

# The Abolitionist Project

A central thesis is introduced: **Humans and their transhuman** successors may use advanced biotechnology to abolish suffering in all sentient life.

- This is not a distant fantasy. The goal is to make the last involuntary experience below “hedonic zero” a precisely dateable event, perhaps only a few centuries from now.
- This project lays out a tangible pathway for our posthuman descendants to, in effect, live happily ever after.





# **But this heart-warming tale is potentially misleading.**

Our best understanding of the physical nature of reality reveals a far more complicated—and sobering—picture.  
Here are three depressing reasons why.



# Reason 1: The Past is Fixed and Unalterable

- General Relativity mandates a “block universe” interpretation of spacetime. In this model, what we call “the past” is as real as “the present.”
- This means the entire Darwinian Era, with all its primordial pain and suffering, perpetually occupies the space-time coordinates it always has. It cannot be erased; at best, we can only determine its future boundaries.
- *Sub specie aeternitatis*—from the perspective of eternity—all here-and-nows are equally real. The horrors of Darwinian life are a permanent fixture of Reality, undiminished by their distance in time.






## Reason 2: We Live in a Multiverse of Parallel Worlds

- Our best fundamental theory, quantum mechanics, suggests we live in a Multiverse.
- The post-Everett interpretation describes reality as a universal wavefunction that does not “collapse” but instead branches into a multitude of macroscopic worlds.
- Most of these branches are sterile, with physical constants unsuitable for life.
- However, a vast number—googols of branches—remain where information-bearing self-replicators evolve through natural selection.





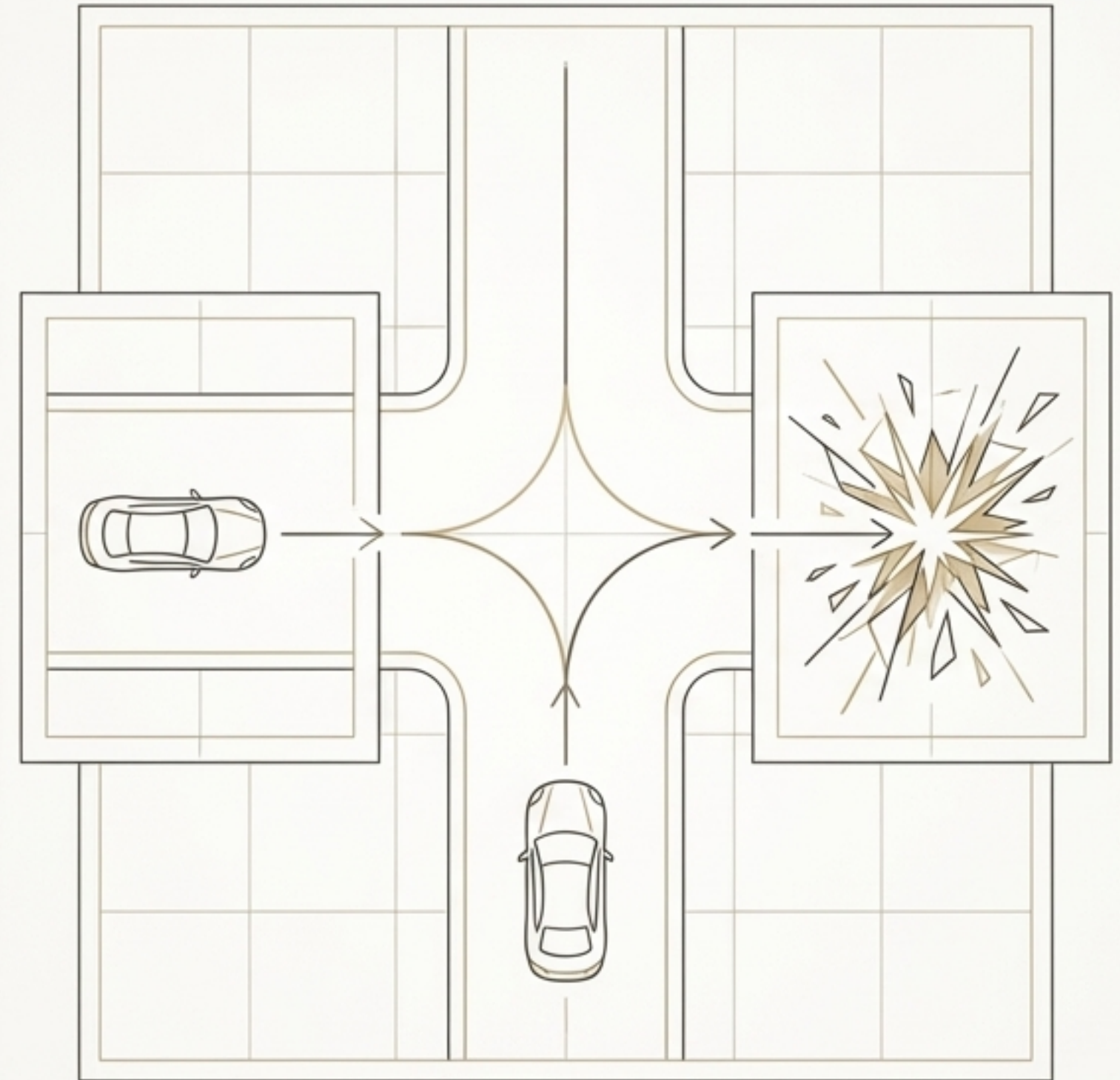
# The Tragedy of the Multiverse: Most Suffering is Inaccessible

