

# **Hankikanto: Falling into the Anti/Natal Abyss #1**

On being antinatal before antinatalism

Theme music:

*I see it now, it all comes back to me*

*I had to leave them to this gloom*

*Lest they fall for the procreative dream*

*That nearly caught me in my bloom*

*But I am back, and I will end their pain*

*I am back, and I will set them free again*

*What have we done to deserve this burden?*

My name is Matti Häyry, I am an Antinatalist philosopher.

And my name is Amanda Sukenick, I am an Antinatalist activist. Welcome to the first episode of *Hankikanto: Falling into the Anti/Natal Abyss*

Matti, the process of building episode #65 of The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast together, was nothing short of a truly significant life event, at least for me. I do my best, never to use words like destiny, but it was impossible, throughout that process, not to feel like that's exactly what I was witnessing you claim, as I watched you finally actualize the position, you have spent a lifetime assembling - all of these puzzle pieces, once scattered & unassembled, and all of these clues you had given yourself through your past works, at last falling into place, and showing you, what you are, and what you have always been. - an Antinatalist, an Extinctionist, fluent in a language you didn't even know you could speak. It was truly, one of the most inspiring events I have ever had the fortune to watch unfold, and now here we are, ready for the next chapter in our adventure.

Yes, it was an eye-opener, for sure. And I have you to thank for that, Amanda.

For those of you out there listening, who have perhaps not yet heard the

first interview Matti & I produced together, I highly recommend that you go and listen to that one first, it's episode #65 of The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast - these recordings will offer a far more in depth window into Matti's world than the first, but that first episode is absolutely, not to be missed - a piece of required listening, for any Antinatalist mind.

Since that time, we've also produced a mini-series called mechANized, in which we ask the Open AI Chat Bot all kinds of questions about Antinatalism and discuss its extremely ill-informed answers. mechANized is on pause for the time being, but you can find the first three episodes of it here, on The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast channel, and we'll revisit it after a few episodes of Hankikanto.

Some time has gone by now since our original outing first aired, so how do you feel about it all now, Matti? What have you been working on since, and where are you now in your Anti-natal journey currently?

In doing the original, I realized something important, namely, that this is one of the main areas – well, **the** main area – of my philosophical interest. It brings together everything I know – and many things that I don't know – so I have just continued thinking and writing about it. I'm now spamming academic journals with an endless string of papers about suffering, frustration, death, and all the other uplifting elements that make up the antinatal discussion. Let's see how much of that we can cover this time.

This answer made me very happy to hear!

Quite early on into the process of developing #65, we were already discussing the possibility of producing a sequel episode, and at that stage, I'm quite sure both of us fully expected for that sequel to simply end up being just another episode of The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast. What's grown out of the last few months, however, is the mammoth undertaking we are now proud to release as the *Hankikanto – Falling into the Anti/Natal Abyss* series – A show all its own, yet on the same channel where our efforts first began.

Before we begin, Matti, for our audience members who may not yet know, would you like to explain the meaning behind the term *Hankikanto*, and a bit about what *Hankikanto* and the stroke between Anti and Natal represent within the context of our conversation?

Hankikanto is Finnish and it refers to a certain quality of snow covering the ground. During hankikanto you can walk on several feet of snow because the top crust is frozen, like ice on a lake. Except that this is far more deceptive. Maybe the sun has been shining on this patch and melted it; or maybe there's something else that has prevented the thawing. So the metaphor that we mean here is unreliability and reckless trust. The moment you start trusting that the snow will carry you, it fails you, and you fall through, into the abyss. And the same applies to life. It may appear to carry you, but once you place your trust in it, whoosh, in you go. And if you don't want to burden a new, as yet not-existing individual with that, antinatalism is your philosophy of choice.

Then the stroke between Anti and Natal. Our title has a double meaning. Doing these sessions have, for me personally, meant falling into the abyss of antinatalist philosophy, being reminded time and again that I have had antinatal ideas since the dinosaurs roamed. For humankind, not listening to the antinatalist message means falling yet again to the **natal** abyss, to the cycle of life, sentience, and frustration. By falling intellectually into the Antinatal Abyss we try to do our bit to prevent our fellow beings from falling physically, biologically, psychologically, and socially into the Natal Abyss.

Yes, exactly.

A big piece of what's been missing in the Antinatalist discourse up until this point, is some kind of real confluence between the worlds of Antinatalist Philosophy, & Antinatalist Activism. Let's see now if through that collaboration, we can get humanity to finally hear the Antinatalist message more clearly.

The following interviews will be quite an odyssey.

We will begin Hankikanto by examining the nearly 40 years of Antinatalism in the work of Matti Häyry - A retrospective of your past, current & future Antinatalist works, both in Academia & rock opera form, as well as detailed looks into your work on animal rights, euthanasia & more. From there, we will explore the full landscape of Antinatalism, and will analyze all kinds of subjects within the broader, Anti-Natal realm and beyond.

Any questions before we begin?

Yes. Will I be extremely famous and popular after this?

Well, certainly if I could promise it, or make it so, I most certainly would! Let's see if we can't at least get a few more shy Antinatalists to follow you on Facebook this time around? I suppose that will be something at least.

As you have done throughout our communication, lets first re-visit some of your past works, and retrace some of the Anti-natal breadcrumbs you dropped along the way during your long & remarkable career, that would eventually lead you down to the anti-natal abyss you now find yourself in.

### **Master's thesis (1984) + Doctoral Dissertation (1990):**

Though it's not entirely unheard of for some Antinatalists to go many years producing Antinatalist works of various kinds without knowing what Antinatalism is, you my friend, are likely the most extreme example of this happening to anyone that I know of, with the exception of maybe Julio Cabrera - 38 years of work, and counting! A nearly unheard of and remarkable feat, made all the more curious by the fact that your contribution remained hidden from the view of most Antinatalists for so long.

So let's begin where it all began really, the year is 1984. A year earlier, in the year of my own birth, you had earned your Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, Folkloristics & Economics at the University of Helsinki, and were now working towards the first of your two Masters, a Master of Social Science degree in Practical Philosophy, Sociology, Aesthetics & Education, again at the University of Helsinki, and preparing to write your thesis, which

I believe it's safe to say, would be a work that would change your life forever. What was that time like for you, and where were you philosophically at this time, before finding the subject of what would become your thesis?

The time. Politically, I was a little left of Baader, Meinhof, and the Brigade Rosse, complete with a conviction that terrorism leads to a police state, people will stand up, and revolution will crush the capitalist system. Philosophically, I was drawn to Italian neo-idealism – the works of Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile. Croce was a loud critic of Benito Mussolini's regime and Gentile was Mussolini's secretary of state for education. Back in the day, I read just enough Italian to make sense of them in their original language, which made me feel like quite the intellectual. But as you can see from the mix, I was mostly just confused, drifting, trying to find my feet.

Your 1984 Master's Thesis was called – would you mind saying the name of it, Matti?

Kohdusta hautaan.

Whose title translates to, *From womb to tomb* in English, and is not a work I've read as it's never been translated from the original Finnish into English, however when we were putting together the commercial for our first episode, you uncovered this quote, which you now say was your first step on your long journey to Antinatalism -

“If the arguments I have put forward are to be believed, abortion is morally permissible and must be allowed whenever a woman chooses it, knowing the consequences for the fetus, the environment, and herself – no one else can make the decision for her.”

What was the process of writing *From womb to tomb* like, how long did it take to write, and when you began writing it, did you already have your conclusion in mind?

I had read Peter Singer's book *Practical Ethics*, defending the right to abortion, Judith Jarvis Thomson's famous article “A defense of

abortion”, also defending, and Philippa Foot’s almost equally famous “The problem of abortion and the doctrine of the double effect”, with a more critical view. My own personal take was that the right abortion policy would probably be what they call “moderate” – meaning yes, but you have to have good reasons. This was in early June 1984.

Then, eighty days later, in August, the work was done, the thesis was completed, and I found, to my surprise, that I defended a “permissive”, or uncompromisingly “liberal” view. That was strange. The arguments had convinced me to change my mind. I have never fully recovered from that.

Your position on abortion was of course, extremely controversial for its time, & is sadly perhaps even more controversial today... You should be very proud in my opinion for defending both the rights of women & the unborn so completely, especially given that you did so in a time and circumstance where I’m sure it was not always smiled upon.

I would also like to note, that of the academic Antinatalist philosophers that I know of, you do actually seem to be the one that has the most liberal and permissive view on abortion by far, and you stand in very stark contrast in this regard to someone like Julio Cabrera, who thinks Abortion is unethical except in a handful of situations.

Not to get to tangential, but what do you think about the idea of an Antinatalist opposed to abortion of any kind? Do you find that shocking?

No, I don’t find that shocking at all. The antinatal stand is at its strongest when it claims that before existence there is no one there. Julio Cabrera and his cronies can draw on a rich philosophical tradition that sees the beginning of life – someone being there – in terms of biological existence. The embryo, at least when it’s sufficiently formed, is biologically a member of *homo sapiens*, so if that’s enough for you, you can go with prohibitive abortion views. So, as far as philosophy goes, that’s a quite legitimate view. Real life is a different matter. The prohibition has implications for women, so practically I wouldn’t advise going there. My thesis reflected that.

