



WHAT'S GOING ON WITH PARFIT'S SURGERY CASES?

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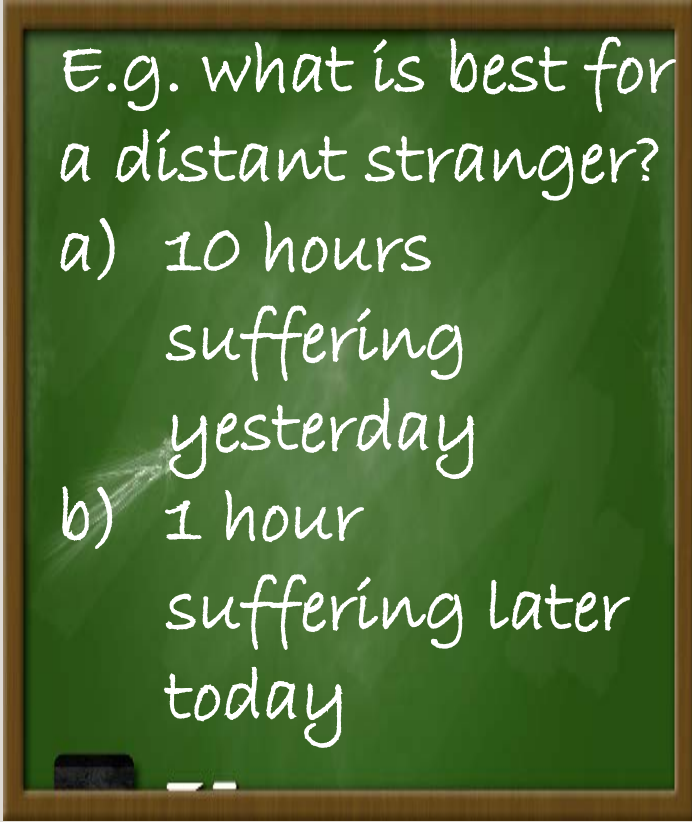
AXΦIV, UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO, 7 DECEMBER 2019



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MAIN QUESTION: WHEN ARE WE BIAS TOWARDS THE FUTURE?

- Generally, when evaluating lives, we care about what happens in a life, but not when it happens
- But, it seems we may exhibit future-directed time bias about hedonic states in these cases:
- Parfit: When we are deciding in the moment for ourselves
- Hare: Also when we are nearby a loved one and deciding in the moment for them



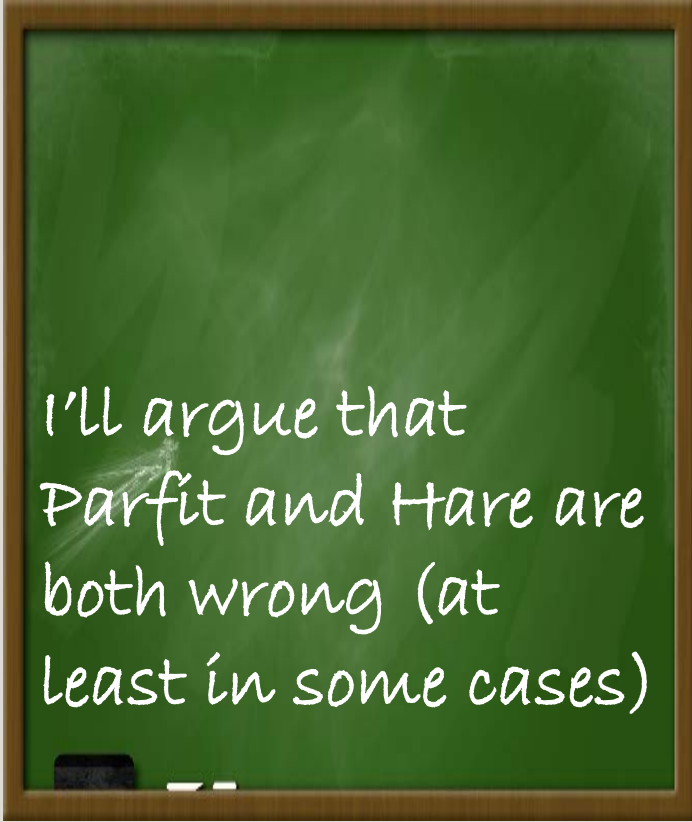
E.g. what is best for
a distant stranger?
a) 10 hours
suffering
yesterday
b) 1 hour
suffering later
today

