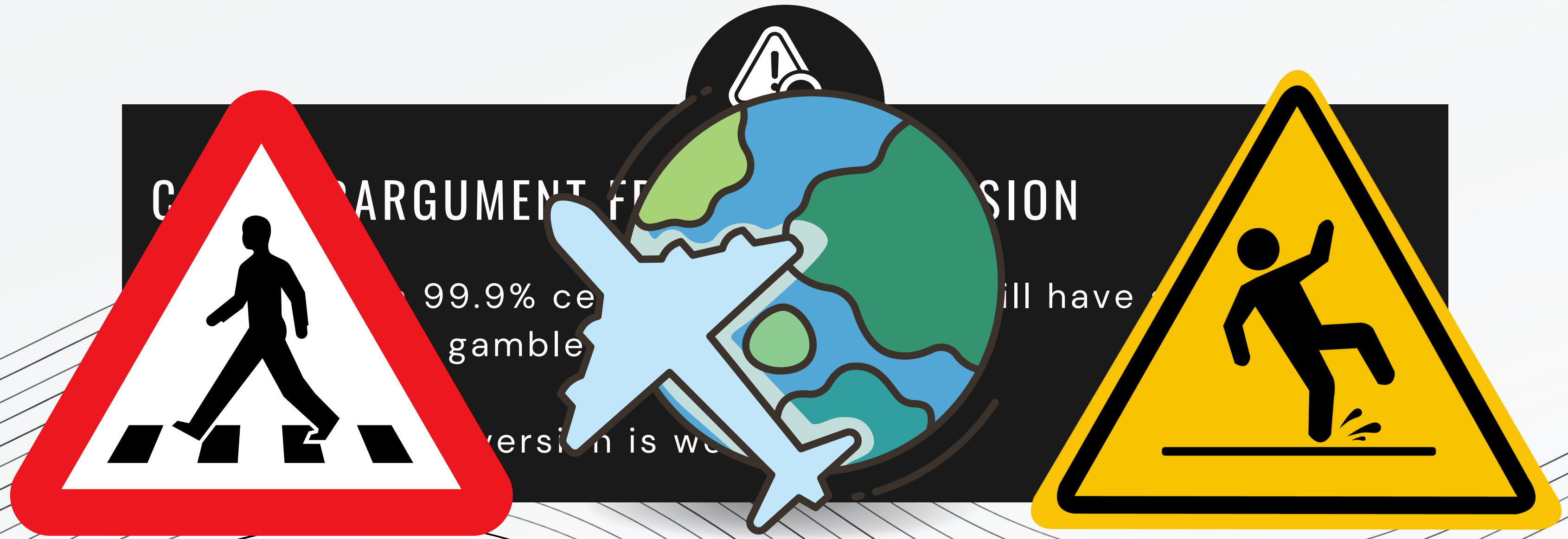


COUNTERARGUMENT FROM RISK AVERSION

Suppose I am 99.9% certain that my child will have a life worth living. Isn't the gamble worth it?

Unrealistic risk aversion is weird!

ONE CONCERN



COUNTERARGUMENT FOR CONCLUSION

99.9% ce
gamble

version is we

RISK-TAKING

A needs-based axiology shows why we ought not assume normative parity between the risk existent people take and the risk we put future people in *via* procreation. (Häyry, 2023)

Existent People



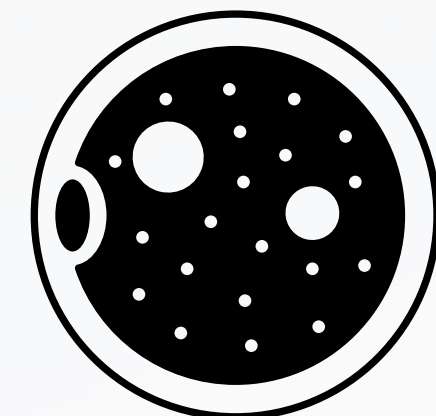
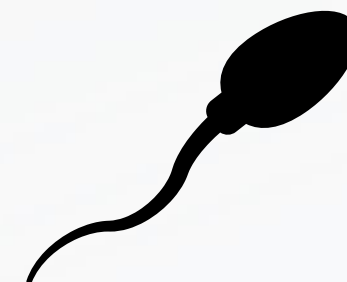
Crossing the street, driving, flying, and indeed leaving home involves risk.

However, existent people have needs that must be fulfilled. Having to take these risks is a reality that we are born into.

Future people, on the other hand, have no such needs at all.

To subject a future person to risk that they do not (yet) need to undertake is morally problematic.

Future People



RISK-TAKING

A needs-based axiology shows why we ought not assume normative parity between the risk existent people take and the risk we put future people in *via* procreation. (Häyry, 2023)



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REJOINDERS

Present and future people, moral epistemology, and the dice we roll

How likely is it that one can know of the likelihoods that their child's life would be worth living so that the likelihoods would make losing the gamble permissible?

**PRACTICAL
IMPLAUSIBILITY**

The only way to know if a child's life is (or will be) worth living is through *retrospective, a posteriori* evaluation. By then, the child would already have been born.

**NECESSITY OF
RETROSPECTION**

My argument revolves around praise- and blameworthiness, not a global impermissibility of procreation. If, somehow, one *knows* that there is a 99% of a life worth living, they should procreate. My argument just says that they are not praiseworthy for doing so.

**MODERATE
ANTINATALISM**



CONCLUSION

To become a parent is to gamble on the lives of future people.

In the presence of *ante hoc* knowledge about the terms of the gamble, a gambler is not praiseworthy for winning. However, a gambler remains blameworthy for losing.

Parents who have children whose lives are worth living are not praiseworthy, but parents who have children whose lives are not worth living remain blameworthy for the harms that befall their children.

THANK YOU!

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