Abstract for the General Public: *Climate Change, Parenthood, and the Virtues of Hope*

When my partner was pregnant with our eldest child, our son, I was struck – perhaps belatedly – with a swirling multitude of anxieties about whether, in bringing him into the world, we would be doing the right thing. A few years prior to that, I had been awarded by PhD for a thesis mainly focused on the work of Theodor Adorno, who I was particularly interested in as a result of his 'Wrong Life Claim': the claim that our society, as it exists right now, is the 'wrong' or 'false' form of life for human beings, and that there can 'no right living' within it. The world, I had always thought, was bad – and getting worse. How could I justify bringing new life into it?

Society might be considered 'wrong' for all sorts of reasons: from rule by authoritarian politicians, to how it treats the poorest and worst-off. Our own society is beset by all sorts of problems – but nowadays, perhaps the most ultimately damning, is the apocalyptic trajectory on which it now seems headed. The climate disaster is not only a sign that we are not living the good or right life *right now* – it gives us the almost certain knowledge that in the future, things are bound to get a whole lot worse. Life indeed may even become completely unliveable.

So this was my problem. As a parent – perhaps even just, as a prospective parent – I had a duty to my son to help him live a good-enough life. But circumstances in the world, political and ecological circumstances quite beyond my control, might be conspiring to make that impossible. Had I done something terrible? How could I even *hope* that I hadn't?

These sort of anxieties are becoming increasingly universal. In public discourse, it is increasingly common to read assertions to the effect that, given the fact of climate change, it is morally wrong to have children. This might be because it is wrong to have children because more humans mean more pollution – so having a large family means a larger carbon footprint. Or it might be wrong, as I personally most especially feared, because *existence* – in the age of climate change – is bad for one's child. No-one can hope to live a good-enough life, so it's better never to be born at all.

When my partner was pregnant with our son, I wrote a philosophical memoir called *Infinitely Full of Hope: Fatherhood and the Future in an Age of Crisis and Disaster*, which was released in 2021. In this book, which was aimed at both a specialist and a general audience, I developed a philosophical account of hope, and realised – thankfully – that, precisely *through* the birth of my son and my new duty to raise him, I had good grounds to continue to be hopeful about the future. My argument proceeded primarily with reference to philosophical and literary figures I had been interested in beforehand: Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Mark Fisher, Franz Kafka, Jean Rhys. But I also discovered important answers in some thinkers and traditions I had previously been no more than passingly interested in: in particular virtue ethics, and the concept of 'natality', drawn from the work of Hannah Arendt. For Arendt, 'natality' signifies the new beginning inherent and birth: for her, it is the founding condition on the possibility of hope.

In this research project, I am building on the work I undertook towards my book to explore Arendt's concept of 'natality', defending it in relation not only to Aristotelian ethics in general, but also what I identified in my book as the three 'virtues of hope': charity, solidarity, and modesty. I want to show how understanding these concepts can help lead us to meaningful (and hopeful) action against the climate disaster, and how parenthood and raising children are vital parts of that. Perhaps still more ambitiously, I want to argue definitively that – far from climate change meaning we should be having fewer kids – the climate disaster means that we need future generations of human beings *more*. Having kids is not only morally OK: it's actively green!