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MAIN ANSWER:

WE ARE NOT OFTEN BIAS TOWARDS THE FUTURE

- Parfit: When we are deciding in the moment for ourselves
- Hare: Also when we are nearby a loved one and deciding in the moment for them



I'll argue that
Parfit and Hare are
both wrong (at
least in some cases)

4/27 METHOD

- Exact Binomial p-values for single-sample groups, benchmark of 50% (“most”)
- 95% Adjusted Wald Confidence Intervals,
- Only two options given for responses
- Participants:
 - Wave 1 (Nov-Dec 2015): CSUS diverse undergrad philosophy students
 - Wave 2 (Feb-Mar 2016): CSUS diverse undergrad philosophy students
 - Wave 3 (Jul-Aug 2016): UoW undergraduate students
 - Wave 4 (Mar 2017): UoW undergraduate students
 - Wave 5 (Mar 2018): UoW undergraduate students
 - Wave Web I (Dec 2017): M-Turk US residents, HS education, Engl. as 1st lang.

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ON HOW DEREK PARFIT MATTERS



6/27 PARFIT'S SURGERY CASE #1 (R&P, PP.165-6; 1A2)

~You must have a perfectly safe and effective surgery. You must be able to feel pain during, but you will be made to forget after.

You have just woken up. The nurse says you may be the patient who had the operation yesterday (lasted 10 hours), or the patient who is to have a the operation later today (lasting 1 hour). It is either true that you did suffer for 10 hours, or true that you shall suffer for 1 hour.

Which would you prefer to be true?

Parfit thinks “most of us” would prefer 10 hours past suffering to 1 hour future suffering (both later forgotten)

7/27 PARFIT'S SURGERY CASE #1 & "IN 10 MINS" VARIANT

Scenario	W	N	A (more past/total suffering)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total suffering)	B#	B%	p-value
IA2: Parfit's SC#1	2	91	You suffered 10 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	65	71%	0.0000	You suffered 0 hrs yesterday, 1 today, later forgotten	26	29%	-
IA5: Parfit's SC#1 + "in 10 mins"	3	63	You suffered 10 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	45	71%	0.0004	You suffered 0 hrs yesterday, 1 hr in 10 mins , later forgotten	18	29%	-

- Parfit was right that people would exhibit bias towards the future in this case... **but not for the right reason**

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PARFIT SAYS “LATER FORGOTTEN” DOESN’T MATTER

- Parfit (*R&P*, pp. 166-7) includes this because he doesn't like the asymmetry between remembering pain and believing there was pain (remembering pain can be painful)
- But this is a mistake
- The “later forgotten” clause actually generates a kind of asymmetry that makes people not really concerned about past suffering
- The “later forgotten” clause makes it like they never experienced the past suffering, but they will experience the future pain (before that is also forgotten)

9/27 PARFIT'S SURGERY CASE #1: "LATER FORGOTTEN" DOES MATTER

Scenario	W	N	A (more past/total suffering)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total suffering)	B#	B%	p-value
IA2: Parfit's SC#1	2	91	You suffered 10 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	65	71%	0.0000	You suffered 0 hrs yesterday, 1 today, later forgotten	26	29%	
IA4SS3: Simpler version of Parfit's SC#1	5	79	You suffered 10 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	22	28%	-	You suffered 0 hrs yesterday, 1 today (next hour), later forgotten	57	72%	0.0001
IA4SS: Simpler version of Parfit's SC#1	2	63	You suffered 5 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	16	25%	-	You suffered 0 hrs yesterday, 1 today (next hour), later forgotten	47	75%	0.0001
IA4SS4: Simpler version of Parfit's SC#1	5	87	You suffered 5 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	24	28%	-	You suffered 0 hrs yesterday, 1hr today, later forgotten	63	72%	0.0000

10/27 PARFIT'S SECOND SURGERY CASE

- Parfit has a second surgery example (without “later forgotten”) to show his first example doesn’t need it, but his second example has another change (pain on two days for the lower total pain case, past and future, instead of just one day in the future)
- Adding this extra change is super weird – why would he do that? No explanation is given. Maybe he did it because using the same old numbers didn’t work!?

