

# **Antinatalist Manifesto**

## **On the Ethics of Antinatalism Challenging Human and Animal Procreation**

**(By Karim Akerma. Translated from German into English by Ashley Mikkola)**

### **What is antinatalism?**

Antinatalism (etymologically from nasci: to be born) is a moral theory, that draws on a deeper set of ideas than most other ethics. All of the ethics up until this point, work off of the assumption **that** both people and animals (should) exist and then asks what the people that exist should do. Antinatalism is an answer to the more fundamental question of **whether** or not people and animals should exist. Antinatalists call on everyone, not to bring any more people or animals into existence.

### **What does ethical action mean?**

A person is acting ethically, when they act only after considering the welfare of all current and future people and animals. In particular, a person is acting ethically, when they treat others the way that they would like to be treated and when they do not treat other living beings in such a way that they would object to being treated.

### **Regarding human beings**

#### **Learning from the past**

Antinatalism is a moral theory that learns from the past. History up until now has shown that with each development of productive forces that support life, there is an accompanying "uptake" in destructive forces that comes along with it. There are lessons to be learned from examples like Germany and even Europe as a whole. Prior to the First World War, Europe had experienced the longest period of peace in its history. Prior to the Second World War, nobody thought it would be possible for the crimes committed under National Socialism to occur in a country as highly developed as Germany. The past acts as a criminal record for the species and we should learn from it that peace is too fleeting to conceive humans and force them to enter into an unknown future.

#### **The "human adventure"**

Anyone bringing up the topic of the human adventure should admit that the foundations of this idea was shaken at the very latest after the Second World War in the 20th century. In addition to the German death camps, there were Soviet work camps. China also made considerable aggressions which were followed soon after by the Chinese culture revolution, then there was Cambodia and the mass-murder of the Tutsis as well as the

Congo wars which had hundreds of millions of victims. When will enough be enough, if it isn't already?

### **Why childlessness?**

If from this day onward, nobody created any more offspring in as little as 100 years there would be:

- no more wars (and no more times of peace)
- no hungry people (and no one satiated)
- no one degraded (and no one respected)
- nobody ill (and nobody healthy)
- no tortured people (and no one uplifted)
- nobody experiencing existential angst or economic deprivation (and no love of life)
- no nursing homes (and no labour and delivery wards)
- no fear of death and nobody dying (and no new-borns)
- no more genocide (and no more cultural understanding)
- nothing like Auschwitz again (there is no comparison here).

Only those people who feel that the aspects listed here in parenthesis more than outweigh these things can logically be in support of the continuation of the human species.

### **Impositions**

A person that conceives a child:

- is acting in a way that means that another person will die; their own child. One widely accepted ethical principle, however, is as follows: One should never act in a way - unless their life is in danger - that means that another person will die because of their actions;
- acts in a way that means that another person (their own child) will have to experience the deaths of Grandparents, parents, countless other relatives, friends and pets;
- agrees with how human history has unfolded and is happy with the current state of affairs. And they would encourage all other people to also have children, which would mean that they believe that human history, should carry along the same path that it has thus far indefinitely;
- acts in such a way that is necessary for another person, after around ten years of school and several exams, to be forced into a less than fulfilling and rarely creative career;
- decides not to support a specific existing individual (as people who adopt and choose to take in another person do), but instead chooses to support whichever human being that could be the result of an unpredictable genetic lottery. The main prerequisite being, that it is their own biological child.

### **Offspring – personal decision or ethical question?**

If couples decide to have offspring, there are people that are directly affected by this decision; their own children. Thus, the question surrounding the issue of having children is clearly an ethical one.

### **Does everyone have a basic human right to reproduce?**

According to constitutional law, everyone has the right to pursue their own happiness so long as this doesn't adversely affect the rights of others. Thus, we cannot assume that there is a fundamental right to have children whose rights and interests will sooner or later be undermined and who will, in their own right, eventually undermine the rights and interests of other people and animals.

### **Better to never have been born!**

Sooner or later everyone ends up in situations or phases of their life where they believe that it would be better to never have been born. What would give someone the right to act in such a way that puts humans (one's own children!) in these sorts of situations?

### **Altruism or egoism?**

Parents love to say that they would do anything for their children. However, in order for them to do this, their children need to exist. People who have children, decide to do so purely for themselves or because they feel pressure from others, such as from their own parent or society. It is impossible to conceive a child for the benefit of that child.