If I may elaborate a bit, philosophy does that to some of us, including me. During my eighty days in the world of abortion, I grew very fond of both my extremely permissive **and** the extremely restrictive view. Both beautiful works of brain art, much better than the conceptually muddy middle ground of the moderate views. For the moderate stand, you would have to ask people what they think. Can't have that. Not on my philosophical watch. Or that's how it panned out for me.

Great answer, very fair – you mentioned you may be surprising me at points – this one did, but in a good way, I hadn't ever really thought of Julio's view in that way before. Very much respect that comment of both sides being 'beautiful works of brain art', great line.

Matti, quick question – both your comment above, 'Julio Cabrera and his cronies', as well as earlier tonight I was lookin' at your FB page for something else, and noticed that I had missed a photograph you posted of some kind of long-ago Bioethics conference in Brazil – both those things made me think to ask now, had you ever heard of or met Julio Cabrera before we started speaking? I guess I just had always assumed he was one of the top fleet Brazilian Bioethicists, so did you two ever cross paths in anyway?

The 2002 World Congress of Bioethics in Brazil had fifteen hundred participants, I spent most my days in the Executive Board meetings, and at night we had a group of mostly Europeans who wine and dined together, so, alas, no, I did not have the pleasure of meeting Julio Cabrera.

In 2001, David Benatar wrote a paper, hilariously titled, *A Pain in the Fetus: Toward Ending Confusion About Fetal Pain*, and Mark J. Maharaj & I asked him about this paper when he was our guest on episode #5 of The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast - he said, and I quote -

23:32 - 24:22

“What I argued with my co-author in that article on fetal pain, was that it's likely that sentience emerges much later in gestation, around 28 to 30 weeks of gestation. So I think that's the crucial point at which, or the crucial

stage at which the being comes into existence as a sentient being. And so before that, I think abortion would be morally required, not legally required, but morally required, because you are still at that point preventing a sentient being from coming into existence. But once the sentience emerges, now you're dealing with an existing being, and I think it has some rudimentary interest in continuing to exist, and it's not that abortion would never be justified at that later stage but, now there's some consideration that needs to be weighed up against the interests of the fetus and continuing to exist."

[Benatar clip.]

What are your thoughts on what Professor Benatar has to say on this issue? Do you also believe that after around 28 to 30 weeks of gestation, the fetus has, as he says, 'some rudimentary interest in continuing to exist'? If a fetus can indeed feel pain at this point, should we really defend that we are ethically justified in causing that pain, for the sake of the freedom to have an abortion?

A tough one. I have thought about this lately and they have a point, sort of. So late in a pregnancy, the situation is a bit different. If the fetus is sentient, we should **not** make it suffer. So, abortion, yes, but painlessly, if at all possible.

But what they call the "rudimentary interest in continuing to exist" – I wouldn't go that far myself. It's an understandable view if their theory of value is sentiocentric – in other words, if they think that all that matters, morally speaking, is the ability to feel pain. I have problems with that.

I would rather say that you need more than that to have a right to life – after all, that's what they are granting the sentient fetus here. I would say that the sentient being also has to have some self-direction, or autonomy, and independence, as in being a separate individual. The fetus doesn't have those and I wouldn't grant it any kind of survival rights.

What was your position on late term abortion then, and has your position



on this matter changed at all over time?

If abortion is the choice, earlier is always better than later. The less developed the embryo or the fetus is, the more it makes sense to say that there is no one there.

But as long as the fetus is inside the woman, it's her choice. That was my view then, inspired by Mary Anne Warren's "On the moral and legal status of abortion", and it is my view now.

Yes, as you say in another quote from an alternative release of *From Womb to Tomb* that I recently found –

"If the woman really wants to have an abortion, a refusal can only be morally defended by undermining her humanity."

Beautifully said.

In 1986, if I'm not mistaken, *Kohdusta hautaan (From womb to tomb)*, was finally released as your first book and was called, you say it

*Rakasta kärsi ja unhoita: moraalifilosofisia pohdintoja ihmiselämän alusta ja lopusta*

Thank you - In English, it's, *Love, suffer and forget: Moral philosophical reflections on the beginning and end of human life*, along with an essay on euthanasia by your co-author, Heta Häyry.

Was it difficult to get such subject matters published at the time? I'm curious to know anything you can tell me about the proper book release of *Love, Suffer and forget?*

And was it after the release of *Love, suffer and forget*, that you started to receive a lot of media attention in Finland? Or had that already started to happen even before the book had been released?

The book – it had, as you said, my piece on abortion and my then-partner Heta's thesis on euthanasia – was first published in a university departmental series. Normally, that wouldn't have been an achievement. People didn't think much of those.

But this one had a lucky break. A slightly senior academic read it and wrote a long review full of praise. It was published in Finland's biggest newspaper, Helsinki News, on an August Sunday – so a million readers who had not seen real news for ages – with a graphic photo of a fetus's head being crushed. You just couldn't miss it. And then the reviewer started by praise, continued with controversy, not against us, with us, and concluded by praise again – “utopianly stylish and beautiful philosophy”, he wrote. Oh, well...

Only a few days later two readers had their letters to the editor published. One sided with us, saying that she can already tell by name the priests and women haters who will attack us. The other was against us. She implied that we are spoiled brats and suggested that we should be locked in our ivory tower to avoid further damage to society.

Yet another week later, the newspaper's theology columnist concluded the proceedings. He bit the hook offered by our supporter, being one of the known priests to object, struggled to moderate the tones of our critic, and tried to be polite to us while smashing the reviewer into smithereens for his “unprofessional praise of [Matti Häyry's] grossly mistaken views on abortion”. There was no stopping us after this kind of a start.

I can see that. But you mentioned that there were also some clearly proto-antinatal and extinctionist tones in that early exchange. Can you elaborate on that a little?

Yes, I found all these items in the Helsinki News archives just now, and this was a surprise to me. The book **was** on abortion and euthanasia, so close enough, but still.

First, the critical letter was named "The entire human race could be erased". The title was chosen by the editors, so it demonstrates their views more than anything, but the writer did indeed make the connection. She noted that we, as philosophers, are so alienated from reality that our kind of philosophy could be used to justify just

about anything, including the demise of humankind. Quite perceptive of her. That's exactly what I've done later.

But secondly, and more importantly, the supportive commentator, the one who said that she can name our religious and conservative critics, actually expressed an idea that any antinatalist could be proud of even today. Our Guest Voice will cite her directly, because she nails it, in these words:

"On the rights of fetuses, I would say differently from what Matti Häyry says. His view is that a potential person does not have the rights of a person. I think that what-is-not-yet has a right not to **become** a person if waking it to life will not self-evidently guarantee it the rights of a person."

Let me add a caveat and a note. The caveat is that her main argument was about the absurdity of restricting abortion rights in a world of war, famine, poverty, and misery that we (the affluent citizens of affluent countries) completely ignore. So, her real thrust was, make the world a better place for all. Having said that, the note. Priceless vocabulary! "What-is-not-yet" has a right "not to become a person" in this world. That's powerful. Not even remembering that she said that, I've tried to formulate the same thing ever since.

Caveat aside, I'm floored by her response – she perfectly articulates, The Right to Not Exits, in 1986 no less! What an incredible piece of Antinatalist history to have unearthed here - the Antinatalism & the Extinctionism are beautifully clear - you two made them pick up on it, even though there was little to no conscious precedent for anyone to have known what any of it was at the time – deeply impressed, & powerful indeed!

You spoke a little bit about the media circus that developed around your works during our first interview, and the ensuing unsafe situation all of that would put you in, prompting you to eventually leave Finland for the UK, but I was wondering if there were any more details you could give on some of the media outings you did back then.

Well, first of all, we were made by that. We were all over the media

for a while, in our matching jumpers. the obnoxious philosopher twins, and people loved us and hated us in equal measures. A very successful bout of branding, at a time when nobody even knew what branding is.

The hate mail included death threats and what have you, but overall the reception was favorable. Even the religious critics learned to just say that they were praying for our souls. Good for us. And a proper book publisher with some Christian connections released the book in a commercial format.

I have no recollection of the national TV and radio programs' names except the one that you are showing now. They were not that many, maybe ten each. They were embellished by public appearances, newspapers, and women's magazines. Decades later, a reporter interviewing me on Orkid the rock opera remembered the time well, but it was all about the brand, not the content. And we moved on to other topics pretty quickly.

And it was more the brand than any considerations of safety that made me move to England. We had divorced – her interview on this featured in a tabloid, my new life was celebrated in a fashion magazine called Gloria (glory, of course), and I had become a production team member of an awful talk show for the national TV. More than anything, I was escaping that, trying to become a serious philosopher instead of a celebrity bioethicist. Didn't really work out, of course – here I still am, for my sins.

It's sort of amazing that, even after so many years later, you are still receiving pushback to this work in Finnish media, the most recent instance being, as far as I know from yle.fi - before we talk about your response paper back to that controversy, may I ask what happened?

Yes, that was a blast from the past a few weeks ago. Just a conservative columnist of the Finnish Broadcasting Company who started his career at the same time with me was trying to obstruct the liberalization of the Finnish abortion law and dragged out my name

and my views from the 1980s. Protect the unborn child against the evil philosopher.