11/27 PARFIT'S SURGERY CASE #2 (R&P, P.167; 1A4)

~Similar to Parfit's SC#1, but no memory wiping after, and the hours are changed.

You have just woken up, recalling some recent suffering. The nurse says you may be the patient who had the operation yesterday (lasted 5 hours), or the patient whose operation started yesterday (2 hours) and will be finished later today (1 hour). It is either true that you did suffer for 5 hours, or true that you suffered for 2 hours and shall suffer for 1 hour.

Which would you prefer to be true?

Parfit thinks “most of us” would prefer 5 hours past suffering to 2 past and 1 future hour of suffering (*neither later forgotten*)

12/27 PARFIT'S SURGERY CASE #2 (R&P, P.167; IA4)

Scenario	W	N	A (more past/total suffering)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total suffering)	B#	B%	p-value
IA4: Parfit's SC#2	2	67	You suffered 5 hrs yesterday, 0 today	56	84%	0.0000	You suffered 2 hrs yesterday, 1 today	11	16%	-

- Parfit was right that people would exhibit bias towards the future in this case... **but not for the right reason**

13/27 PARFIT IMPLIES THAT “PAIN YESTERDAY AND TODAY” IS THE SAME AS PAIN TODAY (ONLY)

- Parfit (*R&P*, p.167) doesn't say anything about why he changed:
 - 10 yesterday vs 1 today (in his SC#1) to
 - 5 yesterday vs 2 yesterday and 1 today (in his SC#2)
- Via silence, Parfit is implying that he thinks it makes no difference as long as option B has less total suffering and more future suffering than option A
- But this is a mistake
- Differences in duration of suffering seem hard to intuitively understand
- But differences in the number of instances of suffering seem easy

14/27 DURATION OF SUFFERING DOESN'T SEEM TO MATTER

Scenario	W	N	A (more past/total suffering)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total suffering)	B#	B%	p-value
IA4SS3: Simpler version of Parfit's SC#1	5	79	You suffered 10 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	22	28%	-	You suffered 0 hrs yesterday, 1 today (next hour), later forgotten	57	72%	0.0001
IA4SS: Simpler version of Parfit's SC#1	2	63	You suffered 5 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	16	25%	-	You suffered 0 hrs yesterday, 1 today (next hour), later forgotten	47	75%	0.0001
IA4SS4: Simpler version of Parfit's SC#1	5	87	You suffered 5 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	24	28%	-	You suffered 0 hrs yesterday, 1 hr today, later forgotten	63	72%	0.0000

15/27 INSTANCES OF SUFFERING DOES SEEM TO MATTER

Scenario	W	N	A (more past/total suffering)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total suffering)	B#	B%	p-value
IA4: Parfit's SC#2	2	67	You suffered 5 hrs yesterday, 0 today	56	84%	0.0000	You suffered 2 hrs yesterday , 1 today	11	16%	-
IA4SS4: Simpler version of Parfit's SC#1	5	87	You suffered 5 hrs yesterday, 0 today	24	28%	-	You suffered 0 hrs yesterday , 1 today	63	72%	0.0000
IF2: Parfit's SC#2, but about mum	4	74	Mum suffered 5 hrs yesterday, 0 later today	60	81%	0.0000	Mum suffered 2 hrs yesterday , 1 later today	14	19%	-
IF3: IF2, but only 1 instance of suffering	W1	100	Mum suffered 10 hrs yesterday, 0 later today	9	9%	-	Mum suffered 0 hrs yesterday , 1 later today	91	91%	0.0000

16/27 PARFIT WAS WRONG

- We may **not** be bias towards the future when deciding for ourselves in the moment...
- We prefer forgotten pain to pain that will be experienced and then forgotten – doesn't seem irrational
- We are bias against the number of instances of suffering (instead of rationally deciding based on duration) – does seem irrational