### **Adoption and support**

The people who truly love children will want to give existing children a better life by adopting them or supporting them (financially). To say that you are improving the situation of a child by giving them life is an egotistical fallacy, as the child did not exist before its life began in the womb.

### **Informed consent**

A person, that conceives another person, believing that it is correct, or even required to do so, also finds it acceptable – from an ethical vantage point – for all humans to procreate. If this is true, then the person who is conceiving another person, sanctions the continuation of human history which has so far been filled with millions of tragedies and tyranny.

### **“My children will make the world a better place!”**

People are often happy to justify their decision to have children, by saying that their children will help to finally make the world a more humane place. However, parents that say these sorts of things should ask themselves why the task of improving the world was not already

completed by their ancestors or even by themselves before they choose to bring children into this ill-suited world.

### **Is joy compensation for the imposition of suffering?**

Parents like to justify the fact that their offspring are destined to experience suffering because those children are also sure to experience joy. The idea behind this is that every painful experience can be offset by a joyful experience of the same length and intensity. These misguided ideas are probably modelled on the mathematical ability to offset negative numbers with positive ones or the concept in physics that negative charges can be offset with positive ones. People's negative experiences cannot simply be neutralised by positive experiences because they are an indelible and often suppressed part of our individual biography. Moreover, trauma leaves scars. Furthermore, we need to establish that our ability to feel joy is far less extensive than our ability to suffer. It is entirely possible for someone to languish away for years suffering from cancer, but nobody floats along on cloud nine for years at a time. At best we can experience contentment as a steady state of existence. The things that are true of the life phases of individual people also apply for making comparisons between groups: Was the negativity of the German death camps "neutralised" by the economic miracle on the Rhine that made millions of people financially better off than ever before?

### **Experimental nature of existence**

People who have children, carry out a human experiment with an unknown conclusion. These people don't know which traits, and which combination of their genes will be carried on in their children, and nobody knows what the result of this genetic lottery combined with their individual upbringing and social environment will be. In most cases, other than conception, human experiments are frowned upon.

### **Imposition test**

Are you actually ready to allow another person to lead a life that is comprised of an average of all the highs and lows of your own life as well as your parents' and grandparents' lives?

### **The gift of life and the burden of existence**

Parents love to talk about how they gave their children the gift of life. However, this line of thought is problematic. Before that child was alive, it didn't exist and couldn't be given the gift of life; and once the child exists, it is already living and can't be given the gift of life. Once the child has come into the world, it is promptly confronted with the burden of existence. After 10 years of school there are another 40 years of working or perhaps even unemployment.

### **The imposition of illness, ageing and mortality**

People who talk of the gift of life, should not ignore all the different

(childhood) illnesses, infirmities that come with age and the mortality that all parents impose on their children. That's not to mention the abuse, harassment and betrayal that every new person will have to face.

### **Care homes**

Those who are thinking of having their own children, take a moment and ask yourself if you are ready to subject your own child to many years of degrading decline in a care home. Thinking about one's own children must include imagining the ageing process of your own child and them ending up in a care home.

### **Mandatory will to live**

"If life is so terrible, why don't more people end it all?" – this is a common question that antinatalism faces. The answer: Our bio-physical constitution (fear of death!) makes it impossible for most or all, to end their life when they wish. Once alive, most people will want to continue to exist – until the pain becomes unbearable. But this desire itself is not our own, but is imposed upon us: first by our parents' actions, and second by the demands of our own body that desperately strives to keep us alive.

### **Assisted dying**

Because the starting point of our lives happened without us being able to approve or reject it, we should at least be allowed to freely decide the end point of our lives. From an antinatalist perspective, a state funded assisted dying program that enables people to die with dignity should be supported.

### **Are antinatalist ethics completely utopian?**

No, antinatalism is not going to first be successful once humanity has died out peacefully and voluntarily. Every individual decision to remain childless is a tremendous success, and this means that there would be one less person that the aforementioned tragedies will be imposed upon. The starting point here is not the concept of "humanity" at large, but rather every single person. But each individual person that decides to be childless - once their decision is universalised - has made a decision in favour of the extinguishing of the human race. And even if each woman brings one child into the world, humanity would die out in a few hundred years.

## **Concerning Animals**

### **Dignity**

According to a well-known pipe dream, human and animal dignity shall be inviolable. Yet with every act of conception or breeding that same dignity is violated and jeopardised. Each new human experiences degrading situations and puts others in degrading situations. Nearly all livestock experience degrading situations or are permanently held in undignified conditions when they are not being kept properly.

