AHALAN

Anti-Humanism, Anti-Life, Anti-Natalism. A philosophical essay on the ethics of existence

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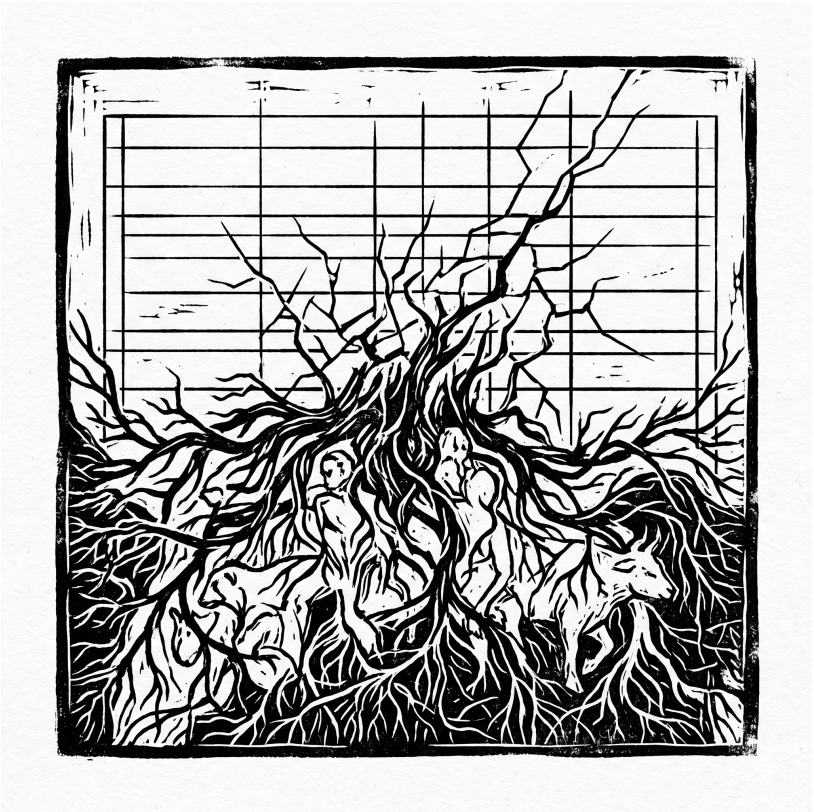

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Preface

This text began as a conversation between four people who will probably never finish anything together again. That is not a tragedy; it is simply what happens. People move, disperse, get absorbed into the machinery of survival. The document we started in 2021 went incomplete the way most things do: not abandoned, exactly, but left behind. I am finishing it alone, under a name none of us chose collectively, and I want to be honest about that before anything else.

AHALAN is not a manifesto in any confident sense. It does not promise a world. It does not recruit. What it does, what it tries to do, is follow certain thoughts past the point where social convention asks you to stop. Past the point where someone in a conversation changes the subject. Past where the feed redirects you toward something more comfortable. The discomfort is not the point; but refusing to look away is.

The three terms in the subtitle (Anti-Humanism, Anti-Life, Anti-Natalism) were chosen for their provocation. I will not walk that back. But provocation is not the same as nihilism, and I want to state clearly: what follows is written out of something that resembles, however imperfectly, care. Not care for humanity in the abstract (that abstraction has historically done enormous damage) but something closer to what you feel when you watch something suffer unnecessarily and you know the suffering is not inevitable. It is written out of that feeling, and out of an attempt to think clearly about it.

I have read widely in preparing this text. Foucault on the administration of life. Mbembe on the administration of death. Benatar on the asymmetry of pleasure and pain, and what that asymmetry implies for the act of creating a new person. Deleuze and Guattari on the rhizome: not as metaphor but as method, as the refusal to think in roots and hierarchies, to follow a line of thought wherever it actually goes rather than where you were told it should lead. Nick Land on capital as an inhuman process that runs through us rather than being operated by us. Mark Fisher on the foreclosure of imagination that capitalism achieves, not through censorship but through the production of a specific feeling that alternatives are simply unreal. The Frankfurt School on the culture industry, on conditioning as infrastructure rather than aberration. Derrida on the animal that therefore I am. Spinoza, somewhere underneath all of it, on the immanence of things: the refusal of transcendence, the insistence that what is, is all there is.