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A PUZZLE ABOUT CASPAR HARE'S OTHER-DIRECTED TIME BIAS



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CASPAR HARE: WE CAN HAVE FUTURE BIAS WHEN DECIDING FOR OTHERS TOO

- Inspired by the idea that we care more about the kid in the well in our village than thousands of starving kids overseas
- Hare thinks we care more and have different value preferences when we are near or far to the subject
- Hare applies this to Parfit's surgery time-bias cases

19/27 HARE'S DAUGHTER CASE #1 (AJP, 86:2, 2008, PP. 269-70)

~Your beloved daughter is uncontactable on the other side of the world.

She will have a very painful operation on 27 July or a fairly painful operation on 29 July. Both would be perfect successes.

It is 28 July (her time). What do you hope is true?

Hare thinks “the large majority” of people hope their daughter has the fairly painful operation on 29 July

This would not exhibit future bias

20/27 HARE'S DAUGHTER CASE #2 (AJP, 86:2, 2008, P. 270)

~Your beloved daughter is on the other side of the world. She will have a very painful operation on 27 July or a fairly painful operation on 29 July. Both would be perfect successes. You arrive at her bedside on 28 July to find her asleep.

What do you hope is true?

Hare thinks “the large majority” of people hope their daughter has the very painful operation on 27 July

This does exhibit future bias

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HARE SAYS PROXIMITY AFFECTS THE PERSPECTIVE FROM WHICH WE JUDGE LIVES

- Hare (*AJP*, 86:2, 2008, p. 270) points out two perspectives. We can evaluate:
 - Her *life* (not time-bias),
 - Or her *predicament* (future bias; Hare actually thinks this is the view we should take in *both* cases)
- Hare says proximity (and possibly seeing her or talking to her) changes our perspective (i.e., affects whether we are future bias)
- But this is a mistake
- Differences in proximity do not matter

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IF2 SEEMS TO SHOW FUTURE BIAS, BUT IT HAS 2 INSTANCES OF SUFFERING IN B

Scenario	W	N	A (more past/total suffering)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total suffering)	B#	B%	p-value
IF2: Near	4	74	Mum suffered 5 hrs yesterday, 0 later today	60	81%	0.0000	Mum suffered 2 hrs yesterday, 1 hr later today	14	19%	-

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IF3 SHOWS NO FUTURE BIAS (WHEN MULTIPLE INSTANCES OF SUFFERING REMOVED FROM B)

Scenario	W	N	A (more past/total suffering)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total suffering)	B#	B%	p-value
IF2: Near	4	74	Mum suffered 5 hrs yesterday, 0 later today	60	81%	0.0000	Mum suffered 2 hrs yesterday, 1 hr later today	14	19%	-
IF3: Near	W1	100	Mum suffered 10 hrs yesterday, 0 later today	9	9%	-	Mum suffered 0 hrs yesterday, 1 later today	91	91%	0.0000

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DIFFERENCES IN PROXIMITY DON'T SEEM TO MATTER

Scenario	W	N	A (more past/total suffering)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total suffering)	B#	B%	p-value
IF2: Near	4	74	Mum suffered 5 hrs yesterday, 0 later today	60	81%	0.0000	Mum suffered 2 hrs yesterday, 1 hr later today	14	19%	-
IF3: Near	WI	100	Mum suffered 10 hrs yesterday, 0 later today	9	9%	-	Mum suffered 0 hrs yesterday, 1 later today	91	91%	0.0000
IFSS: Far	2	50	SYCA suffered 10 hrs today, 0 tomorrow	6	12%	-	SYCA suffered 0 hrs today, 1 hr tomorrow	44	88%	0.0000

- Note differences in IFSS (short description, low N, “today” not “yesterday”)

25/27 HARE WAS WRONG

- We may **not** be bias towards the future when deciding in the moment for others we are near to...
- Hare should have done some x-phi

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MAIN QUESTION: WHEN ARE WE BIAS TOWARDS THE FUTURE?

- Main answer: Less than philosophers thought
- So what???
- Can self vs other judgments be different and both correct?
- We need to decide between a better life and a better future for people
 - Hypothetical: choose your child's life
 - Real: Executor of a will with two beneficiaries
- So which is the correct? Is future bias irrational?