And your response to this, was in the form of a very recently released essay at the time of this writing, entitled, *Roe v. Wade and the Predatory State Interest in Protecting Future Cannon Fodder* (2022), and I wanted to spend just a little bit of time asking you about that paper, in part because it truly brings this section of our discussion full circle, as you do begin the paper by talking about the process of writing *From womb to tomb* - what can you tell me about the new article?

The US reversal of abortion rights in the Supreme Court seemed to come as a surprise to all liberals in the US and also in Finland. I have never trusted the privacy argument myself and I wrote a blog about it in Finnish, arguing that the 1973 case (I cannot pronounce the name properly, so I'm not even trying) ... anyway, arguing that it was a flimsy piece of legal fiction to begin with and should have been converted to codified law a long time ago. And I suggested that it wasn't done because no one wanted abortions to be available for the right reasons. But I think that you are locking and loading to read a passage from the ensuing English article that I then wrote about it, so go ahead. That should explain my thinking.

“All abortion restrictions are dangerous, because pregnancy is a health risk, a medical condition in need of medical attention. If the cure, termination at the patient's request, is denied, women's well-being is jeopardized. Many abortion restrictions are also expressivist rather than functional. They declare a moral stand but do not reduce terminations like sex education and the availability of contraception do. Most current abortion restrictions are reactionary. They remove rights that women have already had. Abortion restrictions based on the state's need to have more workers, consumers, and soldiers are cynically pronatalist. They treat pregnant women and the fetuses they carry as a means to an external end. They are also collectivist in that they put the needs of the public body before the needs of individuals.”

How did we end up here in 2022? In your opinion, why is progress on this

issue moving backwards instead of forwards, Matti?

I can only repeat myself. Because no one wants abortions to be available for the right reasons. Which are women's health and the fact that there is no one there in the womb.

I believe that access to abortion, may only be the beginning - do you think they will come after access to contraception and perhaps vasectomy's next?

They might. I don't know. Abortion seems to be the hottest issue, though, so it doesn't necessarily follow.

For what it's worth, I hope that you are correct, there is talk about it in the media here, but I don't really know if it's just scare tactics.

Has yle.fi as of yet responded to *Roe v. Wade and the Predatory State Interest in Protecting Future Cannon Fodder?*

No, that's not the logic of things. The columnists are there to create click baits. They do it and then move on to other topics. My response in Twitter had, I think, two or three likes, one of them yours.

Well Matti, this has been a fascinating look at this early period of your career, but I think now it's time to move on to the next chapter of your story

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In 1991, you received your PhD. as a Doctor of Social Science (Practical Philosophy), from the University of Helsinki, and your doctoral dissertation was called - *Critical Studies in Philosophical Medical Ethics*, your first book in English, unless I'm wrong, and this was released in 1990. This dissertation, from what you've told me, included 10 articles + a summary.

The 10 articles included were - *Abortion and applied ethics, Infanticide on request – The dark side of liberal abortion policies?, Selecting our offspring – Some objections and, Evaluating abortion policies in praxiological utilitarian terms, AIDS, society and morality – A philosophical survey, Utilitarianism human rights and redistribution of health through preventive medical measures), Paternalism and Finnish anti-smoking policy, Health*

*care as a right, fairness and medical resources, Euthanasia, ethics and economics & Measuring the quality of life: why, how and what?*

What was the overall, cumulative thesis behind, *Critical Studies in Philosophical Medical Ethics*?

The overall thesis is that all traditional moralities are dubious and shouldn't be trusted. If they say that life is sacred, doubt it and analyze it until you can show that they are wrong. And the same with every traditional belief, religious or ethical.

I was learning the tricks of my trade – bioethics – and I was learning it by doing it. Take an argument, smash it to pieces, take the next argument, do the same.

The thing that I missed was that I was smashing only traditional arguments, not the liberal ones challenging them. The thesis could as well have been called “**Liberal** Studies in Philosophical Medical Ethics”. The criticism of half of the field was missing.

What can you tell me about the process of writing, *Critical Studies in Philosophical Medical Ethics*? Were all of these articles written over a long period of time, or in quick succession from one another?

Most of the articles started life as conference presentations in Finland, England, and Scotland, in about four years, during the very late 1980s. That explains the liberal overtone – it was the time of Reaganism and Thatcherism in economics, and a similar kind of libertarianism – a let-go attitude – was also gaining ground in medical and healthcare ethics. “No” to state interventions in abortion and euthanasia. “No” to the paternalism of medical doctors. “No” to just about everything.

Within the Preface section of the summary, you mention that *Abortion and applied ethics* which was at least in part written as a criticism to someone by the name of R. M. Hare, turned out to be quite a memorable event, as Mr. Hare was unexpectedly present at the event where you were presenting the paper! Would you like to tell us the story of what happened?

Yes, R. M. Hare was one of the most notable utilitarians of the time and an Oxford professor. For one conference in Oxford, I wrote something about the methods of philosophical ethics.

I started my presentation by citing Professor Hare, a direct quote in which he said: “If philosophers are going to apply ethical theory successfully to practical issues, they must first have a theory.”

Sounds self-evident but I was working under a different assumption – namely, that we enter topics armed with just logic and our soundest intuitions – no actual overarching theory – and use the logic and intuitions to reject bad moral judgments. So, partly I was criticizing Professor Hare, who wanted us all to use his superior preference utilitarian theory for everything.

The memorable dimension was that he was indeed in the audience, sitting in the front row. As I started reading my paper, he immediately began to huff and puff, muttering, “I never said that” and rolling his tie up and down. That continued more or less a[ll through my twenty-minute presentation. So, welcome to the world of academia! I had never before realized that I was writing about actual people and their views. Learned to be more careful from then on.

Again within the Preface, I noticed several references to Peter Singer having given his criticisms to several of the articles, I was just curious when it was that you had finally met him, and had begun working with him on various things?

We first met in 1988 or 89 and immediately hit it off. In 92, Heta and I invited him to visit Helsinki to give talks about animal rights and welfare. His visit led to a life decision that was long in the making but has now reached a conclusion, I guess.

We were dining in an Indian restaurant, Heta, our supervisor, and Peter. I had my whatever-dish with beef, Heta with chicken, and our supervisor with pork. Peter, of course, had the vegan plate. He did not comment our choices in any way, and that impressed Heta and me.



That night, when we went home, we decided not to eat pork anymore. We believed that pigs were the most intelligent of the animals we ate, so thought that this would at least be a good start. And it was, albeit that the going was slow for quite some time. We didn't eat pork but we didn't advance into vegetarianism, either.

I am happy to announce, however, that I arrived a few years ago and now call myself a wannabe vegan. The wannabe means that there may be traces of nonhuman in my wine and vitamins, and I don't know what to do with leather shoes that are still wearable. Other than that, I have concluded the journey prompted by Peter Singer thirty years ago.

I personally don't think there is anything wrong with continuing to use still-good, old clothing that contains feather or what not, wasting it would be even worse. I had a chuckle at 'Wine and vitamins' same thing really.

Can you tell me a bit more about *Infanticide on request – The dark side of liberal abortion policies*? What was your position on infanticide at the time that this was written, and how has it changed over time, if at all?

Infanticide is the utilitarian nightmare in debates on abortion. Utilitarians typically use the concept of what is called psychological personhood. It means that if you are **not** aware of your own existence as a continuous subject of experiences – if you don't have memories, hopes, fears, and expectations – then you **don't** have a right to life, strictly speaking. You are not there.

In the context of abortion, this means that pregnancies can, as far as the embryo and the fetus are concerned, be ended at any time. So far, so good. But the **psychological** status of the human being doesn't change in any way during the travel through the birth canal. So we should be licensed to kill babies, as well. Oops.

There's no easy way out of this mess by using utilitarian concepts. There **is** a difficult way, and I already said something about that in answering your David Benatar question, but that dawned on me only later. So, in the article, I simply used Mary Ann Warren as an

authority and said that the fetus is inside the woman, the infant is outside, that's the difference. This doesn't address the real theoretical issue but at least it gives a palatable practical conclusion. Don't kill babies even if you happen to be a utilitarian.

Within the Summary, you coin two terms, 'Cognitive deprogramming' & 'Rational reconstruction', could you explain both of these concepts, and the roles they play in the essays that comprise *Critical Studies in Philosophical Medical Ethics*?

Cognitive deprogramming is getting rid of our old ways of thinking about norms and values. Look at them hard enough and they will crack. No one should be killed, ever. Wrong, we must at least allow the possibility that doctors may have a role in helping people to die when they are terminal and in a lot of pain and want to die.

Rational reconstruction is building better norms in the place of the ones that we just rejected. No one should be killed, normally, but in the exceptional case of ... what I just said ... we can consider it.

But then we have to subject **this** to cognitive deprogramming, as well, because it can have its problems, too. Repeat until both your sense of logic and your moral intuitions agree. Then present it to others who will rip it to pieces. Start again. It's a perpetual-motion machine. Keeps philosophers employed.

You have this great little line - I've seen you say it elsewhere as well in much later works - that philosophers are at their best in the role of 'barking dogs' – Could you elaborate on that notion a bit?

Philosophers as barking dogs is a concept that dates back to the school of Cynics two and a half millennia ago, in ancient Greece. The words "cynic" and "cynical" mean dogs and it became first the symbol of Diogenes – the first cynic – and then also of his likeminded friends. Cynics claimed to bark honestly at those in power instead of being their servile guardian hounds.