- A critical choke-point exists: In only a small minority of life-bearing branches can intelligent agents arise who are capable of eradicating suffering.
- Only language-using tool-users can master the science needed to rewrite their own genetic code and redesign their ecosystem.
- In branches where a meteorite didn't wipe out the non-avian dinosaurs, Darwinian life 'red in tooth and claw' presumably continues indefinitely. No reptile could ever achieve self-emancipation.
- These worlds are inaccessible. We cannot tamper with other branches of the universal wavefunction.



# Quantum Mechanics Demands a New Ethics of Risk

- If the Everett interpretation is correct, then all physically possible events *actually happen* in some branch of the multiverse, albeit at low density.
- This forces a systematic reassessment of “acceptable risk.” We tend to discount remote risks as zero, but in a multiverse, they are **realities** for some versions of ourselves.
- For example, one must drive *ultra*-cautiously, aiming to minimize the number of branches in which one injures anyone. “If a motorist doesn’t leave a (low-density) trail of mayhem, then quantum mechanics is false.”
- This ethical re-evaluation must be systemic and institutional, not just a matter for private initiative.





# Reason 3: The Multiverse Itself May Be One of Googols

Speculative theoretical physics suggests the Everettian multiverse may not exhaust the totality of suffering. There may be googols of other multiverses.

Potential Sources of Suffering:

- **Eternal Inflation:** Other post-inflationary “pocket universes” far beyond our light cone.
- **Cosmological Natural Selection:** Myriad parent and child universes.
- **String Theory:** Sentiences existing in some of the  $10^{500}+$  different vacua.
- **Boltzmann Brains:** Hypothetical self-aware entities arising from random fluctuations.

The suffering of beings in these realms, however speculative, would be no less real than our own.





