

# The Abolitionist Project

## Engineering a Future Without Involuntary Suffering



An introduction to the central thesis, first articulated in the 1995 manifesto, *The Hedonistic Imperative*. It posits a strong ethical imperative to use advanced biotechnology to phase out all involuntary suffering in all sentient life.

“I teach one thing and one thing only, suffering and the end of suffering.” - Gautama Buddha

# Evolution Did Not Design Us to Be Happy

The Darwinian human condition is rooted in a biological architecture that prioritizes gene propagation over individual well-being.

## 1. The Hedonic Treadmill:

A suite of negative feedback mechanisms in the brain that stop most people from being very happy or very sad for long. This explains why major life events (winning the lottery, a severe accident) often have only a temporary impact on our baseline happiness.

## 2. Hedonic Set Point:

Each individual has a genetically influenced default level of well-being around which they fluctuate.



Being discontented a lot of the time is good for our genes even if it's bad for us.

# The Entire Biosphere is a “Darwinian Hellworld”

The argument is extended beyond humans to all sentient life, describing the “obscene suffering” inherent in nature. For most free-living animals, life is defined by predation, starvation, and disease. Most do not survive to maturity. This establishes the moral necessity of a pan-species approach.



Each year, some 800,000 humans take their own lives, the tip of an iceberg of mental pain.

The life of a pig or cow is as sentient and demonstrably more sapient than a human toddler.

“The living world is... some kind of monstrous snuff movie.”

# Transhumanism Provides a Framework for a New Era

A concise definition of the transhumanist movement through its three core pillars, or 'the three supers':

## Superintelligence



Humans are a stepping stone. Aims for intelligence amplification by rewriting the genome and using AI to become "full spectrum super intelligences."

## Superlongevity



Organic robots, like silicon ones, can be repaired and upgraded indefinitely, tackling aging and death.

## Superhappiness



Pearce's primary focus, using technical solutions to solve the problem of suffering. This is the Abolitionist Project.

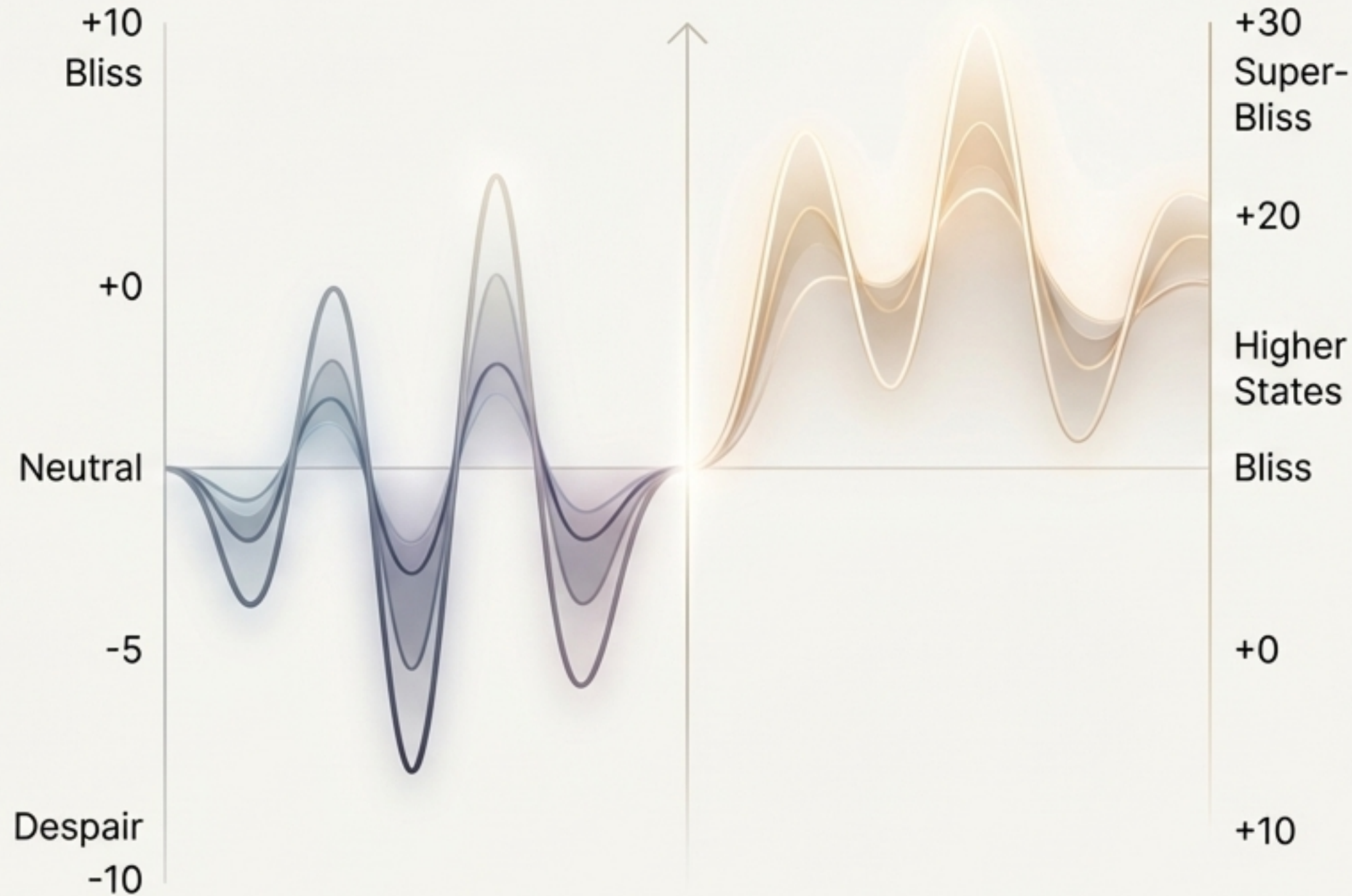
# For Humans: The Reproductive Revolution Will Recalibrate the Hedonic Treadmill

