

To Bear or Not To Bear: Fatherhood at the end of the world?

Dear C and Dr. B:

I am 26 and my girlfriend and I were talking marriage. I love her very much but there's one problem: children. She wants them; I do not. I cannot conceive of still being alive to watch them suffer - science predicts that the world as we know it will not be recognizable 50 years from now due to climate change. Why would I bring someone into that suffering? - Suffering Sam

Dr. B says: I can guarantee the future holds war, pestilence, famine, flood, earthquake, hurricane, fire, and volcanoes. These conditions have always been, and will always be. This doesn't mean that what's happening globally will affect every person alive the same way. What science also shows is that early on, climate change will mostly affect the poor and marginalized based on how we structure our society. I assume if you are reading this that you and your kids will not be either. I do not recommend your kids buy waterfront property in Rhode Island (or possibly live in Rhode Island at all) but there will be plenty of waterfront property available inland. There are maps to show where that will be. People just need to build in concrete for the impending hurricanes.

Probably, your reasons for not having kids because of impending future disasters or over population is actually a rationalization. Possibly, you just don't want to have kids. If you have made up your mind, then don't get married to someone who wants kids. It won't be fun. I don't believe anyone is worth that kind of sacrifice.

If your desire truly is to help climate and overpopulation, a better solution is adoption - sharing your abundance and privilege, changing someone else's life projection. This could be your most powerful contribution.

C says: What I'm hearing, Sam, is that you're eminently unsuitable for parenthood. Raising kids takes awareness, optimism, and an ability to roll with the punches. You seem like a pretty anxious guy, full of pessimism and uncertainty. It would probably not be a good idea for you to adopt either. Adopted kids bring all the same problems that having your own child would.

If people actually ever knew for certain what the future held, things would play out very differently. But as John Lennon so aptly put it: "Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans."

The idea that future life will hold nothing but suffering is just that - an idea. People have been predicting the end of the world for centuries. Yes, the environment is in peril. But if people don't decide that climate change is a lost cause, we might find a way to stop it in its tracks. Nothing is possible if we give up and live as if the suffering is inevitable.

Good things, better things, might be possible in the future too. When I was a kid, we only had black and white TV and no one knew what a computer was. In less than one lifetime, so much has changed. It is entirely possible that one of our future kids might find or see something new that our limited brains in 2021 can't conceive of.

But there is one undeniable fact which is reason enough not to have children: overpopulation. There are too many humans on earth and not enough resources to take care of them all. There is no reason for anyone who does not want children to have them.

As far as I can see, the only reason to have children is because you want a family. Many parents feel that children and grandchildren give meaning and purpose to what they do. They see family as their greatest asset and only future. Be honest with your girlfriend. She deserves a partner who wants that too. You are doing her no favors by locking a ball and chain onto her ovaries.

If all children were wanted and loved, we all might have a better future.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com