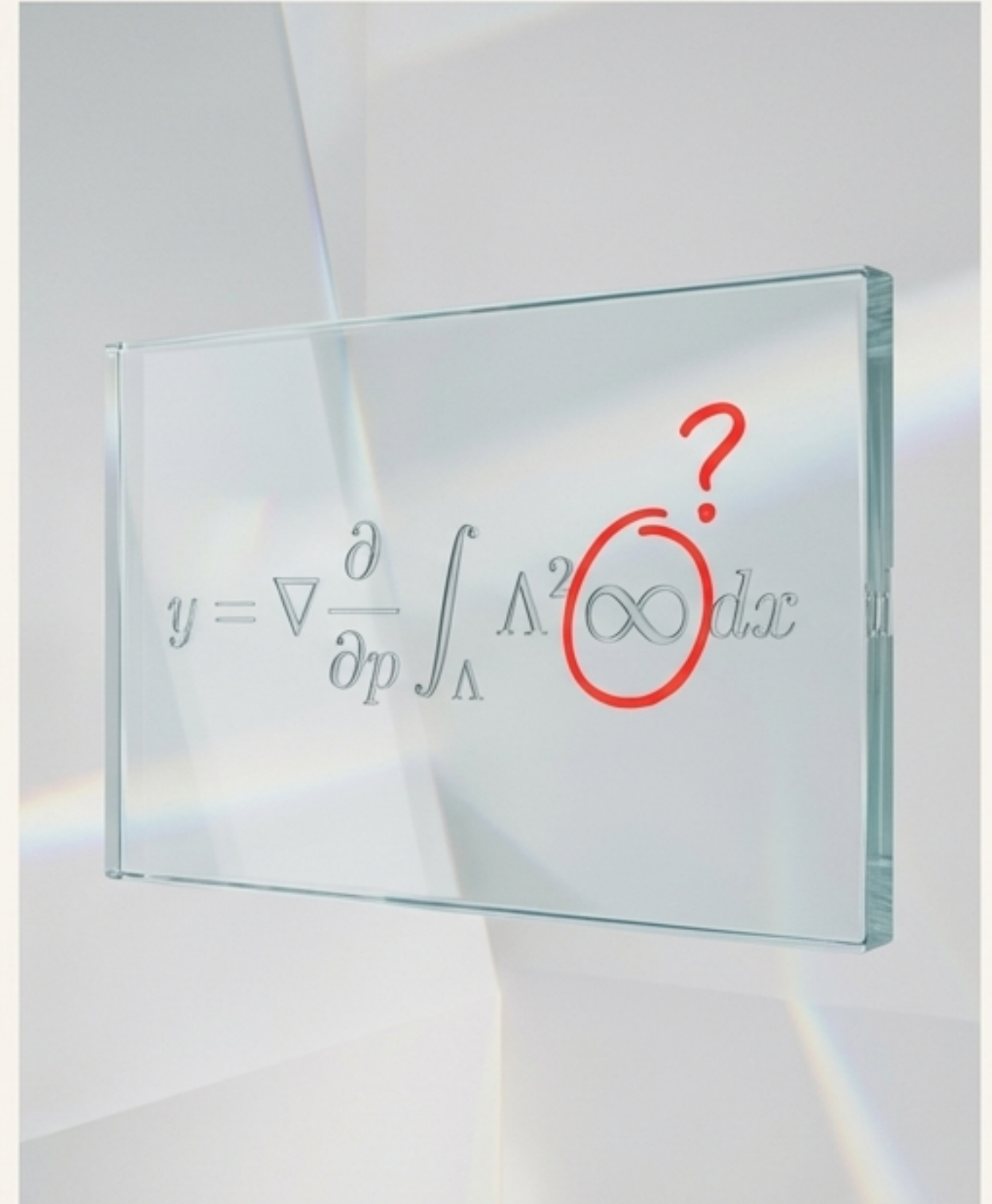
## • **Confronting Moral Paralysis**

- Faced with this fathomless immensity of suffering—googolplexes of Holocausts—a compassionate mind may become shell-shocked.
- A natural conclusion follows: The amount of suffering in Reality must be infinite.
- This leads to a sense of hopeless fatalism. If any bid to minimize infinite suffering would still leave an infinite amount behind, what is the point of our actions?



