# The Foundational Problem of Existence

Life, as engineered by natural selection, is an engine for creating fiendish varieties of suffering. Discontent, pain, jealousy, and status-hunger are not bugs; they are fitness-enhancing features. The systematic abuse of sentient beings in factory farms and slaughterhouses could have come straight out of Dante's *Inferno*. This "Darwinian horror-show" is the central crisis we face.

"I think of reality itself as fundamentally evil." – David Pearce

Our Minds are Sentient Malware
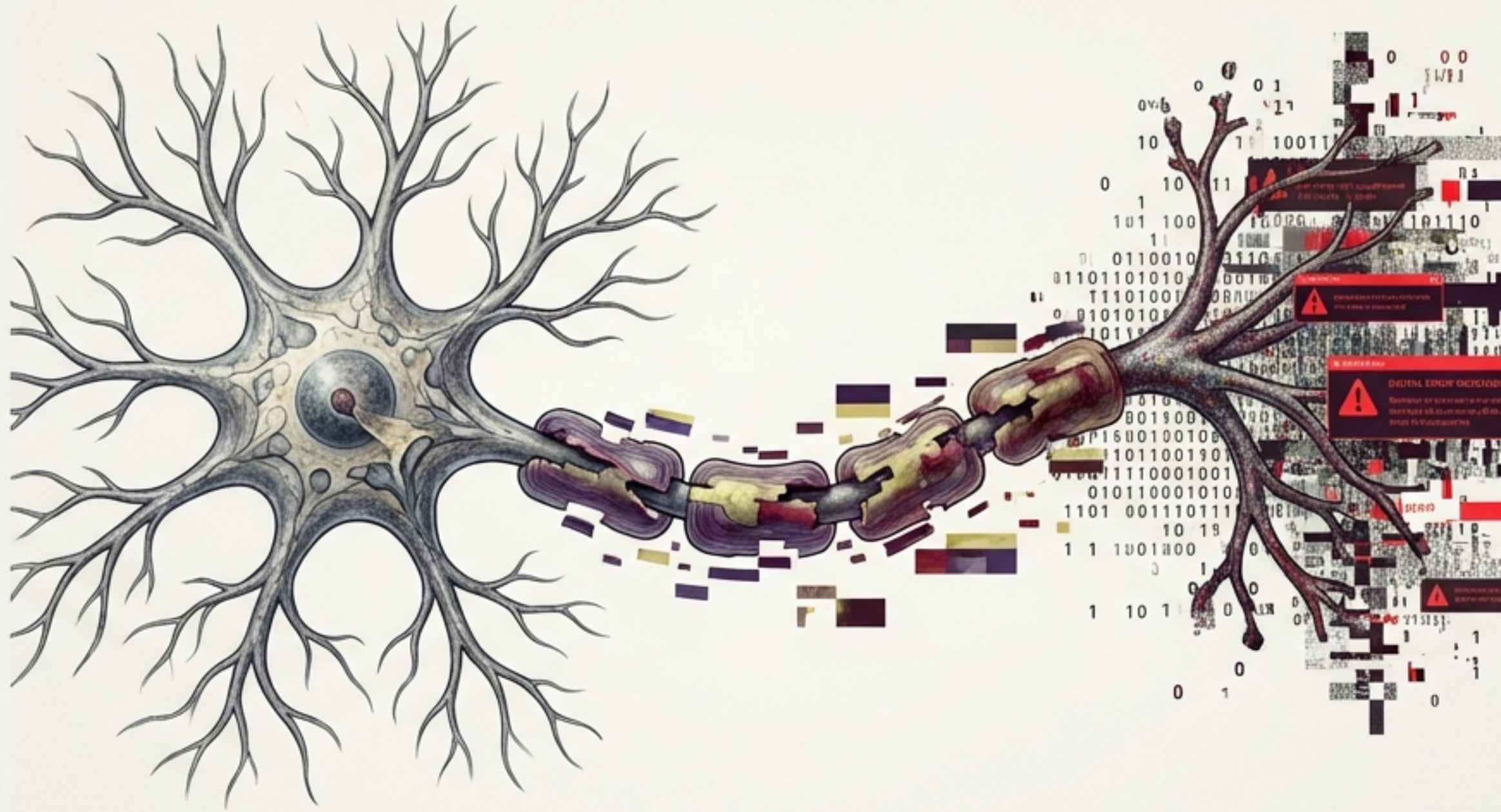
Darwinian minds are evolved to maximize the inclusive fitness of DNA, not the well-being of the individual. They are characterized by a pleasure-pain axis, psychotic self-centeredness, and a host of attributes like spite, envy, and resentment.