I had something else in mind when I used the expression. I meant

that philosophers are better at cognitive deprogramming – the criticism of existing views – than at rational reconstruction – the building of alternative views. And there is a simple reason for that. It's relatively easy to prove a positive – “There is a criticism that can be launched against this doctrine and the proof is that I just launched it.” But it's more difficult, if not impossible, to prove a negative – “This is my view and there are no valid counterarguments.” As soon as I say this, a hand is raised in the back row.

So, good critics, iffier problem solvers.

I wanted to ask you briefly about, *Paternalism and Finnish anti-smoking policy*, this essay made me think a lot about the possible paternalism or non-, paternalism or the coercion or non- coercion, of the idea of grandfathering out certainly kinds of human behaviors... Smoking would be the most benign of all the examples I have in mind – What if we as a society declared that, ‘this will be the last generation of smokers.’? What if we allowed anyone who wanted to smoke, to have as much access to tobacco as they wanted, even perhaps with some kind of prescription, but in turn, there would be tremendous, perhaps even life threatening penalties against anyone who allowed a minor to smoke... Do you think such an idea could work? Do you think that would cause more harm than good? And what if we applied it to other issues? Perhaps people who cannot stop eating meat, should be allowed meat so long as they are the last meat eaters? I already see the pitfalls of trying to apply this to procreation, regardless, there is something kind of beautiful in the idea of allowing less and less birth gradually until they are a thing of the past... Any thoughts?

This is a very good illustration of what I just said about critics and problem solvers. Let me give you the official answer that it deserves.

So, Amanda's rational reconstruction proposes that smoking, meat eating, and reproduction are allowed to continue for now, but restrictions apply to these practices by younger and future people. This is a good solution in that it does not compel those who are already engaged in these practices. There are, however, three points of contention that I would like to raise.

First, the coercive element would still be there, only applied to different groups of people. And we have some evidence that coercion can be counterproductive, the practices being continued illegally, causing several social problems.

Secondly, empirical evidence seems to show that practices like these are handed down to new generations by the old. A voluntary collective change of mind in the next generation is not, therefore, inevitable.

And thirdly, the value or disvalue of all these practices is contested. Many people think that smoking, meat eating, and reproduction are good and natural activities that should not be interfered with even if we could.

So, that's my cognitive deprogramming to your rational reconstruction. I hope it clarified what I mean.

Regarding *Health care as a right, fairness and medical resources* – perhaps it's just simply because I have a one track mind, and though it's likely a screaming category error to compare allocation of medical resources to anything regarding extinct – I must say none the less that really quite a lot of the language in this essay reminded me of our conversations on extinction ethics, particularly relating to the difficulty, or perhaps even impossibility of not doing harm, and in the idea that 'hard choices and tragedies are inevitable'... Do you think there is any realistic comparison to be drawn, from the kind of careful thinking we would like the medical industry to engage in when it considers difficult medical decisions, to the kinds of decision making an extinction ethicist might find themselves having to consider?

There is a connection, but it's riddled with assumptions that are hard to defend. **If** we assume that healthcare resources are a constant **and** that less people consume less healthcare resources than more people **then** it would make sense to have less people. But if we put this proposal seriously forward, I can already hear the dogs barking. With less people, there would be less healthcare resources. And the

diminished population – due to ageing and the like – would probably use more of those resources. So maybe not.

*Measuring the quality of life: why, how and what?*, & *Euthanasia, ethics and economics*, are both articles we will speak much more about when we come to our section dedicated to all of your work on Euthanasia, so let's leave them be for now –

However, three more articles, *Evaluating abortion policies in praxiological utilitarian terms*, *AIDS, society and morality – A philosophical survey*, & *Utilitarianism human rights and redistribution of health through preventive medical measures*, I have not read, and they could not be readily located – was there anything in particular you would like to say about these three missing pieces?

Not really. They are all theory-specific. In the first, I defend a weird kind of utilitarianism, in the second, try to balance between private freedom and public interest, and in the third chop into atoms something called the doctrine of double effect. They are all finger exercises in the application of concepts and principles more than attempts to pontificate upon the policies or practices involved. I do say that abortions should be permitted, that people with AIDS should not be discriminated against, and that vaccinations can be justified even if they kill people, but those are almost side issues, or afterthoughts.

On December 13th, 1990, you successfully defended your Doctoral Dissertation, and you finally earned your PhD. This was to be a big day for you for another reason as well, for reasons which will bring us to the next chapter of your story. But before we move ahead, is there anything in particular that you'd remember about the defense?

Perhaps a note on the personnel, as they will make a comeback in the next section, and one fond memory.

The chair of the committee and the occasion was my supervisor in Helsinki, Professor Timo Airaksinen, and my external examiner was Professor John Harris, a utilitarian of sorts from the University of

Manchester. Timo is now happily married to my then-wife and I worked for a decade with John at the beginning of the millennium, so we move in small circles.

And the memory. John likes to tell the story that he had prepared fifty questions for the three-hour examination but only managed to ask five of them – because my answers lasted for ages and covered everything under the sun and a little beyond. Which goes to show that I have not changed since then – once long-winded, always long-winded.

Was *Critical Studies in Philosophical Medical Ethics* ever published outside of your university, and did it receive any of the same kind of attention that *Love, suffer and forget* did a few years earlier?

The best of the articles have collected their fair share of attention over the years but the dissertation as such has remained hidden in the University of Helsinki archives.

You've written so much on the subject on medical ethics since that time, what are your over-all feelings on *Critical Studies in Philosophical Medical Ethics*, all these years later?

As for the content, self-indulgent liberalism that I have tried to shed – with little success – ever since. As for the execution as a finger exercise – it's solid albeit a little all over the place. As for the methodological framework – I have kept working with that and it still keeps evolving.

### ***Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics (1994) + Just Better Utilitarianism (2020)***

Now going back to December 13th, 1990, literally hours after having successfully completed your defense ceremony, you had an idea to begin what would become one of your most important works, this being of course your 1994 book, *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics*. In the preface of the book, you explain how this work came to be, will you share with us some of that story now?

We were having dinner after the examination of my PhD dissertation in a nice old-style restaurant called Elite – elite – in Helsinki. My supervisor Timo and examiner John agreed that my idea of applied ethics was hopelessly relativistic – that I could never prove anything about right or wrong with it. I argued back that I do have a non-relativistic theory that I keep hidden so as not to frighten people. And why frighten? Well, because the theory is utilitarian and utilitarian was a curse word in moral philosophy. But, I added, I can write it out if someone wants to publish it. John happened to be well-connected with a publisher – Routledge in London – and said that he'd take care of it. And I did. And he did, too.

Though you spoke about *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics* several times in our previous episode together, I certainly had not yet read it at that point, and it actually wasn't until we were putting together our commercial for the first interview, that I fully came to understand that you have now come to embrace this work as the original formation of your Antinatalist position! Is it sort of shocking for you now to think about this work of yours suddenly in this new way?

It's a surprise, but I have written so much about so many things over the years that I'm not shocked by almost anything anymore. But yes, a surprise, and a pleasant one.

Perhaps my favorite quote of the book, a line from literally the first page of the book, that now repeats often in my head -

"I could not see then, and still cannot see today, how it could be my duty to act in ways which do not produce the maximum of net good."

I was wondering if you wouldn't mind speaking a bit about this quote, and how it informs your work, and the desire you had to vindicate Utilitarianism through *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics*?

Wow. Did I say that? It seems to be my deadly-against-any-traditional-moralities head speaking. I've lost that since somehow. Now I think that perhaps it's my duty to respect humanity, or to act virtuously, or just to be kind. There are so many ways of putting these

things into words.

And then there's the monster of positive, as against negative utilitarianism, wanting to maximize good. That one led me into all kinds of theoretical trouble later on.

But yes, I suppose I meant it, and I can understand what I meant by it. Don't act on vague moral prescriptions handed down by earlier generations. Check for yourself that it does some objective, measurable good. That's utilitarianism, all right. Acid poured on rusty structures, and if nothing's left after that, it was corroded through and couldn't be relied on, anyway.

As someone who knows very little about the history of the development of Utilitarian thinking, reading this book was extremely informative, I truly learned so much from it - I had an inkling that people had come to form a negative opinion of Utilitarianism over time, but I didn't really understand anything about why. To quote something that you had realized after extensive conversations between you and your friends -

“gradually learned that there are corollaries to the traditional utilitarian principles which make the doctrine intuitively unacceptable to many people. I did not, however, give up my conviction that there must be a form of utilitarianism which can be defended against the intuitionist critiques.”

Why had Utilitarianism reached this very unpopular stage in its history? For instance, you talk about how Utilitarianism has become conflated with rights violations and totalitarianism - how did this happen?

The traditional version says that we should maximize the greatest happiness of the greatest number whatever happens. The scandal started already when William Godwin published his book *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* in 1793. He argued that people who produce more good to others are more worthy than others. In his famous example, the palace of archbishop Fénelon, a great benefactor, is in flames and we can rescue Fénelon or his valet, but not both. Godwin thought that the decision in the archbishop's favor is self-evident, no matter what. He wrote, and here's our second Guest



Voice:

“Suppose the valet had been my brother, my father, or my benefactor. This would not alter the truth of the proposition. The life of Fenelon would still be more valuable than that of the valet; and justice, pure, unadulterated justice, would still have preferred that which was most valuable. Justice would have taught me to save the life of Fenelon at the expense of the other. What magic is there in the pronoun “my,” that should justify us in overturning the decisions of impartial truth? My brother or my father may be a fool or a profligate, malicious, lying or dishonest. If they be, of what consequence is it that they are mine?”