## BEFORE: Darwinian Range

## AFTER: Engineered Range

### Technologies

- **Pre-implantation Genetic Screening & Counseling:** Allowing prospective parents to select for benign genetic traits.
- **CRISPR Genome Editing:** Directly editing our genetic source code.



### Genetic Targets

- **SCN9A gene:** The “volume knob for pain.” Editing for alleles that confer an extremely high pain threshold without abolishing nociception.
- **COMPT, FAR, and FAR OUT genes:** Key genes that modulate hedonic set points. Editing for variants associated with a high default level of well-being.

# For Domesticated Animals: The Cultured Meat Revolution is the Essential Next Step

This slide makes a focused and urgent case for ending animal agriculture, which Pearce identifies as the “world’s worst form of severe readily avoidable suffering.” The solution is to accelerate the development and commercialization of cultured meat and other farm-free animal products. This is a non-negotiable prerequisite before tackling wild animal suffering.



This technical fix bypasses the need for universal veganism, making the abolition of factory farms and slaughterhouses sociologically realistic.

# For Wild Animals: Reprogramming the Biosphere via a Pan-Species Welfare State

This slide outlines the plan to end “Darwinian hellworlds.” The core of the vision is to use advanced biotechnology to manage the biosphere with compassion.

## Key Technologies:

- **Synthetic Gene Drives:** This technology “cheats the laws of Mendelian inheritance,” allowing desired genes to spread rapidly through sexually reproducing species.
- **Cross-Species Fertility Regulation:** Using gene drives or immunocontraception to manage population sizes.