None of these thinkers are cited as authorities. They are cited as fellow travelers who went further down certain roads than most people are willing to go, and who mapped what they found there.

I have tried to write in a way that is readable without being simple. The ideas here are not simple. Anyone who tells you that questions about the ethics of existence, the value of life, the relationship between humans and other animals, are simple is either not thinking about them or is using that simplicity to foreclose your thinking. I would rather be honest about the difficulty.

One more thing, before we begin. AHALAN is a word that lives in two places simultaneously, and is at home in neither. It is Arabic in origin, shortened from “ahalan wasahalan”: you are like family, your entry to my home will be easy. It is also Israeli street slang, absorbed into

Hebrew the way borrowed words always are: casually, without ceremony, stripped of half its weight. That double life is not incidental. A word of radical hospitality, traveling across one of the most politically saturated linguistic borders in the world, arriving stripped and colloquial, used as a greeting between people who may know nothing of where it came from. The acronym was chosen by the four of us partly for the irony: a welcome extended toward thoughts that no one welcomes. But also for something harder to name; the way a word can carry more than its speakers intend, the way hospitality and dispossession can inhabit the same syllables without resolution. AHALAN does not resolve. It greets.

Part I — Life Under Management

The administration begins before you arrive

There is a specific moment (different for everyone, though it seems to happen most often in the late twenties) when a person realizes that the structure of their daily life is not something they chose. Not in any meaningful sense. The job, the apartment, the relationship status, the reproductive timeline that everyone around them seems to be following: none of it was selected from an open menu of genuine alternatives. It arrived. It was already there, fully formed, waiting. And the person walked into it the way you walk into a room that was furnished before you were born.

Foucault called this biopower: the management of populations through the administration of life itself. Not the crude domination of kings and dungeons, but something far more efficient; the production of `norms` around which people organize themselves voluntarily, eagerly, often with genuine pleasure. You have children because that is what health looks like. You stay alive because that is what sanity looks like. You seek productivity because that is what worth looks like. The state does not need to force any of this. The infrastructure of daily life forces it. The calendar forces it. The insurance system forces it. The news feed forces it.

This is where the algorithmic dimension of contemporary conditioning reveals itself most clearly. Pavlov and Skinner worked with bells and electric shocks; contemporary platforms work with something far more intimate: the precise mapping of your desires, anxieties, and social fears, used to surface content that incrementally reinforces the emotional disposition you already have, until that disposition becomes the only one you can imagine having. The algorithm does not tell you what to think. It tells you what feels real. And what feels real, after long enough, is everything. The unreal (the thought outside the feed, the life outside the norm) begins to produce a specific kind of anxiety that is indistinguishable from danger. You do not reject anti-natalist ideas because you have refuted them. You reject them because entertaining them produces the feeling of falling.

Deleuze and Guattari described the dominant mode of Western thought as arborescent: tree-shaped, hierarchical, rooted. A central trunk (the human, the normal, the reproductive, the productive) from which branches extend and to which everything returns. The rhizome, their counter-concept, has no center and no root. It spreads laterally. It connects anything to anything. It has no beginning and no end, only middles. What they were describing was not just a form of thought but a form of life: one that moves by proliferation rather than by ascent, that does not require a destination in order to move.

AHALAN tries to move rhizomatically. The three terms in its title are not a pyramid. Anti-humanism does not ground anti-natalism; anti-natalism does not follow from anti-life as a logical deduction. They are three points of entry into the same territory, and the territory is large and strange. You can enter from any of them and find your way to the others, or not. That is fine. The text does not require you to arrive anywhere in particular.

The inhuman runs through us

Nick Land described capital as a process that humans did not design and cannot control: an inhuman teleology that uses human bodies and desires as its substrate, the way a virus uses a cell. This is not metaphor, or it is not only metaphor. The reproductive imperative, the accumulation imperative, the growth imperative: these are not human values that capitalism merely amplifies. They are attractors in the system; stable states toward which human activity converges not because anyone chose them but because the system rewards convergence and punishes deviation. You do not choose to want more. You arrive into a world in which wanting more is what being healthy feels like. The system is not cruel. It is indifferent, which is something else entirely.

