

The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast #16

Miguel Steiner

Hello everyone, and welcome to the Sixteenth episode of The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast, a podcast all about the subject of Antinatalism, created by Antinatalists. My name is Amanda Oldphan Sukenick, also known as ForeverWolfFilms on Youtube, and today, I'm speaking with the the author of **De la felicidad y los hijos. La evolución del pensamiento ético y la dimensión demográfica de los problemas.** (Of happiness and children. The evolution of ethical thought and the demographic dimension of problems.), Miguel Steiner!

- Welcome Mr. Steiner, thanks you for being my guest on Exploring Antinatalims!
Hello. Good morning. Good afternoon, in Spain. This is so because the Earth is not flat. It is round.

- So Mr. Steiner, this interview is a bit of a unique situation, because you have in fact written a book about Antinatalism, and sadly I have not read it, as it's in Spanish, and I can only speak and read English. So this is a truly unique opportunity for both our audience and myself to familiarize ourselves with your work!

- Before we begin discussing your works, could you possibly just tell us a little bit about yourself? Who you are, and perhaps how long you have been interested in the subject of Antinatalism?

I was born in Austria six decades ago and I grew up in Germany. Personal circumstances -this means a woman- made me settle in Spain. I studied at the University of Barcelona Spanish Studies and Philosophy. I am against procreation since the age of 17 or 18.

- What is your main reason for being an Antinatalist? Why are you an Antinatalist?

A serious depression, when I was 17 years old, showed me how vulnerable we are and how much we can suffer. I was also painfully mindful about other people's and animals suffering. There are horrible and atrocious things in the world. I think that the pain of other people is, objectively, as important as mine is. It has his intrinsic unquestionable importance. So the main point for me is to avoid, prevent and reduce suffering, especially intense suffering. Of course, intensity matters. And I can't guarantee the wellbeing of my children. I just know that there are terrible risks and menaces and that the more people are in the world the more victims will be claimed by all the existing problems. Hunger, violence, disease, sorrow, agony... All our needs are sources of suffering if we can't satisfy them. So I will not create a new life and a new death for what I think is a genuine ethical reason.

- 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 presented a doctoral dissertation in the year 2000 (Ética, sufrimiento y procreación). It is about Antinatalism but I didn't use the word because I haven't heard it. But it doesn't matter. I didn't need the word to express my opposition to procreation.

- I'm always interested in finding out how Antinatalism is existing in different parts of the world, what is Antinatalism like in Spain? Is there anything like an Antinatalist community in Spain? Does Spain have its own history of Antinatalism at all?

I don't know any Antinatalist group, community or organisation in Spain. Very few people have thought about the matter and there is no cultural background at all. People could agree or not with Antinatalism, but they just have absolutely no idea of this possible discussion and only treat procreation as a personal question.

MANIFESTO ANTINATALISTA (Published May 2020):

Though it probably makes more sense chronologically speaking for us to speak about your book first, I was wondering if you would mind me asking you about a very recent essay of yours on your website, called *Manifiesto Antinatalista* - which unlike the book I was able to at least fully Google Translate!

- What prompted the writing of this new work, and how long had you been working on it?

I wrote it in 2017 but updated it recently. I tried to get people to be active and to help, maybe, to create an organisation, but there was little echo. I wrote it in a short time because in other books I had written already the basic arguments to defend the ethical importance of Antinatalism.

- How do you most wish people will use this Manifesto, and what do you most hope that people will come away with after reading it?

I said before that there is practically no cultural background for Antinatalism. So I would like that my manifesto gets known and causes discussion. Its publishing by a publishing house and its translation to other languages would be very interesting. Who wants to sign it can do it looking for *Manifiesto antinatalista* in Internet or getting in contact with me in facebook. Antinatalism is not a personal preference but an ethical commitment for me. That is why it seems necessary to me to reach public opinion.

- Though I'm sure that Google Translate is not doing full justice to your words, it's really a good piece! And I was really excited to see that you are in fact a very suffering focused Antinatalist, in that you make suffering a very large focus of your Antinatalism -

How did you come to the understanding of Suffering as being the most important focus of Antinatalism?

The soul is a potential of suffering. This is my definition of the soul. There is no need to create possibly happy beings but it is necessary to prevent intense suffering. Stones can't be happy but there is no privation because you can only feel privation when you are living. Nuns don't have children and nobody blames them for it. Evil is part of sentient life. Without suffering there would be no evil in the world. My point of view could be called "negative utilitarianism". Not the most happiness but the least suffering is the important goal. Frequently we all accept some suffering. We accept some personal sacrifice, punishment, bitter pills and so on. But we only do it choosing the lesser of two evils. It also can be helpful being positive and minimize the problem of inevitable suffering. But I am absolutely convinced that the notion of right and wrong and good and evil would not even be possible without suffering. So be good, I say, and don't increase the number of potential sufferers.