# Is Physically Realized Infinity a Coherent Concept?

- Such moral defeatism is premature. We must question whether “physically realized infinity” is a cognitively meaningful notion.
- In the history of physics, infinities that crop up in equations have always turned out to be “vicious,” yielding meaningless results that signal a flaw in the theory.
- It is doubtful whether Reality supports any abstract objects, let alone a physical ontology of infinities.
- If Reality is finite, then the total suffering is also finite. The problem, while still swamping human comprehension, is not technically infinite.





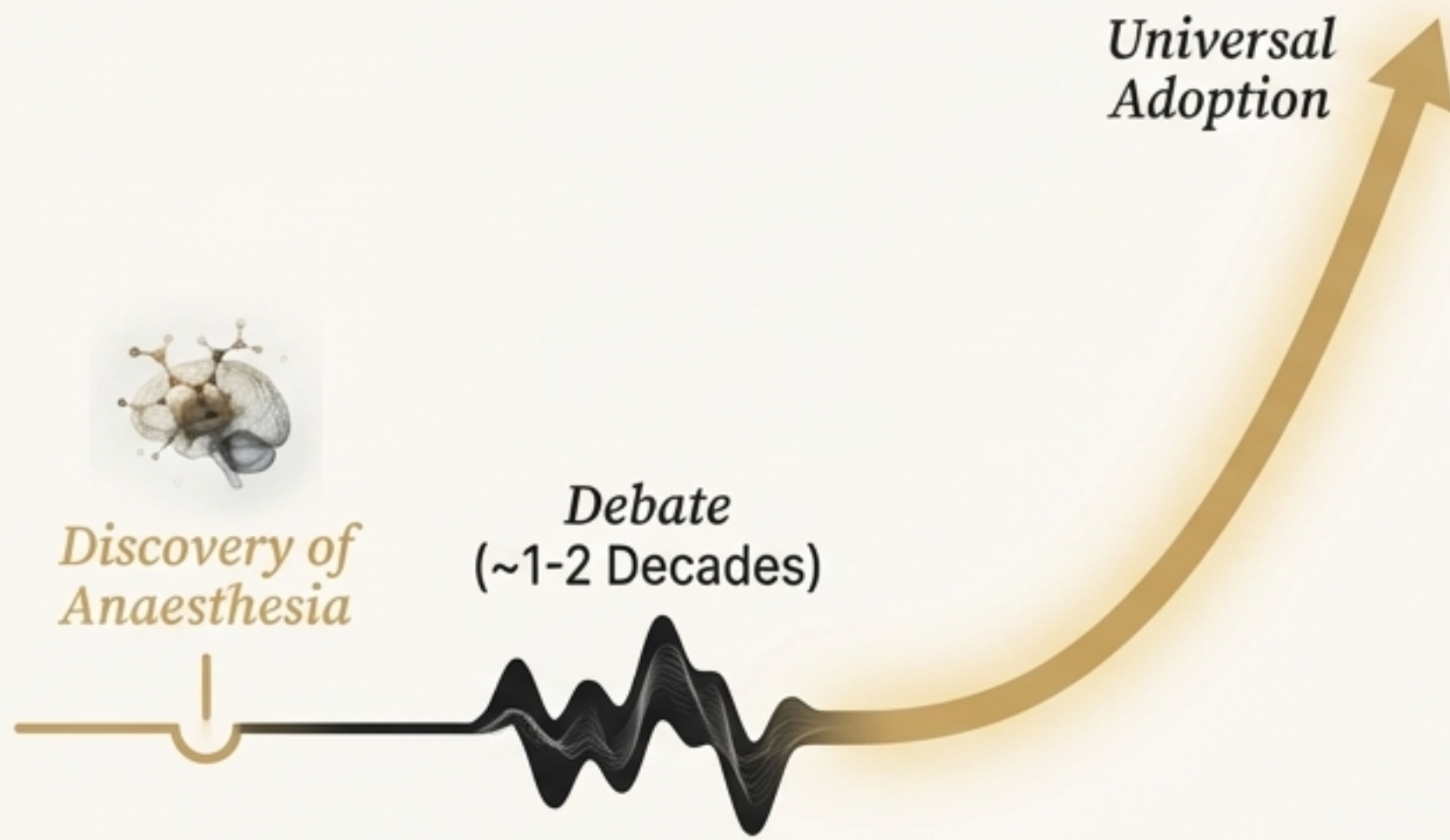
# Why the Utilitarian Focus on Suffering?

