

“Conflicting Intuitions About Causing People to Exist”

A single act can both cause a bad effect in a future life and be a necessary condition of the existence of that life. Provided that the life is worth living, the act is neither bad nor worse for the person who suffers the bad effect. Nor, I believe, does it infringe that person's rights. One of Derek Parfit's many important insights was that such acts are far more common than we previously supposed. The problem of explaining why these acts can be wrong is what he called the *Non-Identity Problem*. The intuition that cases involving the Non-Identity Problem tend to elicit is that when someone is going to come into existence, there is a strong moral reason to ensure that it will be a better-off person rather than a *different*, less well-off person. Another common intuition is that there is no moral reason to cause a person to exist just because that person would be well off. These two intuitions, however, are in tension with one another. Can the belief that there is a *strong* moral reason to cause a well-off person to exist when the alternative is that a less well-off person will exist instead be reconciled with the belief that there is *no* moral reason to cause a well-off person to exist when the alternative is that no one will come into existence? It may seem, indeed, that these two common sense beliefs together imply that it is *worse* if a less well-off person comes into existence than if no person comes into existence. I will argue that these and other related problems compel us to accept that there is a moral reason to cause well-off people to exist, just as there is a moral reason not to cause miserable people to exist