Land's accelerationism (the idea that the way out of a system is through it, not around it) is not something AHALAN endorses without reservation. Acceleration has its own romanticism, its own eschatological fever. But the diagnosis underneath it is hard to dismiss: that the humanist tradition's belief in rational collective agency, in the ability of people to step outside the system and redesign it through deliberate choice, is itself a product of the system. The Enlightenment subject (autonomous, rational, self-determining) was always partly a fiction, and a useful one. Useful to whom is a question worth sitting with.

What AHALAN takes from this is simpler than acceleration. It is only: the processes that manage us are older and larger than we are, and thinking clearly about them requires giving up the fantasy that we stand outside them, evaluating them from neutral ground. There is no neutral ground. You are inside the machine. What you can do, what thinking does, is make the machine visible. Not to escape it necessarily, but to know what it is. To see the norm as a norm rather than as nature. To feel the conditioning as conditioning rather than as the shape of things.

Mark Fisher called this capitalist realism: the widespread feeling that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. He was right, and the feeling has only intensified since he wrote it. But what he diagnosed about capitalism's grip on the political imagination applies with equal force to the specific ideological complex AHALAN is concerned with: the belief that human life is inherently valuable, that reproduction is inherently good, that death is inherently the enemy. These beliefs do not feel like beliefs. They feel like `reality`. The work of any serious thinking, on this terrain, is not to assert the opposite but to make the apparent reality strange again, to restore to it the contingency it actually has.

On anthropocentrism and its silences

The claim that human life is worth more than non-human life is so deeply embedded in the architecture of daily language that it is almost impossible to hear as a claim. It is the water. To say that you believe in human rights is considered a statement of basic ethical seriousness. To say that you believe in animal rights is considered, by most of the same people, a kind of eccentricity: worthy perhaps, but secondary, optional, the concern of people with sufficient leisure to think about it.

Derrida, in a late lecture series, asked a question that sounds simple: what does it mean to say that animals do not have language? Not whether it is true; but who decides what counts as language, and by what authority? The definition of language that excludes animal communication was constructed by the same tradition that required that exclusion: the tradition that needed hu-

mans to be categorically different from other animals in order to justify everything it was already doing to them. The circle is perfectly closed. We define language in a way that only we have it, then use the possession of language as the criterion for moral consideration, then present this as a neutral discovery about the nature of things.

Anthropocentrism is not a mistake that Western thought made on the way to something better. It is structural. It organizes the entire edifice: the legal system, the food system, the medical system, the language of rights itself. Dismantling it cannot be done by adding a few animal welfare laws to the existing framework. The framework is the problem. What is required is a different ontology, a different account of what kinds of things are, and what kinds of relations between them are possible.

Spinoza's immanence helps here, or at least opens a door. If there is no transcendent God who made humans in his image and placed them above the rest of creation (if what there is, is only what is, in all its lateral connectedness) then the hierarchy collapses not as a moral choice but as a description of how things actually are. Humans are not the crown of creation. They are an evolutionary accident of considerable complexity, currently in the process of eliminating most of the other evolutionary accidents they share the planet with. Seen from the outside (if there were an outside) this would not look like a civilization. It would look like a very fast extinction event with administrative paperwork.

/On sources:/ Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France, particularly /The Birth of Biopolitics/ and /Society Must Be Defended/; Deleuze and Guattari's /A Thousand Plateaus/, the introductory plateau on the rhizome; Land's essays collected in /Fanged Noumena/; Fisher's /Capitalist Realism/; Derrida's /The Animal That Therefore I Am/; Spinoza's /Ethics/.