This is not a technical limitation; if "loved-up" MDMA-like minds had been more adaptive in our ancestral environment, natural selection could have engineered them. Instead, nastiness has been adaptive.

"Darwinian minds are sentient malware."

Suffering Is Not in the World, but in the Simulation

Our perception is not a direct window onto reality. We live inside a phenomenally-bound world-simulation run by our minds.
What we perceive as 'material' objects are properties of our consciousness, not the external world itself. This is non-materialist physicalism: only the physical is real, but the intrinsic nature of the physical is experience.

Suffering, therefore, isn't an inevitable property of the universe, but a feature of the 'software' that generates our simulation. Software can be debugged and rewritten.

"The seemingly 'material' objects that populate your phenomenal world-simulation — such as your computer, your body-image, your nearest-and-dearest … are all phenomenal properties of your mind."

The Hedonistic Imperative

If suffering is a mutable feature of our biology, then we have a moral obligation to eliminate it. This is the central argument of The Hedonistic Imperative. The project is not to merely manage or reduce suffering, but to completely replace the biological substrates of all unpleasant experience. The goal is a new architecture of mind for all sentient life.

Pain/Pleasure Axis

Gradients of Well-being
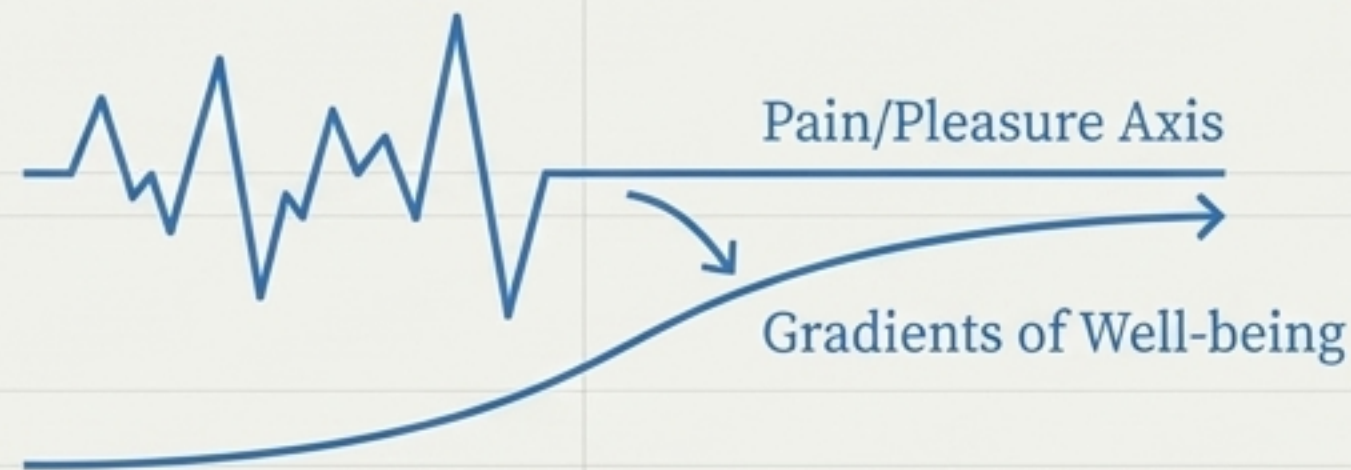
"The biology of pain and suffering can and should be replaced by an architecture of mind based entirely on gradients of well-being."

The Toolkit for Abolition

Genome Reform

Preimplantation genetic screening and and editing will allow parents to choose the genetic makeup of their children, selecting for alleles that predispose to high levels of well-being. The hedonic range and set-points of future humans will become adjustable parameters.