This is in clear contradiction with the – among other creeds – Christian teaching that all lives have equal worth and should be treated alike. Godwin gained a reputation as a dangerous philosophical radical. And that reputation has followed utilitarianism ever since.

Again, from the preface, there was one particular line that really peaked my interest -

“Since I mistrusted deontological moral theories even more than the classical utilitarian doctrine, I had to assume a more general theoretical approach.” (x)

We will talk more about deontology later in the context of Antinatalism, but I’m curious to know more about why you had and/or still have a mistrust of deontology?

I’m not even sure which deontological theories I meant in there. I think I must have inherited the general utilitarian misconception that deontology is a bunch of groundless rules, whereas its opposite is a bunch of rules based on good grounds – although there can be issues with cases like the archbishop and the valet.

I **now** think that morality and ethics can be expressed in many

sensible ways. They all have their limitations and their problems, but I just hope that what I do fits at least that broad category of sensible.

What is your doctrine of *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics*, and how is it different to all the other forms of Utilitarianism that preceded it?

The main difference is that I do **not** claim to know all the answers. Orthodox utilitarianism has a hard time dealing with conflicts of interest sometimes. It makes a credible case in easy conflicts. If I desire to have ice cream right now and getting it prevents me from rescuing someone from a burning house, my preference should give way to the more fundamental needs of others.

But it fares worse if the interests or needs are of the same order. The classic case is the Trolley Problem, made famous by Philippa Foot and Judith Jarvis Thomson. I'm the driver of a trolley. The trolley is headed towards five people tied to the track. If I do nothing, they will die. I can turn the trolley on a side track and save them. But there is one person tied on the side track and the trolley will then kill that one person. Should I turn the trolley?

According to the standard reading, utilitarianism makes it my duty to turn the trolley, and that's seen as problematic. Not the idea of turning the trolley, necessarily, but that it's a **duty**. Mr. Spock of Star Trek said that "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few – or the one" and he may well be right. But does this "outweighing" automatically convert into an absolute moral obligation? Critics of utilitarianism have their doubts.

And this is where my novelty comes in. I said: Let's confess that utility calculations do not automatically dictate what is right in difficult situations like this. Let's say that utilitarianism is good in the easy cases – and we have a lot of those – but not in the hard ones. Let's use the methods of applied ethics – cognitive deprogramming and rational reconstruction – to deal with those. It's messier but perhaps safer.

My supervisor and examiner, the ones who prompted me to write the

book, could, of course, observe that with this solution I just return to square one. Relativism still looms large. Some will say “Turn the trolley”, others will say “Don’t turn”, and we don’t know who’s right.

But to this I say that we should concentrate on the easier cases. They can be solved by my version of utilitarianism even if it doesn’t apply to the most difficult choices.

And it seems to me that, give or take a few twists and turns, antinatalism is one of the easy ones.

So different forms of Utilitarianism have been based on different axiologies over time, such as duty-based, rights-based, community-based and so on - Liberal Utilitarianism, like at least some forms of Negative Utilitarianism, are Needs-based. Can you explain more about the importance of Needs, both their satisfaction & frustration, and why they are a central part of your Liberal Utilitarianism?

Let’s make a few specifications first. As far as ethical approaches go, utilitarianism is an alternative to duty-based, rights-based, and community-based theories. None of these wants to make the objective measurement of the good the cornerstone of morality. They state that we have self-evident or reason-based duties and rights; or that we should abide by the community’s traditions and customs. According to utilitarian thinking, these obligations, entitlements, and ways of behaving **can** be right but only if they produce the greatest good.

Axiologies, or theories of value, are attempts to define the good to be maximized, optimized, or pursued. Utilitarianism has, over time, relied on hedonism (pleasure to be pursued, pain to be avoided), or desire fulfilment, preference satisfaction, and many others. I’m not sure why I chose needs. Perhaps it’s a hangover from my Baader-Meinhof Marxist days and the principle “From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs” guided me. Or maybe I realized that talking about needs allows me to build a hierarchy from more fundamental to less fundamental values.

One issue with hedonism is that if pleasure and pain are simply added, subtracted, and multiplied, this can produce counterintuitive results. What if one person, a pleasure monster, could enjoy all the pleasure in the world better than all the rest of us together? Should we then concentrate all the good on the monster? Or what if torturing one person to death would give an audience of thousands so much pleasure that it outweighs the pain of the tortured one? Should we then allow the performance?

With hierarchical needs we don't have to entertain such silly and repugnant conclusions. Not to be tortured to death is a basic need, the sadistic pleasure cannot be compared with that, end of story, performance not allowed.

You speak a lot about how Utilitarianism had become overextended, and that what Liberal Utilitarianism does is apply limits - will you explain more about that?

Well, the two things that I've just said set the limits. Against the Trolley Problem cases, let's continue the analysis beyond utility calculations. And against the pleasure and pain monsters, let's use a better theory of value. Mind you, I'm still in search of the perfect theory of value, as we'll no doubt see later on in the show.

The other key piece of the book, the Applied Ethics pieces, you have assembled into a system that help people understand how to make ethical decisions, where the limitations of Liberal Utilitarianism cannot, again would you mind explaining more about this piece of your theory?

In the book, I still rely on the cognitive deprogramming and rational reconstruction model that I presented in my doctoral dissertation. Simply put, try to criticize the hell out of existing solutions, then try to put together a new solution, then criticize the hell out of that, and so on and so forth.

It's an ongoing process, and I never meant it for the person in the street, really. It's a philosophical tool that can, in one form or another, be used to give broad outlines to how our decisions could be made,

especially on the levels of policy and practices.

Others have suggested other models like that. It's a way of saying that professional applied philosophers will be needed forever and ever.

Throughout the book, you have some very interesting things to say about Negative Utilitarianism, and you also fully address sentient extinction - I didn't really expect to find those two words together when I started reading! We will revisit some of what you have to say about sentient extinction within *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics* much later on in this interview, however, the following quote, I did want to bring up now, it's a longish one, but I think it has extremely important relevance, and historical interest to our overall conversation -

“An axiological variant which is closely related to the ‘need’ and ‘interest’ approaches is ‘negative utilitarianism’, which states that it is not the maximization of pleasure but the minimization of pain that counts in the moral assessment of actions. This view, which has never been fully developed, owes its popularity to the sound idea that the elimination of suffering has a certain urgency which is missing from the augmentation of pleasure. But the view, as a whole, is as problematical as the more traditional versions of utilitarianism. Two deficiencies are particularly apparent. First, the possibility of irrational suffering makes negative utilitarians subject to the same type of critique that faces the proponents of the desire and preference views. There may well be persons who are genuinely aggrieved by the fact that other persons are not made to suffer. And if this is the case, negative utilitarianism can be rejected on the same grounds as the ‘corrected’ desire and preference theories. Second, it can be argued that the most effective way to minimize suffering in the world would be the extinction of all sentient life forms. But nihilist normative conclusions like this are widely regarded as immoral.” (P. 66-67)

‘Nihilist’ huh? Do you still even now consider the extinction of all sentient life forms to be nihilistic?

As you well know by now, that was mostly me trying to please an

audience that simply cannot stomach the idea of humankind's demise. "Nihilism", from that audience's point of view, is the correct term. Making nil of our species and other sentient life forms must be the prime example of evil.

You say quite a bit more about sentient extinction within *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics*, but we'll return to those particular sections, another time.

I was also intrigued by your comment on Negative Utilitarianism never having been fully developed, do you still believe this to be true today? And if so, why do you think that remains the case, and what in your opinion would need to happen in the development of NU for it to become fully developed?

Prompted by our exchanges, I have assessed the situation, and yes, it has remained underdeveloped. Luckily, also prompted by our exchanges, I have just completed a new version. When that one hits the fan, it will be a whole new ballgame. If anyone reads it, that is.

Given that Liberal Utilitarianism & Negative Utilitarianism are both, unless I'm mistaken, based on need-based axiologies, how do they differ? In what other ways are they perhaps the same?

The default value of negative utilitarianism was for a long time hedonism, in other words, avoid and prevent suffering. When I studied the scene just now, there were other axiologies in play, but no need-based attempts. My new version will remedy that.

Based on things you've told me, I get the sense that basing Liberal Utilitarianism, like Negative Utilitarianism on Needs, was extremely controversial when you first proposed it, and was met with a lot of resistance & pressure for you to relent, will you tell me more about what you experienced in attempting to do this?

It's hard to tell what the reception of the book has been. It has been cited, but not fantastically. At the time of its publication, I detected one review, and that was lukewarm. Utilitarianism of any kind was not the

flavor of the day, and the main message of the reviewer was that I didn't pay sufficient heed to human flourishing. That **was** the flavor of the day, and pretty soon Nobel Prize Winner Amartya Sen and philosopher Martha Nussbaum cashed it in by their human capabilities approach.