- A non-utilitarian might say: "Lighten up! Think about life's joys."
- A classical utilitarian might argue that the superbliss of future posthumans matters more and should dominate the narrative.
- However, from a negative utilitarian perspective, the intensity of experience is what matters most objectively. The extremes of suffering dwarf the mundane pleasures of Darwinian life.
- To a victim, consciousness is not "dim." As anyone who has lost a child or had a toothache knows, suffering commands absolute moral priority.

MUNDANE PLEASURES

ACUTE SUFFERING





# The Inevitability of Abolition

- A controversial assumption is made: when intelligent agents gain the technical means to abolish suffering, they will almost invariably do so.
- Consider the analogy with general anaesthesia. After its discovery, its surgical use was contentious for a decade or two, but pain-free surgery soon became universally accepted.
- Can we imagine a branch of the Multiverse where anaesthesia was discovered and then *permanently rejected* ? The proportion of such branches is sociologically incredible; it is vanishingly small.
- While the abolition of psychological distress is more complex, a similar logic holds. The proportion of advanced societies that reject mental superhealth will likely also be vanishingly small.



# Our Duty Is Parochial, and Therefore Absolute

- The staggering cosmic perspective does not diminish our role. It clarifies it.
- We cannot rescue the sentient beings in other Everett branches or in distant pocket universes.
- Our responsibility is therefore local. Our duty is confined to “our” parochial corner of Hilbert space—the sphere of reality accessible to our intervention.
- Within that sphere, our moral obligation to abolish suffering is absolute.

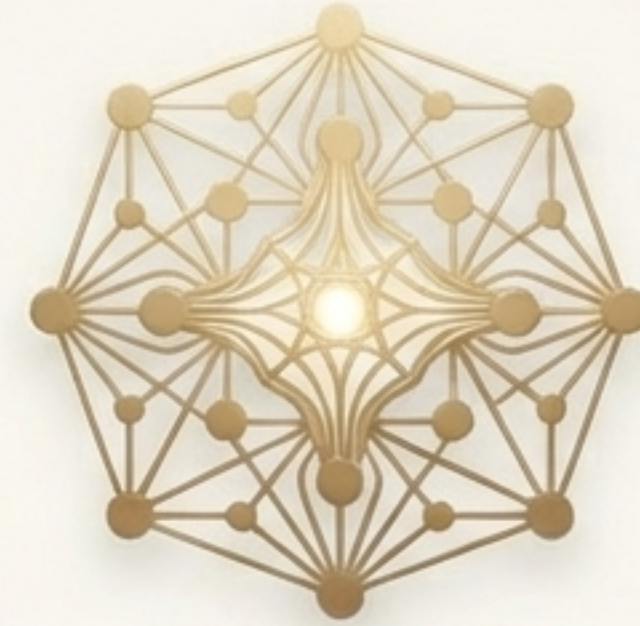


# A Two-Fold Path Forward



## 1. Complete the Abolitionist Project.

We must pursue the abolition of suffering within our sphere of influence, leveraging biotechnology to redesign our ecosystem and ourselves. This is our primary, local responsibility.



## 2. Develop Beneficent Superintelligence.

We should aim to create superintelligent systems designed to maximize the well-being of all sentient life within the fragment of the cosmos accessible to us. This extends our ethical project to its logical cosmic conclusion.





# The Final Duty

“And when we are sure—absolutely sure—  
—that we have done literally everything we  
can do to eradicate suffering elsewhere,  
perhaps we should forget about its very  
existence.”

- David Pearce