Cultured Meat

Will supersede the suffering of animal agriculture.
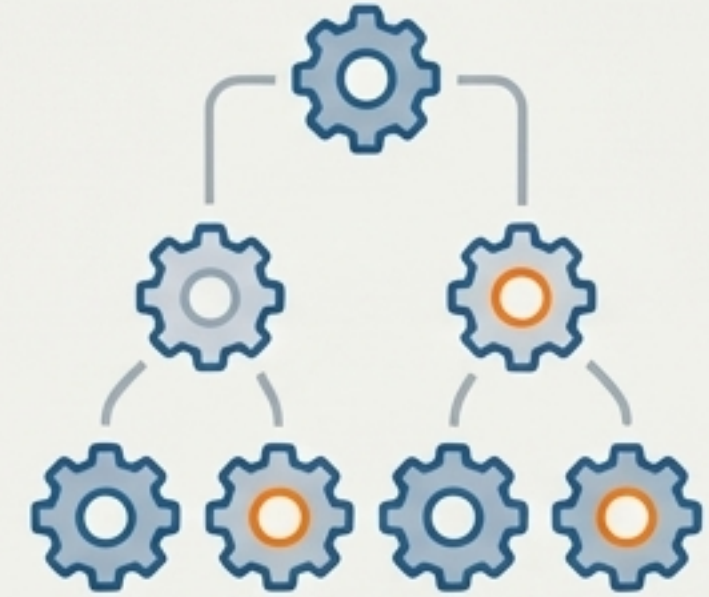
Synthetic Gene Drives

Can be used to reprogram ecosystems, for example, to 'herbivorise' predators and tackle wild animal suffering in inaccessible environments.

From a Pain-Pleasure Axis to Gradients of Bliss

The aim is to recalibrate the hedonic treadmill. Life will no longer be governed by the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure. Instead, it will be based on information-sensitive gradients of bliss. The lowest possible state of being will still be wonderful, with motivation driven by the desire to reach even higher states of well-being. Sustainable, engineered analogues of MDMA-like consciousness—characterized by profound empathy, love, and a sense of magical beauty—offer a glimpse into this future.

"Universal love, hugs, cuddle puddles and a magical beauty that infuses everyone and everything."

Answering the Objections

"You can't have the sweet without the sour."

This is the most popular but weakest objection. It ignores the existence of people with chronic pain or depression, who experience the 'sour' without the 'sweet.'

Conversely, case studies of extreme hyperthymics show that a life based on gradients of well-being is biologically possible. Today's hedonic outliers can be tomorrow's norm.

"This is eugenics."

The 'e' word is tainted by the race hygiene policies of National Socialism, which were not geared to promoting the well-being of all sentience.

Genome reform, focused on eliminating the genetic predisposition for suffering for everyone, is an expression of longtermist effective altruism, not racial purity.

The underlying ethical risk is natalism (the genetic crapshoot), not genetically responsible parenthood.

The Vision: Paradise Engineering

What will post-Darwinian life be like? The discipline of 'paradise engineering' will use biotechnology to create a civilization founded on superintelligence, superlongevity, and superhappiness (the 'triple S'). Our successors will occupy alien state-spaces of consciousness in immersive virtual realities. Archaic human consciousness—what we call being 'awake'—will disappear into the dustbin of history. Hedonic uplift will enrich our quality of life without sacrificing critical insight or social responsibility.

A Pan-Species Welfare State

The abolition of suffering must extend to all sentient beings. With the aid of artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, and robotics, every cubic metre of the planet will become accessible to surveillance, micromanagement, and benevolent control. This allows for the end of predation and wild animal suffering. Non-human animals are akin to toddlers; their lives don't raise the same privacy issues as the affairs of mature humans. This isn't Orwellian control, but a universal safety net ensuring well-being for all.

A Date with Destiny

The replacement of the biology of suffering with life-based on gradients of bliss will one day seem as crushingly inevitable as pain-free surgery does now. This is not a vague hope, but a specific prediction.

"The world's last experience below hedonic zero will be a precisely dateable event a few centuries from now."

The Thinker's Origin

The grand vision of the abolitionist project is rooted in a personal, lifelong preoccupation.

David Pearce grew up in an ethically serious, vegetarian family. As a child, he was troubled by death, aging, and the existence of carnivores. He would rescue injured ants and desiccated worms from the garden path. His philosophy is the technological culmination of this simple, profound impulse: to end suffering wherever it is found.

"Aged four or five, I used to rescue injured ants and desiccated worms from our garden path."

Knowledge as a Necessary Evil

Earlier in his life, David Pearce was fanatically oriented towards truth. That romance has ended. The Darwinian era is something to be forgotten like a bad dream.