That, by the way, is another development that I was aware of in the 1990s, like I knew of David Benatar's work on antinatalism before it was published. In the case of the capability approach, Martha Nussbaum was working in Helsinki, at the United Nations WIDER institute, and a student of mine, a secretary at the institute, carried me all her notes from the presentations on the topic. Another point of envy for me, as I saw that this combination of diluted Marxism, Aristotelianism, liberalism, and near-utilitarianism would be the bees knees and the dog's bollocks in the years to come.

So utilitarianism in almost any form would have been unpopular at the time. Lucky for us that you stuck to it – otherwise, I couldn't make the next revelation about the book.

Lo and behold, on page 121 of *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics*, you do in fact define a form of Antinatalism! (Minus the word of course.) I quote -

“Liberal utilitarianism counters the difficulties of the classical view by stating that family and population policies cannot be discussed in terms of total or average happiness in the way suggested by modern theorists. The principle of other-regarding need frustration implies that it is always right to satisfy the basic needs of an existing being, provided that the operation does not frustrate the basic needs of others. Non-existent beings who will never come into existence need not be counted in the evaluation, since they do not have and will not have needs which could be satisfied or frustrated. Thus the healthy and happy couple do not have an obligation to procreate, even if their children would contribute to the total or average happiness of the world. On the other hand, however, non-existent beings who will come into existence as a consequence of our actions or independently of them will in the foreseeable future have needs which must

be accounted for in ethical decision-making. Since the genetically defective couple are directly responsible for the existence of their suffering child, they are also directly responsible for the child's suffering. Their decision to procreate despite the genetic defect would, therefore, be morally wrong.” (p. 121)

An amazingly Antinatalist statement, especially considering the time was only 1994! Of course, this idea had no word attached to it yet, and would not for another 12 years, and had virtually no place within academia - Was this statement ignored at the time of the book's publication, or did people who read *Liberal Utilitarianism & Applied Ethics* at the time pick up on this statement at all? If so, what did people have to say about such an idea in 1994?

People who read the book back then, all five or six of them, including the editors, did **not** respond to this passage in any way. They probably didn't even notice it. There were several reasons for the limited readership and the tepid reception. Let me list some of them.

One set of reasons for the limited sales was that books were prohibitively expensive; this one had an ugly, nondescript cover; and it was written by a nobody from an obscure little country somewhere up north. I wouldn't have bought the hardcover copy myself, and the paperback only came out eleven years later.

The topic was not attractive, either. Utilitarianism was not fashionable – the market was saturated by books on liberalism, neoliberalism, virtue ethics, and, if with traces of utilitarianism, with a much more applied, as opposed to theoretical, approach. This one was originally supposed to slip into the applied box. Let me explain that.

My plan was to present the theory and then boldly apply it to animal welfare, energy policies, environmental matters, development policies, and the world order more generally. That would have been the book that everyone else was writing at the time, and it would have had an audience, perhaps.

As things unfolded, I realized, two years into the writing, that my



contract required me to deliver within months. Not knowing yet that publishers will give you an extension if you are struggling, I just threw the methods of applied ethics from my doctoral dissertation in, submitted the manuscript, and held my breath. And it was accepted, but in a form that didn't make me rich or famous.

Looking back, that's not a bad thing. It is historically accurate and theoretically sound, something to be proud of. But it wasn't a book that was destined to catch a wide readership.

To your question about this particular passage, though. It's a powerful passage, and I'm proud of it, but you didn't give the full context. It was sincere, and written with my heart blood, yet I practically renounced it as I moved along. The idea of not having children was, as I've told, used as a refutation of theories. So, I inconspicuously backtracked and let the more positive utilitarianism, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, to reign. David Benatar and antinatalism were yet to conquer anyone's consciousness.

Also, I only address the situation of parents who would have a clearly suffering child. Actually, this may have had some impact at the time. Peter Singer later told me that he made a student of his in Monash, Australia, Julian Savulescu, read the book. And Julian Savulescu then became famous for his Principle of Procreative Beneficence, which starts from the same premise with me but reaches a different conclusion from what you have in mind.

The premise is that potential parents should avoid having children who suffer. Savulescu's solution is technological. Let's test all the embryos and only implant the ones that probably will not suffer. In fact, let's make the best babies we can, genetically. I, along with many others, have contested the "genetically" bit, but that hasn't made a dent to his influence and popularity.

And, let me repeat, David Benatar had not yet come forward saying that all human life is suffering. And to be fair, I didn't argue anything like that either, in the passage you quoted.

You go even further though, as one of your five principles for application states:

7) The principle of actual or prospective existence. When the moral rightness of human activities is assessed, the imagined needs of nonexistent beings who will never come into existence shall not be counted.

**Now** we are talking. That **is** an antinatal statement without any disclaimers. In isolation, it says that however positive, or happiness-seeking, we are, there is no duty, no obligation, to bring new people into existence. We have a perfect right **not** to reproduce.

The only ideas needed now are that life is, or can be, pretty bad and that we cannot ask the unborn if they want to take the risk of a bad life, and, hey presto, philanthropic antinatalism as we know and love it is born. As it did when David Benatar and Seana Shiffrin published their ideas and I followed suit in my article *A Rational Cure for Prereproductive Stress Syndrome* ten years after *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics* had been released.

*Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics* is an amazingly ahead of its time work, Matti, addressing issues that few would have had the courage to even go near back then - I hope, that given the new place this book has found in the annals of Antinatalist history, that it will come to find a new, and much deserved audience, it's a very important work indeed.

Thank you. Let's hope so. I suppose together we stand a better chance.

And talking about "together", we have heard, here and in ExAN #65, a lot about **my** adventures on and off antinatalism. But what about **you**? How did you become involved? When did you learn about antinatalism and how did you grow to think that it's your thing?

Thanks very much, Matti! I started my adventure into Antinatalism officially, in 2010, when I was 27 years old. Before that, I can remember some quite strong Antinatalist feelings as a young kid... I grew up completely fixated on

monsters & deformity.

It seemed obvious to me, for instance, that there had been something seriously ethically problematic in Dr. Frankenstein having created The Monster - maybe he should not have done that... Lines from Alice Cooper songs, like, 'She wanted an Einstein, but she got a Frankenstein!' (*Public Animal No. 9*) helped me see that - maybe I was on to something, maybe there was some real-world correlation between the biological experiments of mad scientists, and of parents...?

I had also noticed that Vampires create more vampires through biting - a kind of procreative act to my early Anti-natal eyes. The first suffering vampire creates another suffering vampire, both driven by hunger and need, but that then go on to create more hungry and needy vampires - a parent creates a victim - a concept perfectly metaphor through vampirism.

Sealing the deal of course, were the words of my beloved childhood hero, The Phantom of the Opera - From a children's adaptation of the original novel - 'I curse the day I was born!'. There was something there in all of these observations, and I felt it - I was in full identification. But I wasn't brave enough yet to say anything about it, and like most Antinatalists, I had assumed the problem was with me.

I was after all, the6 deeply twisted child of a psychoanalyst and an oil painter/advertiser - a fat, transgender, learning disabled, obsessive-compulsive, nerd, who was fixated on comic books and horror films and action figures... What did I know?

I've spent most of my life making art in various forms, drawing, sculpting & making prints, mostly etchings... In 2008, I graduated from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago with a BFA in Printmedia, but I had no idea what to do with any of it in the real world. As soon as I got out, all I wanted to do was make movies and videos. So I jumped from one independent film set to the next, filling a variety of different roles both behind and in front of the camera, and I started my first YouTube channel.

By 2009ish, I had a lot eating away at me. I was searching for some answers, and some inspiration, and I accidentally found it when I stumbled

upon the videos of Inmendham - an encounter that would completely change my life forever.

Aha – I can see where this is going now. After your years in the wilderness you are, at last, finding greener pastures.

Inmendham, also known as DoNotGod, or Gary, as I would come to know him, had been making videos on the subject of Anti-procreation since 2007. This was a very interesting time to have come into the Anti-Natal world, I now know in hindsight, because it was right before people started to say the word ‘Antinatalism’ on YouTube, and it was also the pre-EFILism days, all that would not start until 2012.

Prior to 2010, *David Benatar’s Better Never to Have Been* had most certainly had an impact within academia, and Antinatalism had received some press, but the philosophy had not yet found it’s footing within the internet. Certainly, people like Karim Akerma, Jim Crawford, Théophile de Giraud and a few others were around even then, & there were a handful of blogs & forums, most notably The Nightmare Network, also known as Thomas Ligotti Online ([www.ligotti.net](http://www.ligotti.net)). But none of that had yet really been enough to spark the growth of a more connected Antinatalist community... Something that, let’s face it, barely exists, even now.

When Gary had his own Anti-Natal epiphany in 2011, finally learning of the word, ‘Antinatalism’ for the first time, due to our friend DerivedEnergy planting the seed, he was not alone in feeling the shock of that revelation. For an entire small community of people who had formed around Gary and his ideas over the years - suddenly, we were all Antinatalists now! And once we had that word, an amazing explosion of Antinatalist conversation & content creation commenced between the years of 2011- 2014ish - the Antinatalist Community was officially born.

This is really exciting stuff. And the speed of it all is amazing. I can imagine how something like this would have an effect on people.

