Parfit's Repugnant Conclusion

1   The Repugnant Conclusion: Z is better than A
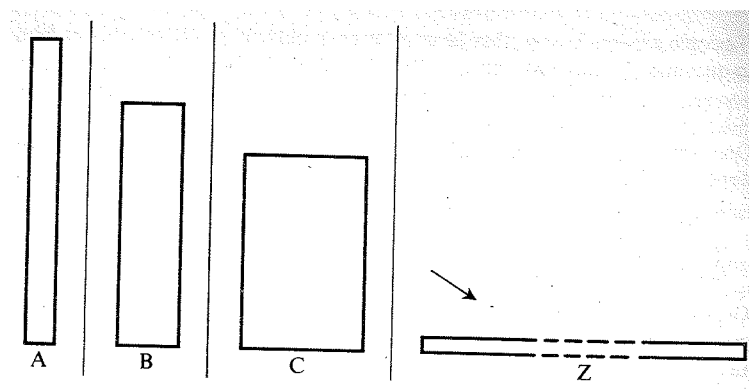
People	Quality	Total	Average
100	1.0	100	1.0

Table 1   A world

People	Quality	Total	Average
200	0.8	160	0.8

Table 2   B world

People	Quality	Total	Average
50,000	0.0033	165	0.0033

Table 3   Z world

## 2   What Denying the Repugnant Conclusion Entails

1. Suppose the Repugnant Conclusion is false: Z is worse than A.

2. If Z is worse than A, then B is worse than A.

3. Therefore, B is worse than A.

3   The first one to notice this: Henry Sidgwick

"Assuming, then, that the average happiness of human beings is a positive quantity, it seems clear that, supposing the average happiness enjoyed remains undiminished, Utilitarianism directs us to make the number enjoying it as great as possible. But if we foresee as possible that an increase in numbers will be accompanied by a decrease in average happiness or vice versa, a point arises which has not only never been formally noticed, but which seems to have been substantially overlooked by many Utilitarians. For if we take Utilitarianism to prescribe, as the ultimate end of action, happiness on the whole, and not any individual's happiness, unless considered as an element of the whole, it would follow that, if the additional population enjoy on the whole positive happiness, we ought to weigh the amount of happiness gained by the extra number against the amount lost by the remainder. So that, strictly conceived, the point up to which, on Utilitarian principles, population ought to be encouraged to increase, is not that at which average happiness is the greatest possible, — as appears to be often assumed by political economists of the school of Malthus — but that at which the product formed by multiplying the number of persons living into the amount of average happiness reaches its maximum."[1]

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[1] Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics,* 7th ed. (London, 1907), Bk. 4, Ch. 1, Sec. 2, Par. 4.

4 The Mere Addition Paradox
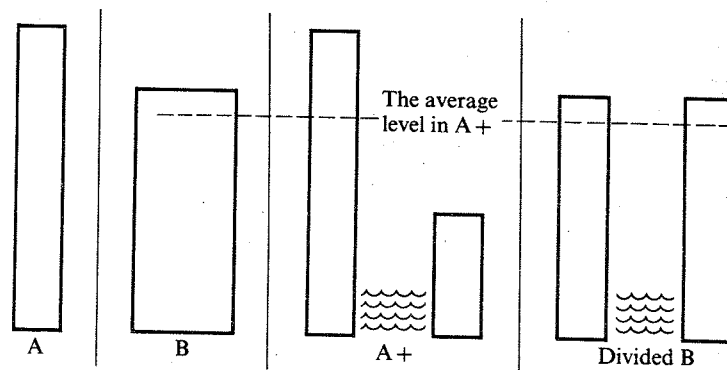
People	Quality	Total	Average
100	1.0	100	1.0
100	0.4	40	0.4
200	–	140	0.7

Table 4   A+ world

People	Quality	Total	Average
100	0.8	80	0.8
100	0.8	80	0.8
200	0.8	160	0.8

Table 5   Divided B world

People	Quality	Total	Average
200	0.8	160	0.8

Table 6   B world

5 Three points from the Mere Addition Paradox

4. A+ is not worse than A. (How could the addition of lives worth living make the world worse?)

5. Divided B is better than A+. (It's better by every measure: total quality of life, average quality of life, and equality.)

6. B is better than A+. (B is the same as Divided B.)

6 Back to the Repugnant Conclusion

7. A+ is not worse than A. (this is 4)

8. If B is better than A+, then B is not worse than A. (from 7)

9. B is better than A+. (this is 6)

10. Therefore, B is not worse than A. (from 8 and 9)

Compare 10. with what we said in the Repugnant Conclusion section:

1. Suppose the Repugnant Conclusion is false: Z is worse than A.

2. If Z is worse than A, then B is worse than A.

3. Therefore, B is worse than A.