

The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast - Written Edition!

Featuring an interview with Mikołaj Starzyński

Author of the new book, *Antynatalizm*

(in translation, the title would be something like:

Antinatalism. On immorality of procreation)

Who is Mikołaj Starzyński?

I was born in Warsaw, (capitol of Poland) in 1989. I graduated in cultural studies, (in 2013) at the University of Warsaw. Two years ago I also took a year of philosophy, (so that my brain would still work.) at the same University. I also studied photography in Warsaw School of Photography and took courses in writing and journalism at JCC Warsaw, where my tutor was Mikołaj Grynberg, a well known Polish/Jewish author. For two years now I have been publishing zines with him under the title "Lamalo" - a quarterly journal to which excellent Polish and Jewish writers, scientists and artists write (and nobody makes money on it, we do it for satisfaction and out of curiosity). In 2015, I published my first book on New Atheism, and this year (in September) my second book on Antinatalism will be published. My regular job is photo-edition in Polish edition of Newsweek magazine and photography freelance (You can see my portraits at www.mikolajstarzynski.pl and other photos on my Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/mikstarzynski/>).

How long have you been an Antinatalist?

It's a hard question. It seems to me that even as a child I had such

intuitions - that bringing someone into the world is not fair. I remember that I have told my parents many times: "I did not ask to be born! If you did this to me, now give me pocket money to go to the cinema with my friends". They usually did :D

Antinatalism, as a word, hasn't been around for very long, and only used as a philosophical term since around 2006. When was the first time you heard the word, Antinatalism?

I heard about the word "antinatalism" during my philosophical studies two years ago. Then I decided to write a paper about it.

When did you begin writing "*Antynatalizm*", and what inspired you to begin the project?

I had to write a dissertation to complete postgraduate studies (in philosophy). I was thinking about the subject from when I was in a bioethics class, and heard about Antinatalism and David Benatar. Next day I ordered "Better Never To Have Been" and few other titles, and started to read and write. Then I decided to make a book out of it.

What can you tell me about some of the arguments you make in favor of Antinatalism in *Antynatalizm*?

My book is an introduction to the subject. I want to present this issue to Polish readers, because it is almost unknown. Therefore, I tried to gather various arguments: from ecological, through feminist, to the philosophical arguments of Cabrera and Benatar. I'm not making any new of my own.

I see that the book will include Zapffe's *The last Messiah*, awesome! Is this a new translation?

For now, there is one translation of the text from Norwegian to Polish by Andrzej Konrad Trzeciak. The translator agreed to include this essay in the book. I am very grateful to him.

I also see that *Antynatalizm* will include 56 Antinatalism quotes submitted by the great Antinatalist historian, Piotr Miroń, that's wonderful!

Yes, I am very happy about it! Thanks to social media I had the pleasure to contact Piotr Miroń and when I learned about his knowledge of the subject, I suggested that he prepare a subjective selection of quotes. He did it perfectly. I hope that the time will come when he will write a book about Antinatalism! It would be so much better than mine! Unfortunately, Piotr is also an extremely modest person, so I don't know if this will happen.

I love the cover design! What can you tell me about this wonderful design? A brilliant re-imagining of the shattered ouroboros often found in Antinatalist circles?

I love it too! Michał Dziadkowiec, our graphic designer, showed me a few covers, each one was great, but we felt it wasn't it. And then, at the last moment, he sat down and came up with this one. I am delighted with it! There is no unnecessary element on it, it is simple and elegant. And yes, it is a minimalistic version of Ouroboros, a mythical snake swallowing its own

tail. Michał added scissors to him, which is supposed to symbolize breaking the circle.

What has been the reaction to the book so far?

The book will be published in September, now we are gathering money in pre-sale. So almost nobody has read the book yet. But there were several interviews with me in the Polish press and in social media comments were probably standard: some people expressed interest and curiosity, and some laughed at the topic or considered me and the idea crazy. It seems to me that this is common reactions on Antinatalism. People often feel judged or criticized by this philosophy.

Who are some of your greatest Antinatalist influences from the past or present, if any?

I don't have any favorites. I am interested in different variations of this idea. But probably David Benatar had the most influence on me, I really like and admire the sharpness of his mind, the way he argues and defends his controversial views. I would like to meet him personally, I am very curious about what kind of person he is. But I doubt it will happen because there is a long way from Cape Town to Warsaw! I don't think he has any interest in visiting Poland. I wouldn't have if I didn't live here...

Do you consider yourself an Antinatalist activist?

