A BENIGN INVASION RESPONSE: 
A REPLY TO A MODEST PROPOSAL

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Dear Friends, The People of Alpha Centauri,

We have received your latest communication, and have studied and debated it endlessly over these many months. On behalf of the UN Committee of Ten, who speak for the majority of Earthlings, I have been asked to give you our reply in writing.

Let me say at the outset how grateful we are to you for what you have helped us to accomplish over these past ten years. Not only has our planet cooled remarkably, but there has been both an economic transformation and a level of international cooperation that has never existed before on this earth. Frankly, we hope we can continue working with you to our mutual advantage. Whether or not this happens depends largely on how you choose to respond to our response to your proposal.

I want to be very candid. There were many on this planet who doubted the sincerity of your request. If what you wanted were young earthlings to eat to increase your longevity, why was it that you indicated that you wanted these harvested children to become domestic servants and pets and objects for your sportsman to hunt? Perhaps a case could be made for using some for scientific experiments or for teaching human anatomy, but these other uses puzzled many of us. In the end most of us agreed that you must have thought of these children as we often think of the animals of the earth, some of which we eat, others of which we use for quite the same purposes as your proposed uses. Although it is not flattering for us to think other superior beings in the universe think of us as we think of animals, under the circumstances, we had to give you the benefit of the doubt. You said you would not invade our planet and simply take what you wanted, and your dealings with us have been otherwise so honorable, we simply had to conclude your offer was
completely sincere. Nevertheless, the comparison of you to us, as we to animals, remained a troublesome one.

On the comparison issue, many believed you really wanted us to think deeply about that comparison, to reject your proposal as unworthy of a morally superior race of peoples; and to begin to treat our animals with a different level of respect, advancing quickly to the level of “do no harm,” which inevitably would mean we should become vegetarians or even vegans. On the other hand, that would mean that you devised your need for protein out of whole cloth, just to make your proposal plausible. But that is not how you have dealt with us in the past; and we just did not think it likely that straight-forward candor, such as you have displayed, would suddenly give way to lies, even if well-intentioned. It is not who you seem to be to most of us.

In the end, we have treated your proposal as a straight-forward and honest one. And we must reject it. You are asking that we reverse what has taken us so long to achieve, a wide-spread (thought not yet universal) belief that all human beings are of equal moral worth, and that we must especially protect the weakest and most vulnerable among us. If we regress to the days when some people assumed they were superior to others because of any variety of traits, from alleged intellectual ones to gender to skin color, then we are doomed. And, with all due respect, you are too. If your proposal is straight-forward and honest, you must see that, even within our own species, what you propose is a continuation of a male superiority complex we are still trying to rid ourselves of. Your proposal calls for females to be forced to donate ova, while males have a choice whether or not to donate sperm. Moreover, however they are “birthed,” these children will be loved, most of all, of course, by their human caretakers; but they will be entitled to equal respect by the majority of other human beings on the planet. Period. We do not agree on the reasons why all humans have equal moral worth. Some believe there is a God above all peoples and all places in all the universe; that we are made in God’s image; that this God has given equal moral worth to each of us a great gift. (We would be very interested to know your thoughts on the subject.) Some believe it is a matter of sympathy, of like to like. There are many other reasonable theories advanced. Philosophers endlessly debate the question. So, however you feel about us, you must now see that we are a developing moral people. Although not equal to you in so many ways, your proposal indicates to us that we may be able to help you increase your own moral sensitivities. Please do not be insulted by this last statement.
One of our most interesting students of human nature, Carl Yung, thought one of our most revered ancient manuscripts, THE BOOK OF JOB from the Hebrew Bible, was an attempt to show how human beings actually helped God in God's own moral development. You admit you are not “gods,” so is it unimaginable that we could help your moral advancement? Believe me, our own children help ours. Animals have helped us too. Perhaps here is the place where we can begin a dialogue? What is there about us that made you think we would not value all humans equally? Then, perhaps we could be interrogated by you on our own attitude towards animals? Perhaps we could learn much from each other about moral worth.

Assuming again, that your proposal was straight-forward, we could also dialogue about the subject of a longer life. Maybe our science cannot directly help you on the subject of protein and human flesh (although good minds are inventive and with your superior knowledge given to our best people, better science could emerge.) It may be that science will give you (and us too) different ways to obtain protein (pills?) or different avenues with which we can give ourselves longer lives. On an allied point, we too seem obsessed with living longer. Is that an intrinsic good? Our bodies seem to have a rather natural end to them, and show decline rather early. Do yours? How is your “natural” cycle different from ours? What does any of that say about the desire to live to four hundred of our years?

Obviously, we are suggesting that we may be of mutual help to one another in ways that have nothing to do with your concrete proposal. We hope you do not disagree. If you do, then we presume you will disappear from our solar system. We think that would be a great loss to you as well as to us. But it is clearly your choice. Thank you for your past help. Thank you for allowing us this present choice. The opportunity to think about and debate about our own deepest values in a “realistic” way (as opposed to a thought experiment) has enriched us immeasurably. You will forever be numbered on our planet among our great teachers. Nevertheless, you must see why we must reject your proposal. It would lessen us as a moral people. Even if our assumptions about you are inaccurate, our position would be the same. If you were trying to teach us something important about the moral life, then thank you, even though we are puzzled by the way you went about it. If you were simply toying with us, you can have your way. The best of us discovered long ago that death is not the worst thing. A shameful life is worse. But we do believe our assumptions about you are correct, and that, therefore, we will suffer neither death nor
indignity; but will grow and prosper with you as our friends and moral equals.

Yours sincerely,

Robert P. Lawry
Chair, UN Committee of Ten