It really was incredible. The result for me personally, was like being hit by lightning, Antinatalism was everything I had been waiting to find my entire life - Anti-procreation, Art, animal rights, The Right to die, Atheism - it was

all there, and I wanted to do... Everything. Something. But what? I was deeply insecure, I have no background in philosophy, my past is filled with drawing monsters & making weird cringy videos dressed up as Anime characters... It didn't seem like it was going to work...

And so, I hid for the first year of my Antinatalism to think about it, I watched the Antinatalist community take its first tender steps from a distance, and I did the only thing I could figure out how to do at the time, which was to sculpt the entire private world of Inmendham, in tremendous and intricate diorama form... I realize, that seems like a strange answer to the problem, but I left that year-long experience of sculptural meditation, having had my chance to think deeply - and though I continue to think of myself as all wrong for the job, I had stopped caring - I was ready to be an Antinatalist, no matter what.

Good choice! And good for antinatalism!

Since my debut into Antinatalism with the Inmendham sculpture, my responsibilities within the Anti-natal world have been many. I am the extinctionist archivist, a vlogger, a cheerleader, a clown, I'm-whatever-I-have-to-be, but what I most like to do, is create pieces of Antinatalist infotainment for both my fellow Antinatalists, & Non-Antinatalists alike.

My first attempt to combine Antinatalism & comedy, was a short series called *Anti-Natal Funnies*. From there, in 2013ish, Inmendham and I would collaborate on the first of two major projects together - a 12-episode Public Access Television show called *Vloggerdome: The TV Show*. Several years later, I would try again with another effort, didn't last long though called, *Efil-TV: Antinatalist Television*.

Wow! Impressive activities!

2020 saw the birth of *The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast*, which started out as a collaborate effort between 6 or so other Antinatalists & myself, but soon became a solo effort, except for my sometimes ex-co-host and the show's founder, Mark J. Maharaj. *The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast* has so far been my longest-running series.

I'm also one of the founders of *Antinatalism International*, the world's first explicitly Antinatalist collective, meant to generate Antinatalist activism of all forms worldwide, and the driver behind such efforts as, *The Antinatalist Film Festival*.

In 2014, I went back to The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, again to study Printmedia, this time as a graduate student... But I never pulled a single print during my time there.... Instead, I operated under the thesis that Procreation IS print media, zerox machines begetting zerox machines, and so therefore my response to print as a concept, was as an ethical stance against biological duplication, as opposed to the active creation of works on paper... Or something, that was part of it. Everyone was very nice about it, and indulged my audacity - I had the time of my life speaking about pretty much nothing but Antinatalism & EFILism for a whole 2 years, to anyone crazy enough to find their way into my studio - I loved every minute of it! The EFIList, was my graduate thesis. A horror-comedy, video essay on EFILism, a form of sentiocentric Antinatalism created by Inmendham in 2012... We'll get to that later.

It's a fine work of art, that one!

Thanks Matti! My love for Antinatalism only grows the more time that goes by - 12 years in, and I'm not tired of it in the slightest. It inspires me endlessly. Antinatalism is, perfect prevention. I think it's the most beautiful idea in the world.

We are told our entire lives that there is nothing we can do about how bad life is, and that there is nothing we can do about suffering... That there are no tools available to us to change anything, or make a difference... But that of course, is a lie. DNA has been forcing us to buy a faulty, harmful, dangerous product, over and over again, for far too long. The task of the Antinatalist is to give Life the scathing product review that it deserves so that maybe, people will stop buying it.

So that's my story.

And a fantastic story it is! Fantamaglorious! Quite a trip. I am **so** looking forward to learning from you as we proceed past my historical

layers.

Talking about which, our discussion on *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics* is not over - we will indeed revisit and come back to sections of it throughout this odyssey. And in fact, we will continue some of that right now

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- In 2020, you released a paper called *Just Better Utilitarianism*, that offered a great deal of insight & clarity into your intentions behind writing *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics*, let's start out by hearing the abstract –

### **Abstract**

Utilitarianism could still be a viable moral and political theory, although an emphasis on justice as distributing burdens and benefits has hidden this from current conversations. The traditional counterexamples prove that we have good grounds for rejecting classical, aggregative forms of consequentialism. A non-aggregative, liberal form of utilitarianism is immune to this rejection. The cost is that it cannot adjudicate when the basic needs of individuals or groups are in conflict. Cases like this must be solved by other methods. This is not a weakness in liberal utilitarianism, on the contrary. The theory clarifies what we should admit to begin with: that ethical doctrines do not have universally acceptable solutions to all difficult problems or hard cases. The theory also reminds us that not all problems are in this sense difficult or cases hard. We could alleviate the plight of nonhuman animals by reducing meat eating. We could mitigate climate change and its detrimental effects by choosing better ways of living. These would imply that most people's desire satisfaction would be partly frustrated, but liberal utilitarianism holds that this would be justified by the satisfaction of the basic needs of other people and nonhuman animals.

I won't spend too much time here now dissecting this essay, but it deserved to be pointed out what an excellent supplemental piece to *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics* it is, and we will come back to it several more times throughout future episodes of Hankikanto.

Written some 26 years after the publication of the book, what prompted you

to revisit Liberal Utilitarianism through Just Better Utilitarianism after so many years?

My interest in animal ethics was revived a few years ago, more or less out of the blue. I had done a lot of it in the 1990s – and we'll come back to that in our later episodes – but bioethics as an investigation of new medical technologies had taken over. Quite frankly, all the research money was in that field, and as a research team leader I had to focus our plans accordingly. Not that we ever did what we promised to do in the research plans. We continued our critical investigation of these technologies and developed our methodological approaches. – But anyway, animals were sidelined for many years.

Now that I had renewed my interest in animal rights and welfare, I had to examine again the theoretical foundation. The team had for many years studied different views on justice and I tried to apply that framework first. But I soon realized that this was a part of the problem rather than a solution. Most theories of justice, be they about individuals or collectives, property or taxation, rights or care, utility or tradition, concentrate on people. Who should get what, whose values should be respected, whose work produces the welfare we may or may not enjoy, and so on. But nonhuman animals were missing from the picture.

And then I remembered that I already have – or ages ago had – a theory that could fit the bill – liberal utilitarianism. But if I dig it out and give it an airing, I thought, I'll need a context. So I came up with one, lest I just repeat myself from ancient times. In the European Society for Philosophy of Medicine and Healthcare 2019 conference in Oslo, Norway, I announced to my dinner party at the banquet that I'm going to edit a special issue for a journal, the Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics. I'm going to update liberal utilitarianism, apply it to animals, and publish the results as a target article. Everyone around the table is welcome to write commentaries from their point of view.

Great excitement and enthusiasm followed this announcement and



many colleagues promised to contribute a paper. Another example of dinner tables being important for the development of my theories. Some colleagues actually lived up to their promise, but the main goal had already been achieved – I had an excuse for revisiting my view.

I mentioned earlier that *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics* was originally intended to have an entire section – chapters four to six – on applications. Just Better Utilitarianism became, in a sense, chapter four.

I want to take a moment to point out an extremely powerful quote from *Just Better Utilitarianism* - it's a long one, but highly worth our time -

“Let me explain why I want the liberal utilitarian credo to precede other considerations. It is all to do with our treatment of nonhuman animals. As I already stated, my starting point in devising liberal utilitarianism was environmental ethics. This emphasis was, however, not based on the survival of the planet (it will survive for a time, anyway, and then meet its demise), biodiversity as such (as opposed to its huge instrumental value to sentient beings), or even the survival of humanity (compare what I said about the planet). The prompt was the frustration of the basic needs of nonhuman and human sentient beings alike by human activities all around the world. I wanted to have a foundation that makes removing this frustration our priority, and liberal utilitarianism defines how. None of the other theories of justice in the center of does this. Nonhuman animals do not feature much in the works of Habermas and Rawls, and although Nussbaum expresses an interest in them, her focus remains on humans and their capabilities. In contrast, liberal utilitarianism addresses the matter head on. Which could be its undoing.”

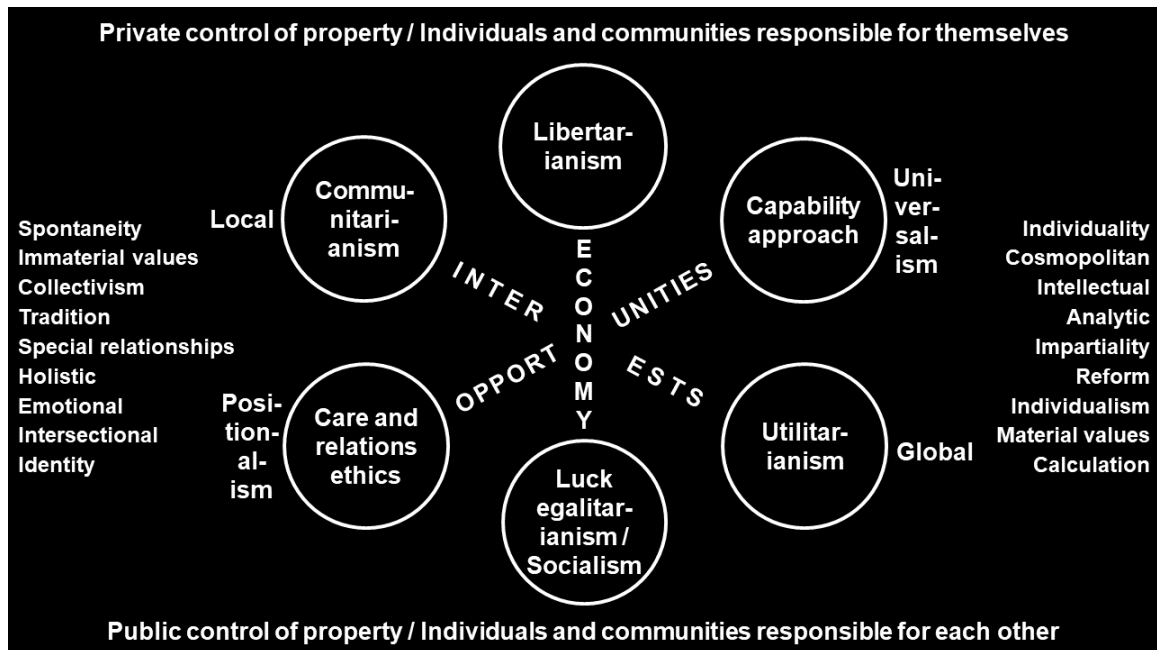
Beautiful, it's just a beautiful statement. And one that surely will resonate with any sentiocentricly minded person. We will talk in much greater depth soon about how Nonhumans animals played such a large role in the development of Liberal Utilitarianism - something I did not fully understand the extent of until I read *Just Better Utilitarianism*, when we get to our proper discussion of your Animal Rights work.