- What do you think of forms of Antinatalism that tend to put the focus on other issues, without necessarily a focus on imposition and suffering at all?

There may be other reasons for Antinatalism than mine. The enormous population is an ecologic problem with possibly disastrous consequences. The consumption of animal products means breeding and ill-treatment of millions of animals, who are sentient beings as well. But I think that suffering always has to be the central part of any ethical

focus. Otherwise, it would be a mere whim. I just concentrate on my first and most direct convincement, which doesn't depend on the possible variation of circumstances or personal misanthropy for example. In some groups in facebook you can see a lot of supposed Antinatalists who don't reason but just express negative attitudes and even insult parents and children. This is not very useful for the cause.

- What has been the general response to this piece? Was there a reaction to it at all on platforms like Facebook?

There was little response, but at least always positive. Antinatalism is a strange and unprofitable attitude for most of the living people. These usually see only the problems that already exist in life. But the sense of responsibility should include procreation as an ethical problem. Life is a very risky adventure without happy end, and we can create it. And this depends on our decision, because we have means to control procreation. And control means responsibility.

- Are there any plans on translating this piece into English?

I am trying to find somebody who could make a good translation.

QUESTIONS ABOUT De la felicidad y los hijos. La evolución del pensamiento ético y la dimensión demográfica de los problemas. (Published in 2012):

My book is based on my doctoral dissertation from the year 2000 (Ética, sufrimiento y procreación), where I analyse different ethical theories since Socrates until postmodern relativism. It is essentially a philosophic work and seems to be difficult to read for many people. I defend the Epicurean and utilitarian point of you, that holds: good is to feel good, end bad is to feel bad. But it is not a symmetrical question, as I said before. The important issue is the evil, ultimately suffering, and the need to reduce it. Happiness never could be more important than the absence of unhappiness. If anybody is interested in reading the book he should contact me.

- When do you begin writing the book, and what inspired you to begin the project?

I wrote it in order to have an easy version of my doctoral dissertation from the year 2000.

- Again, sadly I have not been able to read you book due to the language barrier, so I was hoping you could just in your own words describe the work for all of us. - What is the main focus of the work, and what are the key arguments in favor of Antinatalism that you write about?

First, I assert the relationship of suffering with our notion of evil and all our important judgments. Second, I oppose procreation from two perspectives. Personal perspective tells me that I could never guarantee the permanent wellbeing of my children. The general perspective is to take into account the demographic dimension of suffering.

- I know at least from the title, as well as some other things that you've said that you put quite a focus on Demographics, can you tell more about that aspect of your work?

There is an evident demographic dimension of suffering. Population is the soundbox of all the problems and of death. One important way to fight suffering is reducing victims. In spite of progress, the last century probably was one of the worst in terms of victims of hunger, war, disease and so on. The population growth makes this possible. By the way, there is always dead waiting for everybody, and death is surrounded by suffering, although I think that it is much better to be mortal than to be eternally exposed to pain, misery, fear, despair and so on. But death still is a problem which makes us suffer a lot.

All our needs and instincts push us to life. Even though, and despite all the barriers, more than a million suicides occur every year. At least one thing is evident; there is a direct ratio between lives and deaths. The statistics tell us about the different ways of agonizing and dying. And their data depends on the size of the population.

I look it up a few ours ago in a population counter. This year, till now, more than 75 million people have been born and more than 31 million have died.

OTHER QUESTIONS:

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

I try to be vegan in order to reduce suffering of animals. I am not religious, because religious people want to think that the world is good because God is good. However, reality and the excellent attributes of god are not compatible. And I don't agree that deserved punishment resolves the problem of a cruel and conflictive world. Religions try to base the sense of suffering on the sinner's punishment. Vengeful people go in the same direction. However, punishment, even justified punishment, does not eliminate the intrinsic negativity of suffering. It only tells us of a dilemma in a troubled world.

So I am an atheist. But there is a curious aspect in the religions: everybody prefers, without the slightest doubt, to enter in the Paradise and doesn't want to be tortured in the Hell. This seems to be a direct intuition of what is bad for a sentient being, although many pious people approve, theoretically, hell on earth and in the afterlife because it is God's wise invention.

As for the right to die, in practical life frequently you have to weigh things up and there always may be different opinions. But I think that an Antinatalist will not reject euthanasia or suicide on principle because he attaches importance to suffering. Life is an imposition, and we should be free to finish it when we cannot stand it.