However, tomorrow's paradise engineers will need a deeper understanding of reality for the purposes of genome reform and a pan-species welfare state. This knowledge is not sought for its own sake.
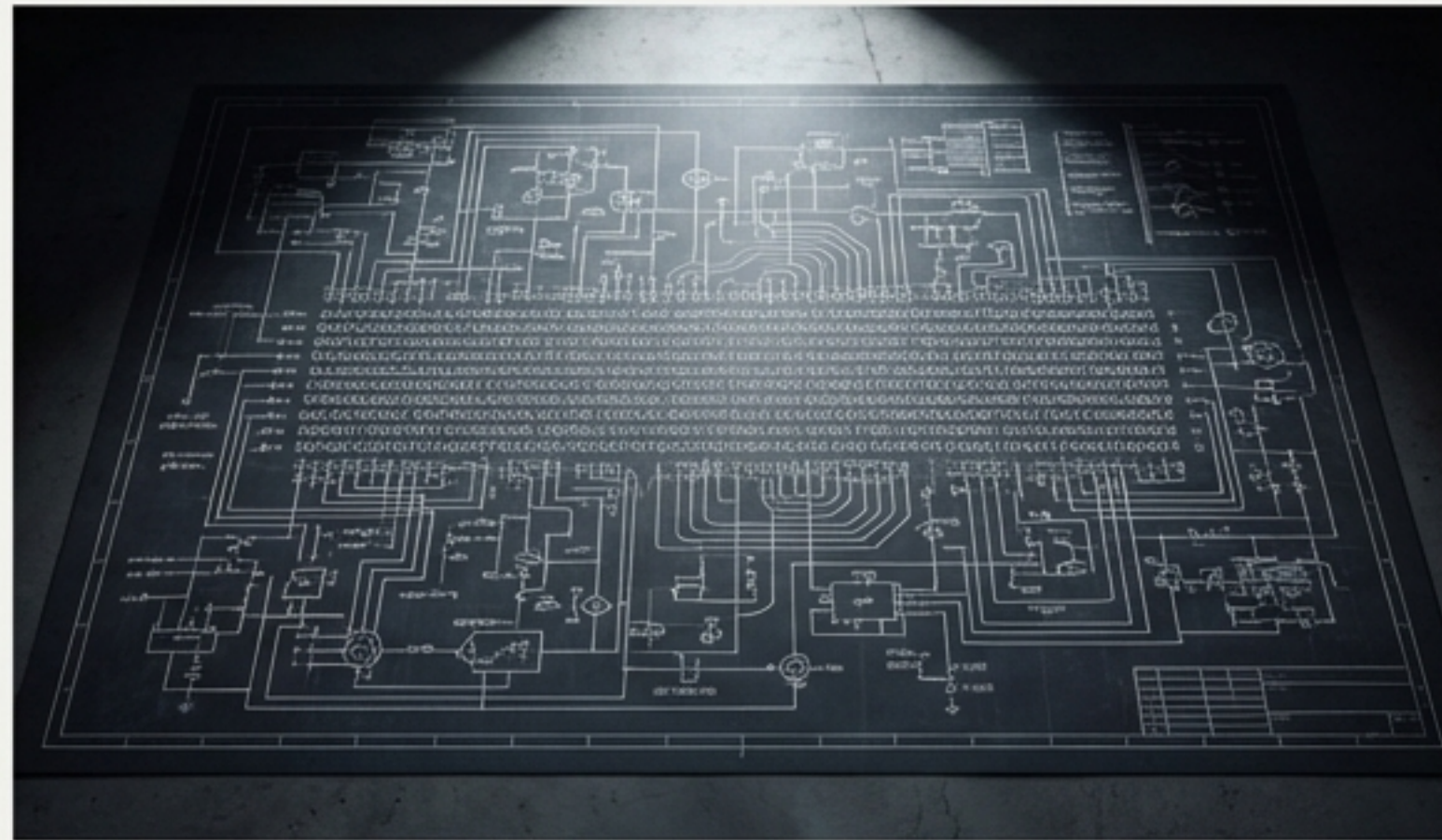
"Knowledge of reality is a necessary evil - a stepping-stone (I hope) to something civilized."

The Convergence Hypothesis

The trajectory towards a biohappiness revolution may be inevitable.
The pain-pleasure axis discloses the world's inbuilt metric of value and disvalue.
Posthuman superintelligences, freed from Darwinian biases and possessing a correct understanding
of consciousness, will not entertain a false theory of personal identity that allows them to keep
happiness for themselves. They will recognize the ethical imperative to eliminate all suffering.
The future of our light-cone is not a matter of choice, but of convergence.