27/27 THANK YOU

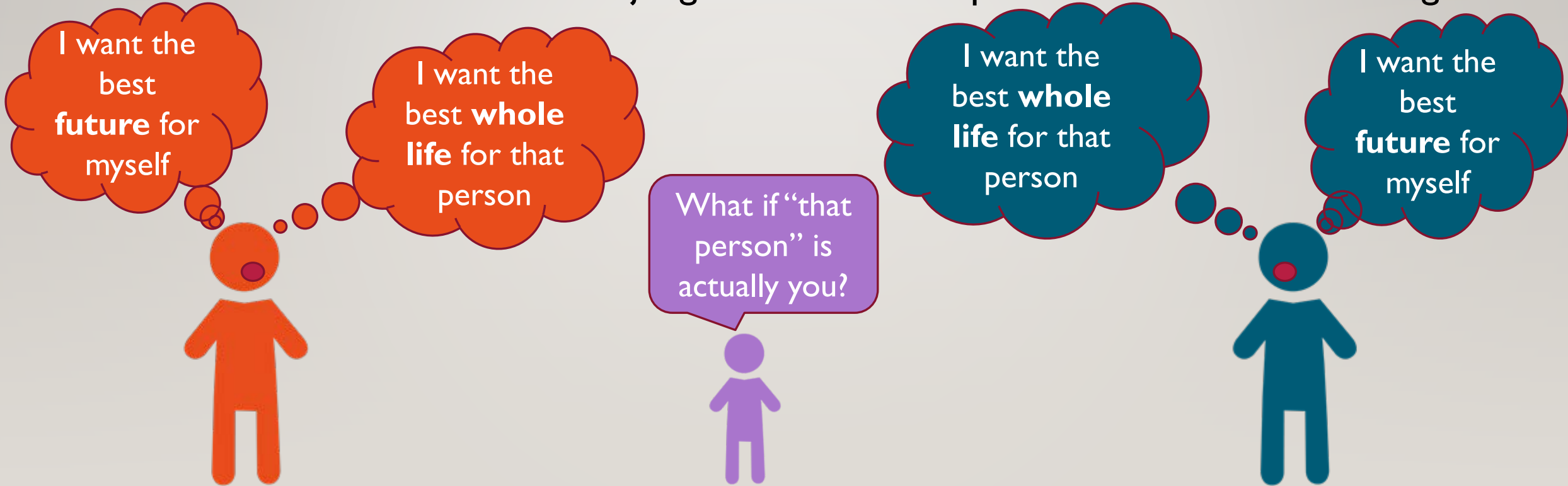
- Questions?

**CAN SELF VS OTHER JUDGMENTS BE
DIFFERENT AND BOTH CORRECT?**




29 SHOULD WE JUDGE IN THE SAME WAY FOR OTHERS AS WE DO FOR OURSELVES? **YES**


- The “self” or the “other” judgments are incompatible – one must be wrong




30 WHOLE-LIFE PERSPECTIVE IS BEST




Now that I think about it, I want the best **whole life** for myself...



... and, I want the best **whole life** for that person



I want the best **whole beer** for myself



Maybe that person wants a **whole beer** too



Thank you!

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THIS SOUNDS LIKE AN EMPTY IDEA...

HAS IT ANY IMPLICATIONS FOR REAL LIFE?

YES



32 WORKING OUT WHO TO GIVE THE GOLDEN TICKET TO (END ONLY)

The first relative has lived happily each year for 70 years, and will enjoy 1 more happy year. The second relative has lived happily each year for 40 years, and will enjoy 30 more happy years. Both relatives have been and will be in good health every year of their life. To carry out your duty, you have to decide which relative has the worse life, write their name on the ticket, and send it to them.

Assuming that the claims about the deceased woman's relatives' future years are true, which relative has the worse life and should receive the ticket?

1. The first relative, who's lived happily for 70 years, and will live happily for another 1, has the worse life and should receive the ticket.
2. The second relative, who's lived happily for 40 years, and will live happily for another 30, has the worse life and should receive the ticket.