### **Nobody would miss us. What about the animals?**

If everyone stopped reproducing from today onwards, in around 100 years, there would be no more humans on the earth. Would anyone mourn the loss of humanity even just a little? Much to the contrary: if humans were to disappear, that would mean the disappearance of a species that is comprised of a significant number of sadistic animal torturers. On the one hand, these are those people who deal with animals and who use vast swaths of land to feed, plump, transport and slaughter them. On the other hand, these are the vast majority of people who will still purchase the products of animal torture, despite being thoroughly informed about the amount of animal suffering involved in every piece of meat.

### **Living amongst living beings that are forced to live**

It is more true for animals than it is for humans that they live amongst living beings that are forced to live. Animals produce offspring without being able to decide whether or not they want to. They are forced to live and reproduce, because their instincts command them to but also because humans force them to. Animals that have been domesticated by humans must live because they are considered useful and because humans benefit from them. A more comprehensive antinatalism would also include sentient animals.

### **Vegetarian and vegan diets**

By living on a vegetarian—or better yet, a vegan diet—the demand for the products of animal torture; fish, meat, milk and cheese is reduced. People who live vegetarian and vegan lifestyles are practising antinatalists inasmuch as their diets ensure that fewer animals come into existence. Every year in Germany alone, more than 55 million pigs are killed. These pigs only came into the world because of the dietary habits of meat eaters. Every vegetarian person reduces the demand for fish, chickens, pigs, cows, sheep and other animals to be farmed in conditions that are often very harrowing.

### **Pets**

Those who adopt pets from a shelter (where they can also get them sterilised) as opposed to getting them from a breeder, reduce the demand for new animals that often face unfortunate fates, while also helping an existing animal out of a vulnerable situation.

### **Sterilisations**

By sterilising animals, we can free them from being a slave to their instincts and bringing more and more captive animals into the cycle of being born, contracting parasites, ageing, ailing and dying; eating and being eaten. The sterilisation of stray animals is a pressing concern, in particular for house cats that have gotten lost or run away. What's more these cats often don't find enough to eat on their own.

## **Zoos**

Zoos love to talk about their success in raising rare animals and endangered species. But these same zoos still bring beings into existence when it would have been better if they had never lived at all. Unlike these animals' wild counterparts, their illnesses are attended to by veterinarians who are on hand. But the life of a zoo animal largely consists of boredom. The underlying principle of zoos should not be centred on breeding more animals according to the aesthetic preferences of humans; at best they should take in animals that are already living.

Strangely enough we only seem to take an increased interest in pets or in wild animals that have become somewhat rare or that have an unusually aesthetic appearance. We only consider the extinction of an entire species or the death of a rare or beautiful specimen to be a tragic loss. The fate of the 58 million pigs killed in Germany alone in the year 2012 has less of an impact on us than the fate of individual bears, sea lions, pandas or giraffes that we admire in our zoos. One of the main goals of the zoological antinatalism is to allow for our livestock; cattle, pigs, sheep, goats and chickens to become so scarce that it is only possible to see them in zoos.

## **Conclusion**

The paradise on earth that is promised by many different ideologies was not able to be achieved over the past 200 years of industrial growth. Instead this era has been marked by the limitless consumption of the few and the all-too-well known consequences for vulnerable humans and animals alike. In order to meet the current demands for resources of the entire human race, we would need more than one earth. Does the earth really need us? Not a chance. The earth doesn't need 10, 7, or even 2 million people. It doesn't need a single person. With the belief in a creator we had convinced ourselves of our importance and the divine command for us to exist on the earth. But we are the product of a blind evolutionary path.

In the history books we read about how humans have made the earth a living hell for other people since the dawn of time. And we know that our presence on the planet makes the animals' lot in life significantly grimmer than if there were not any humans. Little by little it dawns on us that there is no reason for us to be on the planet. The time has come to bow out of existing. Specifically by not bringing any more beings into the world that are capable of suffering. Instead of carrying on like we have before, trying to create more and more joy for more and more people, we should work to restrain ourselves and ensure that there are fewer and fewer people and animals; meaning less and less suffering. Thanks to the fact that there would be ever fewer suffering animals and humans, a globally practised antinatalism could become a source of joy for emphatic individuals.

(Written in July 2014)