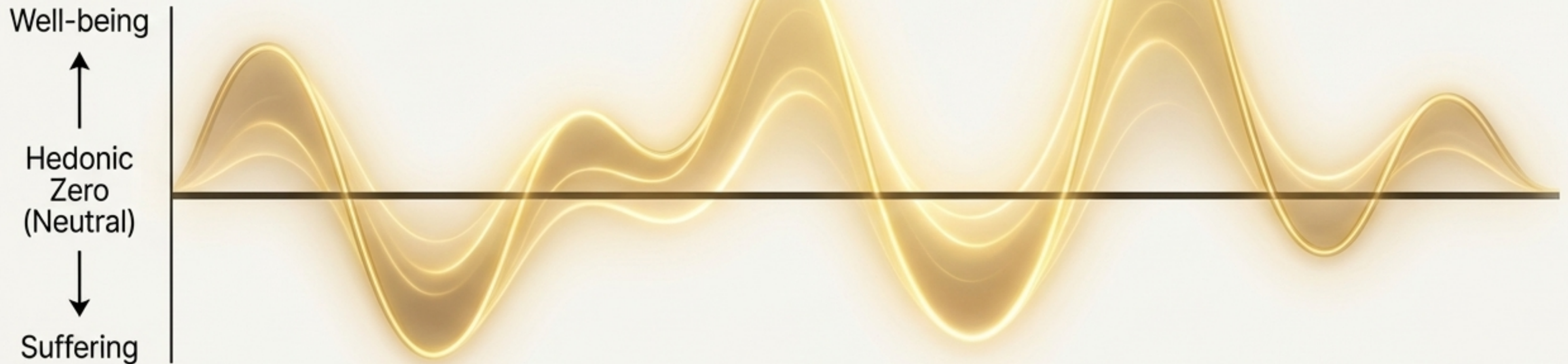
## Key Concepts:

- **Spreading Benign Genes:** Propagating alleles for high pain thresholds and high hedonic tone across wild populations.
- **“Herbivorizing Predators”:** Genetically tweaking predators so they no longer need to hunt and kill other sentient beings.



# The Vision: A Future Animated by Gradients of Intelligent Bliss

**Information-Sensitive:** Critical insight, social responsibility, and intellectual progress are enhanced, not eliminated.



**Motivation is Retained:** The mesolimbic dopamine system (motivation) can be amplified alongside the mu-opioid system (bliss). The happiest people are often the most motivated.

**Contrast Without Suffering:** Life will still have peaks and troughs, but the entire hedonic range is shifted above zero. The analogy is lovemaking: it has variations in intensity but is “generically enjoyable.”

# Objection: “Isn’t suffering necessary for meaning and appreciation?”

## The Myth of Necessary Suffering

---

- Suffering drains life of meaning; bliss enhances it. Depression is associated with nihilism and hopelessness.



- Consider people with chronic pain or depression: their lives are not richer or more meaningful for their suffering.



- Consider “hypothymic” people: individuals with naturally high hedonic set points who lead rich, high-functioning, socially responsible lives without ever experiencing states below hedonic zero.



- The ghastly feel of suffering is not indispensable; its functional role as a signaling system can be replicated without the negative experience itself, as demonstrated by advanced AI avoiding noxious stimuli.

“No one says I feel blissfully happy but my life feels empty and meaningless.”

# Objection: “This is unnatural, dangerous, and eugenics.”

## Responsible Stewardship vs. the Genetic Crapshoot

### The Unnatural

Our entire civilization—from wearing clothes to using smartphones—is “unnatural.”

Humans already massively intervene in nature; the only real question is whether we do so as “callous gods or benevolent gods.”

### The Danger

Natural reproduction is itself an “extremely dangerous, untested genetic experiment.”

We are creating a new being with an innate opioid addiction and a fatal genetic disorder called aging.

The Abolitionist Project is about *responsible* experimentation.

### The Eugenics

Pearce embraces the term but redefines it. Unlike 20th-century eugenics focused on “racial hygiene,” this project is guided by a single principle: **the well-being of all sentients.**

It is aligned with the WHO's definition of health as “a state of complete physical, social, emotional well-being,” and should be seen as remediation, not enhancement.

# Objection: “Won’t this create a boring, uniform society?”

## Bliss Breeds Diversity

### Behavioral Diversity

Happiness fosters creativity, sensation-seeking, and exploration. Depression, conversely, is a “recipe for getting stuck in a rut.” Happy people are responsive to a broader range of stimuli.



Depression



Happiness

### Genetic Diversity

While some uniformity is good (e.g., the optimal number of alleles for cystic fibrosis is zero), genome reform allows for far greater diversity than natural selection.

We can create “novel allelic combinations” that could never arise naturally.

### Intellectual Diversity

Gaining mastery over our reward circuitry will allow us to safely explore “an unparalleled diversity of altered state spaces of consciousness” that are currently inaccessible to the Darwinian mind.