It depends how you define this word. You can consider me an activist because I popularize this philosophy. But it is not my goal to persuade

anyone to Antinatalism. My work is rather descriptive. Although of course I would like people to think before they have children.

What is Antinatalism like in Poland specifically? Is there an Antinatalist community there of any kind? I'm always curious to learn more about how Antinatalism exists and grows in specific places in the world!

I have not heard of any reliable sociological research on this subject. I know several Facebook groups with around 3000 members. But that's probably it. Childless people are another matter, but such a decision does not have to be based on Antinatalism. Who knows, maybe my book will help establish a community?

How does your Antinatalism intersect for you with other subject such as Atheism, Veganism and The Right to Die?

Interesting question! In fact, I'm both an atheist and a vegetarian. I also believe that people should have the right to decide on their own deaths. The combination of these factors is probably popular among Antinatalists. It seems to me that it's difficult to combine religious faith with Antinatalism. Just like caring for unborn babies, one should care for living and sentient people and animals. It seems obvious to me. Antinatalists are usually extremely sensitive and empathic people.

Would you consider yourself a suffering focused Antinatalist?

I don't think I'm focused only on suffering, although I see its terrifying

magnitude in reality. I am surprised by the human tendency to look away and pretend that everything is wonderful.

Do you consider your Antinatalism to be at all inspired by environmental issues?

Yes, the environment and its crisis are for me a strong argument in favor of Antinatalism. I think that for many "ordinary" people these are the most understandable arguments. In contrast to rather abstract ones presented even by Cabrera or Benatar.

Would you consider yourself an anthropocentric Antinatalist, or are you more of a sentiocentric Antinatalist?

Definitely sentiocentric. Human race is overrated.

Would you agree or disagree that the ultimate goal of Antinatalism should be extinction?

I am a pessimist, so I do not believe that humanity could become extinct, especially as a result of rational reflection and conscious decision. But should we? Reason says "yes", but the heart shouts "no!". We both know which is right.

You are also quite an accomplished photographer, I'm curious if Antinatalism in any way influences your photographic work? Do you have any feelings or ideas about how the subject of Antinatalism is a fairly new, highly unexplored subject matter for artists?

Thank you very much! Antinatalism had no effect on my artistic work so far. But I can share a secret with you that, but I'm planning a photographic project on Antinatalism. I am waiting for information about whether I got to the prestigious photographic collective "Sputnik Photos" - if so, that's where I want to deal with this topic. It will turn out in a month, so keep your fingers crossed, please!

The book had an extremely successful crowd sourcing campaign in order to raise funds for printing - congratulations on getting fully funded in such a short amount of time! How did you get such an incredible turn out of support? Impressive!

Thanks, I'm quite surprised how well it is going. The publisher (<http://tnsa.pl/>) did a great promotional job. And I have a lot of friends in the world of media, culture and the academic world. Many of them shared the information about crowdfunding and thanks to that we have collected necessary amount in 32 hours!

What can you tell me about some of the fabulous prizes you have set up as incentives for donating to the book project?

There are standard items such as t-shirts, cups, bags and backpacks with the book cover logo. We also offer some special gifts, such as official "name-thanks" at the end of the book, an oil painting painted by the graphic designer (with the same logo) and a portrait session with me.

Is there still time to donate to the fundraiser? And are there options

for people who might only have options such as Paypal?

The fundraiser ends on July 10, and everyone can support us by then. To use PayPal You can use kontakt@tnsa.pl and on the same mail You can contact my publisher about incentives for donating 😊

Will the book be made available at all to people who missed the fundraiser, or who were otherwise not able have contribute in time?

Of course! Since the fundraiser is such a success, we will print more copies than we planned. Now it is 20% cheaper, but after the fundraiser will end you can also order a book.

When will the book be officially released?

We are planning a premiere on September 20.

I'm so sad I may never get to read this book due to the language barrier! Do you have any plans to create translations in other languages? And is there anything that the Antinatalist community can do too help make that happen?

To be honest, I didn't even think about it. I think that if there was a willing publisher and money for translation and printing – I'm sure there would be no problem. Maybe such a short introduction to the topic would also find interested recipients in other countries. It would be great, but as a pessimist I can't count on it!

What do you most hope for Antinatalism to ultimately accomplish?

As a realist and pessimist, I don't count on much. I would like people not to succumb to the pressure of having children. That they would make informed decisions about having them. That would be a huge step.

Thanks so much for taking the time to read and answer my questions

Mr. Starzyński!

Thank You, Amanda! Call me Mikolaj, please. Greetings to all the listeners!