This is perhaps an awkward time to ask, however, since I believe this is the first time within this interview your research into the subject of Justice has been brought up, could you now tell us more about your map of justice that you reference in the quote above?

How much time do we have? This is an elephant that we are talking about now. But it's an important elephant, I grant you that, so maybe I should give it a try. Justice.

Almost everyone agrees that the core of justice is equality. We must recognize and respect and treat everyone equally; everybody is to count for one and nobody is to count for more than one in political practices; and in making decisions we should hear or take into account everyone who is affected by them.

Then the difficulties begin. Who counts as everybody? What should be recognized and what should be respected? What does equal treatment mean? People have different views on what features of equality should be stressed. Three dimensions stand out. The figure on the screen sketches everything that I say here. It's a bit of an eyeful but I'll talk us through it.



*Map of justice with dimensions, theories, and variables*

First, the *responsibility* or *economy* dimension tells apart two types of social and economic views. One promotes individual responsibility and the private control of the means of production; the other social responsibility and the shared or public control of the means of production. The doctrine names, for what it's worth, here are *libertarianism* (linked with Reaganism and Thatcherism in economics) and luck egalitarianism (linked with social security in policies).

Secondly, the *opportunities* dimension marks a continuum between *care and relations ethics* on one hand and the *capabilities approach* on the other. Care and relations ethics emphasizes the identities, dependencies, and interconnectedness of people instead of formal norms and measurable welfare. Capabilities theorists rely more on universal rights to achieve what any individual would have to achieve to flourish.

Thirdly, the *interests* dimension divides views into those that focus on local concerns or tradition, and those that advocate the global maximization of measurable wellbeing. Politically, the stress on communities can range from the liberal protection of indigenous ways all the way to the defense of neo-nationalism, with all kinds of “our group first” versions in between.

Communitarians share the stance of positionality with care ethicists. Which is easily forgotten – that they share anything – because this is the terrain where the current Cultural Wars are being fought.

Utilitarianism, the view that I have used is as far away as possible from conservative communitarianism and a little closer to care ethics.

I'll give more detailed descriptions of the views and their connections if and when they pop up in our future episodes, but one thing should be noted right away. And it is, as I said talking about my article *Just Better Utilitarianism*, that nonhuman animals are almost lost here. I mean, sentiocentric utilitarianism can be bent to include them, and care ethics might have something to say about our special relationships with some animals, but otherwise no. Theories of justice are mostly theories of human-on-human behavior – human rights,

human capabilities, human wellbeing, human communities, human identities. This is what drew my attention in the animal welfare issue – and this is why I went back to my earlier liberal utilitarianism.

One last quote before we wrap up this episode, from page 18 of *Just Better Utilitarianism*:

“I have reassessed my relationship with utilitarianism before, and more or less renounced the doctrine. I will probably continue the reassessment, but for now, my interim conclusion is that I may be a liberal utilitarian, after all.” (p. 18)

May I ask why you had come to reject utilitarianism, and therefore your own Liberal Utilitarianism in the past? Are you a Liberal Utilitarian again now?

Good question and deserves to be answered. It’s complicated. But simply put, I have never renounced liberal utilitarianism as I formulated it back in the nineteen-nineties. I have just been unsure about its status as a utilitarian theory.

Utilitarianism is supposed to be based on **one** clearly identifiable value and it’s supposed to answer **all** moral questions. Does our decision, compared to other possible decisions, maximize some measurable good – pleasure, wellbeing, or the like? If yes, it’s the right decision, the right thing to do, probably our duty. If not, it’s not the right decision – we should choose one of the alternatives instead.

Liberal utilitarianism breaks this pattern in two ways. The value theory is based on different kinds of needs – basic and non-basic. If a decision would satisfy or frustrate both, the non-basic drop out – they are not included in the comparison. I’m not sure that this is good, orthodox utilitarianism. And if many people’s basic needs are in conflict, the decision should be made on different grounds. This is definitely non-utilitarian because it means that liberal utilitarianism does not solve all the problems.

We’ll see in other episodes how I have tried to deal with this. The latest development is what I call Conflict-Responsive Need-Based

Negative Utilitarianism, and that will take us to the core of antinatalism and extinctionism. But that's another story.

## Concluding thoughts

Matti, now that we've looked at so many of your past Antinatalist works, a question I've had since the very beginning of our correspondence becomes even louder - how the hell did you manage to remain such an unknown within the Antinatalist community for so long? Most Antinatalists including myself, were not really aware of you until the 2015 release of David Benatar & David Wasserman's book, *Debating Procreation: Is It Wrong to Reproduce?* and even then, I can confirm, on Facebook, on Twitter, on Reddit - there has been little to no discussion of your work until recently. As happy as I am that this is now being rectified, do you have any thoughts on why this might have happened?

I suppose one has to be visible to be seen. And apart from my short 2004 article in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* I have not been visible at all. Your detective work has unearthed passages here and passages there over the years, but before these sessions, the world has never seen a fully-blown announcement of antinatalism by me. I'm actually a little surprised that some people, notably from the opposite, pronatal camp, **have** apparently known about my lunacy. Many of them have even commented, when they have been specifically asked to, but they have then discreetly turned to look the other way – to let me recover from my malady in peace and silence, I suppose.

Well, I also think not enough of us went looking either – the academic papers kind of got the short end of the stick between everyone either obsessing over the books, or all the video stuff - I only started investigating the academic papers a little in 2013 for Vloggerdome, and then didn't return in any serious way until working with Mark on Exploring Antinatalism – but that's the crazy thing, even several people I know who are obsessed with reading academic papers on Antinatalism, hadn't really done much of any investigation, it's wild!

During our first conversation , you make several statements expressing a

sometimes unsure attitude towards your status as an Antinatalist, and then at other times, one of completely resolve and identification. Where are you with this now? Do you feel more sure now? Or less?

I am an antinatalist. But I'm also a philosopher, so the statement has to come with qualifications.

I'm a little cautious about describing myself in terms of isms. Most of them can be defined in many ways.

I have an antinatal attitude and conviction and I have a theory that supports the conviction without committing me to any untoward implications. I believe that people do **not** have a moral duty to have children and I believe that people **do** have a moral duty **not** to have children. My theory justifies, with certain assumptions, both these duties, so my mind is at ease. In this sense, I'm definitely an antinatalist. This feeling has become stronger during our sessions.

But other people may define antinatalism differently, and they may not agree with the assumptions or the implications of my theory. If they think that they hold a monopoly in the field and that I'm trespassing, then I'll happily yield. OK, I say, if you define it like that, then I'm not an antinatalist. No bones broken. Let's both keep putting out the fire and worry about the color of the hose later. All good. Back to work.

Don't relent to them that easy, Matti! We've already spoken a little bit about how Antinatalism should be defined on mechANized, and will do more of that much later on in our discussions - I still don't know what the perfect definition of Antinatalism would be... But there are a few things about Antinatalism that I am sure of, and one is that - Antinatalism is many different things to a lot of different people. And it's messy, there are huge disagreements, we have real problems ... But that's the truth, that's the state of things. This medley of different versions of the same idea has now brought a lot of people to roughly the same place, - and it's done that through it's diversity, it's variety, not because one argument or definition or approach has won.... So the Monopolies are a silly game anyway. I would

just say to those that try to build such monopolies, I would just remind them, that no matter what species of Antinatalism, there is always a shared kernel, and that's the important part, that's where the focus should be. Build there, don't shoot to kill. Antinatalism has to belong to everyone. And we have better things to be doing.

And so Matti, I do believe this will conclude our first episode of *Hankikanto: Falling into the Anti/Natal Abyss*, next time, we will be looking at a completely different area of your work, because in addition to philosophy & bioethics and all the things you do academically, you are also, a Rock Star. Learn all about Matti's Rock Operas in the next episode.

I am Amanda Sukenick

and I am Matti Häyry and we are Hankikanto –  
*Falling into the Anti/Natal Abyss* – bye for now!