# A Centuries-Long Project, From Pilot Biospheres to a Civilized World

This slide sets realistic expectations for the Abolitionist Project. It is not an overnight revolution but a gradual, centuries-long transition.

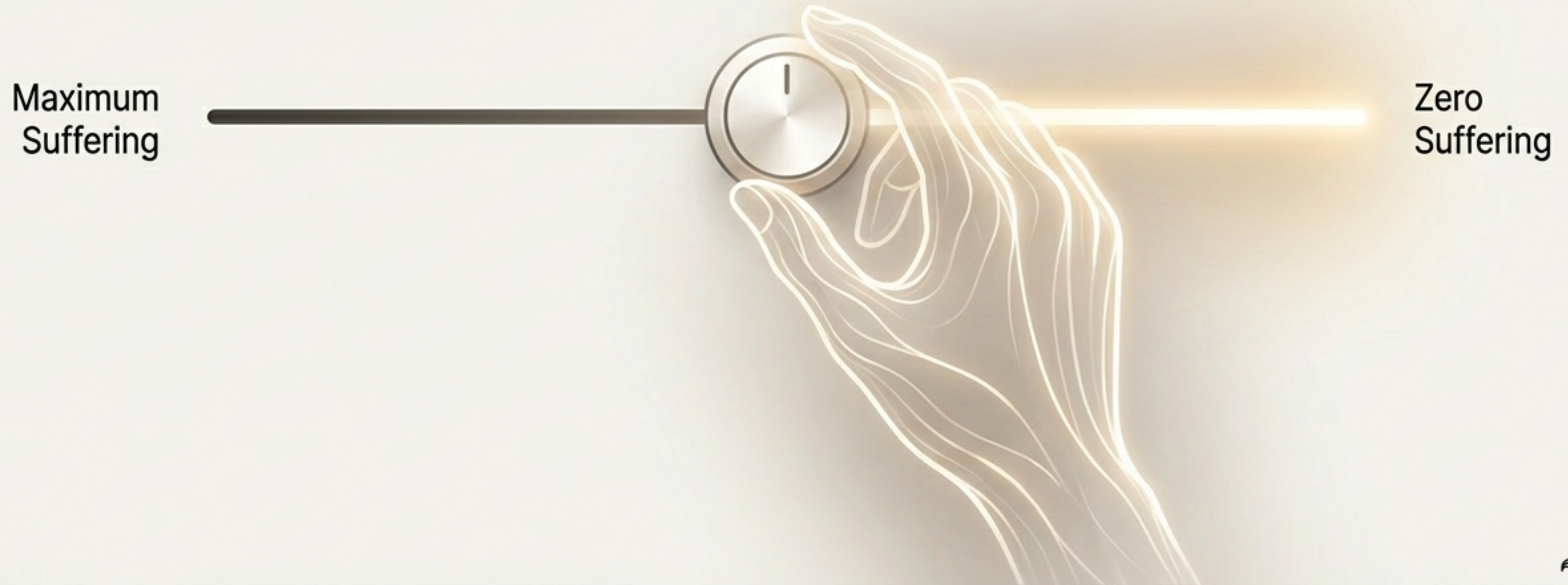


## The Primary Obstacle

The main challenge is not technology, which is rapidly advancing. The primary barrier is “**status quo bias**” and the lack of ethical and political will.

# The Level of Suffering in Nature is an Adjustable Parameter

With biotechnology, the amount of suffering in the world is no longer a fixed constant; it is a variable that humanity can control. The question is no longer **if** we can intervene, but **how**. With power comes complicity. To stand by and allow the “Darwinian horror show” to continue when we have the means to stop it is an active moral choice.



# About David Pearce & The Abolitionist Project

## David Pearce

A British philosopher, co-founder of the World Transhumanist Association (now Humanity Plus), and a prominent figure in the transhumanist movement. He is a leading advocate for negative utilitarianism and the use of technology to eliminate suffering.



## Source Materials

### **Foundational Text:**

*The Hedonistic Imperative* (1995), Pearce's online manifesto that lays the groundwork for the Abolitionist Project.

**Further Reading:** A comprehensive collection of essays, interviews, and resources can be found at:

HedWeb.com

Abolitionist.com

BLTC.com