- Do you have any thoughts of the different types of Antinatalist thinking? Child Free? VHEMT? Antinatalism proper, EFILism?

I think it is important to make the world less bad. The question is not if you like or don't like children. Childfree people, who just talk about how annoying children are or about the advantages of living without children, just express personal preference. They don't help to convince people with other preferences. I have adopted two girls. If people want to have children, adoption could be an alternative and even help to promote Antinatalism. Of course, nobody should adopt if he is not interested in it. I just want to say that the ethical question is the creation of a new vulnerable person, not if you like children or don't or get advantage of them. A new individual is something more than a desire. It is surprising how many people are unable to differentiate their desire to be a parent from the intrinsic importance of the child as a new vulnerable individual.

- You also have a social media presence, at least on Facebook - do you engage much with the larger Antinatalism community online? And if so, what are your thoughts on it?

Communication on facebook is very superficial and it is full of arbitrary, insulting and stupid posts and commentaries. Facebook is a disappointing experience for me. But sometimes you can get good and useful contacts, as you are, for example. It is a tool in any case.

- Do you consider yourself an Antinatalist activist? Do you think activism around Antinatalism is a good thing?

My main activity is writing so far. I think that Antinatalists should defend their convictions also with public actions. If Antinatalism is an ethical cause, activism is a logical

consequence.

- What do you feel like Antinatalists are doing right? And what do you feel like Antinatalists are doing wrong, so far? - What are the most important things that Antinatalists should be doing now?

There is no organisation, as far as I know. The few Antinatalists who exist should try to coordinate themselves in order to be stronger. But I am not an organizer and can't say how. There are also many supposed Antinatalists who simply despise children or do not want children or cannot have them and then generalize their opposition or frustration. Therefore it is important to define well the ethical claim of Antinatalism and avoid a mere misanthropic image. In other words, we have to try to reach public opinion. Maybe one day Antinatalists could create a political party and defend the ethical value of not being born.

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

I don't dare to give a clear answer because it is a somehow shocking question. However, there is an enormous margin to reduce the population without having to speak of extinction. We are nearly eight billion (eight thousand million) people and population is still increasing enormously every year. Another interesting point is that less population means less personal extinction. In fact, the closer we are to extinction the fewer deaths there are. Or with other words: it is the procreators that generate deaths. They have to justify the inevitable death of their children and the permanent extinction of individuals. And also, human beings are the only animals (it should be clear by now that we are mammals) with enough intelligence and cultural development to torture. This seems to me to be a good argument in favour of extinction. Human beings have created the worst cruelties. I would say the world is worse since human beings exist. Nevertheless, I don't think there's any need to set any long-term goals. It is always good to forgo having children, even if it is only done with a view to more modest goals, which will be more manageable.

- Do you believe that Antinatalism should extend to animals? That all sentient life would be better off going extinct?

Life on Earth has grown from zero to thousands of millions of species. Many species have gone extinct during the development of life, dinosaurian for example. I would say they are better off. The defence of biodiversity is an anthropocentric point of view. The problem is what to do actively, and the intervention in Nature cannot be an easy and clear project. But Antinatalism could be applied to other species too, I think. We should fight massive breeding of chicken, pigs and cows and avoid their ill-treatment. Sterilization can also be applied to animals.

- Do you have plans to continue to write about Antinatalism in the future?

My plan is to improve my literary resources and to have texts of all possible extensions and forms. I am also writing fiction where Antinatalism is present. I have written and been working on several works I would like to see published, all written in Spanish.

- What do you most hope for Antinatalism to ultimately accomplish?

We should try to change the egoistic point of view, which is the basis of procreation (except when there is a lack of control, which should be improved). Population is increasing dramatically. It should be shrinking by the pacific means of anti-conception. The slogan should be: Make love not babies!

You can't resolve the problems of sentient Nature, bound to be cruel since animals exist. But you can reduce them. Suffering is a viable part of life, because its pressure controls our conduct. We have to escape from suffering and this means in Nature satisfy our needs, survive and procreate. As I say: Pain is the electric fence of life. Sex is also a need for many people. By reasoning we can control the consequences of our sexual instinct and escape the trap of Nature, separating sex and procreation. Since we can control the procreation, we have a new responsibility. By preventing life, we help to control the demographic dimension of suffering. Obviously, the numbers matter. If not, we would not persecute crime, or try to end wars or feed our children, because few terrible cases and many terrible cases would be just the same. We should not add new victims to the world; we should not supply the hangman with new lives. Procreators do.

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And also make sure to follow him on Facebook - www.facebook.com/miguel.steiner.31