

MERE ADDITION AND THE SEPARATENESS OF PERSONS: A CANDIDATE FOR THEORY X

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The best reason to preserve life on earth is that more lives worth living are better than fewer. But how shall we avoid the repugnant conclusion? Some suggest that we can block it by claiming that good lives are lexically better than mediocre ones. Yet this does not solve the mere addition paradox. I argue that the paradox arises because it entails two types of aggregation.

Suppose we are comparing a single good life in world J and a million sweatshop lives in world K. Only J's welfare falls above the lexical level. Since everyone in either world will be equally well-off, we adopt, in Rawls's phrase, 'the principle of rational choice for one man'. All things considered, we would prefer the single good life in J to a million sweatshop lives, and so would any other possible people. But after possible lives have become actual—when comparing J+ and K—we must weigh one person's preference for his good life against a *million other people's* preferences for moving on to K. These inevitably outweigh the preferences of the original person, making K better than J+.

If J is better than K, and K is better than J+, then either J+ must be worse than J, or we must accept intransitivity of value. I argue that J+ is worse, because of its inequality. But this is not because inequality is bad in itself. Rather, it is because J+'s inequality makes it better to move on to K. Since K is worse than J, and J+ has a property that makes it better to choose this inferior outcome, that makes J+ worse than J. This solves the mere addition paradox and lays the foundation for an impersonal theory of population ethics.