Affirmative Case: Quality of Life

By Breck Frauenholtz

Resolved: In the context of innovation, the proactionary principle ought to be valued above the precautionary principle.

Airplanes are a wonder of innovation. They allow us to travel from point A to point B quickly and efficiently. But imagine if the Wright brothers, when they were innovating, had to prove that airplanes would not cause harm. That is an impossible standard because it is untrue: terrorists used planes to kill thousands on September 11th, 2001. Aerial bombers and fighters have killed countless in wars past. These heinous acts that were done through airplanes doesn’t belittle the wonder and usefulness of the innovation, and we shouldn’t hold the innovator to the burden of proving no harm may come. Rather, **resolved: in the context of innovation, the proactionary principle ought to be valued above the precautionary principle.**

Definitions

Proactionary Principle

Holbrook, J. B., & Briggle, A*. (2014). Knowledge kills action – why principles should play a limited role in policy-making. Journal of Responsible Innovation,* *1*(1), 51–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/23299460.2014.882554

“The proactionary principle states: **People's freedom to innovate technologically is highly valuable, even critical, to humanity.** This implies a range of responsibilities for those considering whether and how to develop, deploy, or restrict new technologies**.** **Assess risks and opportunities using an objective, open, and comprehensive, yet simple decision process based on science rather than collective emotional reactions.** Account for the costs of restrictions and lost opportunities as fully as direct effects. Favor measures that are proportionate to the probability and magnitude of impacts, and that have the highest payoff relative to their costs. **Give a high priority to people's freedom to learn, innovate, and advance.”**

Precautionary Principle

Oxford Dictionary, *“Precautionary Principle” https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/precautionary\_principle Accessed 10/4/2021*

“the principle that the introduction of a new product or process whose ultimate effects are disputed or unknown should be resisted. It has mainly been used to prohibit the importation of genetically modified organisms and food.”

Innovation

Oxford Dictionary, *“innovate,” and “innovation.”* [*https://www.lexico.com/definition/innovation?locale=en*](https://www.lexico.com/definition/innovation?locale=en)[*https://www.lexico.com/definition/innovate?locale=en*](https://www.lexico.com/definition/innovate?locale=en) *Accessed 10/17/2021.*

“the action or process of innovating, [which is to] make changes in something established, especially by introducing new methods, ideas, or products”

Resolutional Analysis

Definition Analysis: Innovation is For Good

 No one innovates for the sake of innovation, but rather someone identifies a negative issue and creates something to address that issue positively. In and of itself, innovation aims at some good, and can’t be conceived as the wiles of a mad scientist.

Value: Quality of Life

 Lovingly known as “good stuff,” quality of life is a necessary value to consider.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. *OECD (2011), How’s Life?: Measuring Well-being, OECD Publishing.* In 2014, the OECD concept of quality of life in cities was developed and adapted for the Swiss partner cities of City Statistics. With a concept of the quality of life an attempt is made to measure the well-being of the population in its various dimensions. Well-being is determined by both material living conditions and the subjective perception of the quality of life. Among the dimensions of material living conditions are Income and Jobs and Housing Conditions. The immaterial dimensions of the quality of life include Health, Education, Environmental Quality, Personal Security, Civic Engagement and Work-Life Balance.

Reason for Decision 1: Context of Innovation

 Because the debate exists within this context, and because innovation aims at good, we can see that innovation aims at quality of life.

Reason for Decision 2: Objective Good

 The things provided by quality of life are objectively good, and so it is a proper value to pursue.

Contention One: Innovation Improves Quality of Life

 This is a relatively simple statement but incredibly important to consider. Think of the phone in your pocket, the laptop in front of you, and the (relatively) cheap food you eat every day; all of these are the benefits of years of innovation.

Andy Wycoff, *OECD Directorate for Science, Technology and Innovation. “Better innovation for better lives.” 2015. https://www.oecd.org/innovation/better-innovation-for-better-lives.htm.*

Innovation is more than about new products; it is about the creation and diffusion of new processes and methods as well. Innovation can lead to new businesses, new jobs and cleaner environments. Innovation can be found in several places in the growth statistics of a country. First, there is technological progress embodied in tangible, physical capital, such as better machinery, smarter equipment or greener buildings. Second, there is intangible, knowledge-based, capital, such as software, data, research & development (R&D), design, intellectual property, and firm-specific skills… Innovation is not just about supporting growth; it is also vital for addressing deep social and global challenges, like ageing, resource scarcity, disease and climate change. Innovation spurs education, skills and wellbeing throughout life too. At the same time, innovation can contribute to inequality, which is why it needs to be accompanied by appropriate labour and social policies.

Innovation is inherently necessary for quality of life, if didn’t innovate we would be in the stone age.

Contention Two: Precaution Harms Innovation

There are wonderful innovations we actively use that come with threats of harm. This lack of scientific certainty would signal a limitation on said innovation. A good example of the harm of this is with Genetically Modified Foods.

Tamika Sims, *who received her PhD in Virology and Immunology from Morehouse School of Medicine. “One of Our Food System’s Helping Hands: GMOs” FoodInsight. January 18th, 2018.* [*https://foodinsight.org/one-of-our-food-systems-helping-hands-gmos/*](https://foodinsight.org/one-of-our-food-systems-helping-hands-gmos/)GMO crops have significantly increased crop yields and simultaneously decreased pesticide use. By doing these two things combined, we are producing more food with less inputs. Decreased use of pesticides, means less pesticide production demand and also less energy use on the farmers’ end, too. Genetic characteristics in fruits and vegetables, such as insect- and disease-resistance, can also help farmers use less pesticides. But, in instances where pesticides won’t eliminate the presence of a pest, a genetic modification can make a crop resistant to the disease caused by pests. Drought-resistance is another trait that can be achieved through genetic modification to help farmers stabilize their crop production. In times of long periods of no rain, this characteristic can save thousands of acres of food. Talk about avoiding food waste!

Despite these benefits, if you look up “do GMOs cause harm” you find about 377,000 results, the top ones giving different sides to the argument, which demonstrates the notion that GMOs might pose a threat to health and safety. Precaution might stifle the innovation necessary to create these wonderful benefits offered by GMOs, depriving our earth and those starving of needed resources. Like airplanes, holding the innovator to the precautionary standard of proving no harm is an impossible and unhelpful standard that lowers quality of life.

Contention Three: Proaction Encourages Innovation

 As previously defined, the proactionary principle contains the idea that “people's freedom to innovate technologically is highly valuable, even critical, to humanity.” Thus, the proactionary principle inherently supports the individual’s right to innovate. This innovation leads to an increase in quality of life.

 One may argue that innovation can damage, but within the principle still recognize that we still “assess risks and opportunities using an objective, open, and comprehensive, yet simple decision process based on science rather than collective emotional reactions. Account for the costs of restrictions and lost opportunities as fully as direct effects.” We can still create restrictions and limits, but the priority is the freedom of innovation.

 If we want to create a better quality of life for ourselves and the people around us, we need to prioritize the ability to innovate. Because precaution stifles innovation and because proaction promotes it, to uphold a good quality of life, we should value the proactionary principle.