



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on March 16, 2012

## Philosophers: Drug Humans, Give Them Cat Eyes, Murder Infants

In the world [S. Matthew Liao](#) envisions, we would be repulsed by eating meat, begat miniature children, and see in the dark through cat eyes.

The professor's theory is that by changing human beings at the genetic level, or giving them drugs, he can alter them to combat climate change and help the environment. He even believes he can alter a man to make him more charitable.



Liao's describes his [Brave New World](#) in [a paper](#) for *Ethics, Policy & Environment*, which [he detailed](#) in an interview with [The Atlantic](#), a leftist magazine.

### Meat Is Bad

Eating meat, [Liao says](#), is bad: "There is a widely cited U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization report that estimates that 18% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions and CO2 equivalents come from livestock farming, which is actually a much higher share than from transportation."

Livestock farming accounts for as much as 51% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. And then there are estimates that as much as 9% of human emissions occur as a result of deforestation for the expansion of pastures for livestock. And that doesn't even take into account the emissions that arise from manure, or from the livestock directly....

Even a minor 21% to 24% reduction in the consumption of these kinds of meats could result in the same reduction in emissions as the total localization of food production, which would mean reducing "food miles" to zero.

Happily, reducing meat consumption, the young Frankenstein says, might not require a pill. "We have also toyed around with the idea of a patch that might stimulate the immune system to reject common bovine proteins, which could lead to a similar kind of lasting aversion to meat products."

Liao [also explained](#) that it's time for human beings to get smaller. "For instance if you reduce the average U.S. height by just 15cm," he bubbled, "you could reduce body mass by 21% for men and 25% for women, with a corresponding reduction in metabolic rates by some 15% to 18%, because less tissue means lower energy and nutrient needs."

And how would Liao accomplish this feat?

There are a couple of ways, actually. You might try to do it through a technique called preimplantation genetic diagnosis, which is already used in IVF settings in fertility clinics today. In this scenario you'd be looking to select which embryos to implant based on height....



In fact hormone treatments are already used for height reduction in overly tall children. A final way you could do this is by way of gene imprinting, by influencing the competition between maternal and paternal genes, where there is a height disparity between the mother and father. You could have drugs that reduce or increase the expression of paternal or maternal genes in order to affect birth height.

There goes the NBA.

### **Meow Mix**

And pgymyfyng the world isn't this fellow's oddest idea. He wants as well to give human beings feline characteristics. And he doesn't mean lapping your milk from a bowl on the kitchen floor.

Rather, Liao has something more bizarre in mind: human beings with a cat's eyes. [Liao lamented](#) that that "the science is not there yet," but that he and his philosophizing pals "looked into cat eyes, the technique of giving humans cat eyes or of making their eyes more catlike."

The reason is, cat eyes see nearly as well as human eyes during the day, but much better at night. We figured that if everyone had cat eyes, you wouldn't need so much lighting, and so you could reduce global energy usage considerably. Maybe even by a shocking percentage.

But, again, this isn't something we know how to do yet, although it's possible there might be some way to do it with genetics — there are some primates with eyes that are very similar to cat eyes, and so possibly we could study those primates and figure out which genes are responsible for that trait, and then hopefully activate those genes in humans. But that's very speculative and requires a lot of research.

Beyond turning us into cats, Liao also pondered the mysterious dimensions of good and evil and the human soul, explaining that he just might want to alter the human being to make him more charitable. And by that, he doesn't mean creating a greater love for God. Rather, Liao wants to boost "feelings" of empathy to get rid of a person's "weakness of will" when it comes to giving to the usual leftist charities.

"It's certainly ethically problematic to insert beliefs into people, and so we want to be clear that's not something we're proposing," [Liao said](#).

What we have in mind has more to do with weakness of will. For example, I might know that I ought to send a check to Oxfam, but because of a weakness of will I might never write that check. But if we increase my empathetic capacities with drugs, then maybe I might overcome my weakness of will and write that check.

Liao explained that many might oppose his plan because they are "biased" toward the "status quo."

### **Infanticide Should Be Legal**

Liao isn't the only "academic" who has gone off the deep end. Two professors at the University of Melbourne in Australia, Alberto Giubilini and [Francesca Minvera](#), think infanticide is morally acceptable. The new name for it is "after-birth abortion."

They published a piece in the [Journal of Medical Ethics that says](#) killing an infant is no different, for all intents and purposes, than abortion, an ironic admission that pro-lifers are right in equating the two.

"If the death of a newborn is not wrongful to her on the grounds that she cannot have formed any aim that she is prevented from accomplishing," the [pair wrote](#), "then it should also be permissible to practise an after-birth abortion on a healthy newborn too, given that she has not formed any aim yet."



There are two reasons which, taken together, justify this claim:

The moral status of an infant is equivalent to that of a fetus, that is, neither can be considered a "person" in a morally relevant sense.

It is not possible to damage a newborn by preventing her from developing the potentiality to become a person in the morally relevant sense.

Oddly, the [pair equate](#) the "fetus," or unborn child, with a newborn. But they reverse the pro-life point of view, which says a child [is alive](#) and [endowed with](#) a soul at conception, and therefore endowed with a right to live. "Both a fetus and a newborn certainly are human beings and potential persons, the [professors argue](#), "but neither is a 'person' in the sense of 'subject of a moral right to life'." So we are thus entitled to murder them.

That's because a person is an "an individual who is capable of attributing to her own existence some (at least) basic value such that being deprived of this existence represents a loss to her." But all those "who are not in the condition of attributing any value to their own existence are not persons. Merely being human is not in itself a reason for ascribing someone a right to life."

Thus, the professors aver, unborn children and newborns are mere "potential persons" who cannot suffer "harm" because "for a harm to occur, it is necessary that someone is in the condition of experiencing that harm."

If a potential person, like a fetus and a newborn, does not become an actual person, like you and us, then there is neither an actual nor a future person who can be harmed, which means that there is no harm at all. So, if you ask one of us if we would have been harmed, had our parents decided to kill us when we were fetuses or newborns, our answer is 'no', because they would have harmed someone who does not exist (the "us" whom you are asking the question), which means no one. And if no one is harmed, then no harm occurred.

The authors then claim that "after-birth abortion" is justifiable because it might serve the interests of "actual persons."

The alleged right of individuals (such as fetuses and newborns) to develop their potentiality, which someone defends, is over-ridden by the interests of actual people (parents, family, society) to pursue their own well-being because, as we have just argued, merely potential people cannot be harmed by not being brought into existence.



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