Part II — The Right to Let Die

Sovereignty and the management of dying

Mbembe begins /Necropolitics/ with a question that Foucault's biopolitics leaves unresolved: if power in modernity is organized around the administration of life, around making live and letting die, then what do we make of the vast territories where power operates not by fostering life but by deciding, with considerable precision, whose death is acceptable? The colony, the occupied zone, the war front, the prison: these are not failures of biopower but its underside, the spaces where the calculus of which lives are worth managing becomes visible in its starkest form. Foucault described the state's capacity to "let die" as the passive face of power, the withdrawal of the conditions for life. Mbembe pushes further; letting die is not passivity. It is a technology. It requires infrastructure, decision, and the sustained production of a category of person whose death does not count as loss.

This is not where most conversations about euthanasia begin, and that distance is worth noting. The standard liberal debate about assisted dying takes place entirely within the administrative logic of biopower: the question is whether the state should permit individuals to exit the system of life-management under certain controlled conditions, with documentation, with certification of suffering, with the approval of multiple professionals whose job is the maintenance of life. The request to die is processed the way any other medical request is processed; through a bureaucracy designed to decide, on your behalf, whether your reasons are sufficient. The sovereign decision about whose death is acceptable has not been abolished. It has been relocated, from the explicit violence of the colony to the quiet paperwork of the hospital ethics committee.

AHALAN's anti-life position does not begin with a policy proposal. It begins earlier, with a prior question: why is the default assumption that life must continue unless a sufficiently powerful authority grants permission for it to end? Not why do individuals want to die (that question deserves its own careful attention) but why does the burden of justification fall entirely on the person who wishes to leave, rather than on the system that insists they stay?

On the asymmetry of staying and leaving

There is a specific kind of violence in forced continuation. It is not the violence of the blow or the wound; it is the violence of the loop, of the day that repeats without horizon, of pain that has been assessed by others as insufficient to justify exit. The person inside that loop knows something that the assessors do not know and cannot know: what it is to inhabit that particular configuration of suffering, at that particular intensity, without relief and without visible end. The assessors know the diagnosis. They do not know the life.

This is not an argument against all medical assessment of suffering. It is an argument against the specific presumption that organizes such assessment: the presumption that life is the default

good, and that any preference for death is a symptom to be treated rather than a position to be heard. When a person in severe, chronic, treatment-resistant depression says that they want to die, the medical system's first response is to interpret that statement as evidence of a distorted cognition, a symptom of the illness rather than a conclusion reached by a subject in full possession of their experience. The circularity of this is complete. The desire for death is proof of illness; the illness justifies overriding the desire; the overriding is framed as care. The person is managed back into life, and the system records this as a success.

Foucault, in his lectures on biopolitics, described the way modern power produces its subjects not through repression but through a productive force: it does not forbid, it shapes. The subject who wants to die has been produced by the same apparatus that now refuses their request. Their desire for life was cultivated, reinforced, made to feel natural; when that cultivation fails, when the desire for life does not take, the system does not ask what it failed to provide. It asks what is wrong with the person.

Nick Land, characteristically, pushes this into territory that is harder to domesticate. The drive toward death, in Land's reading of Freud and Schopenhauer, is not a pathology but an undertow; the pull of the inorganic that runs beneath all organic striving, the entropy that capital accelerates but cannot ultimately outrun. Thanatos is not the absence of Eros but its twin, present in every organism from the beginning, the other direction of the same force. What the culture of biopolitical life-management cannot tolerate is not death itself (death happens constantly, is everywhere, is administered daily in hospitals and hospices and nursing homes) but death chosen; death as an act of will that falls outside the system's scheduling.

The animal and the human, again

There is a peculiar asymmetry in the way contemporary Western societies think about death across species lines. To euthanize a suffering animal is, in most contexts, considered an act of mercy; the refusal to do so, when suffering is severe and irremediable, is increasingly regarded as a form of cruelty. The veterinarian who prolongs the dying of a dog in obvious pain, out of a principled commitment to life-preservation, would be considered to have failed in their care. The logic is straightforward: if a creature is suffering, and the suffering cannot be relieved, and the creature cannot understand or consent to its own continuation, then ending that suffering is the most caring available act.

Apply the same logic to humans and the entire framework inverts. Suddenly, continuation becomes the default good regardless of suffering. Suddenly, the person's own stated desire for death is treated as a symptom rather than a preference. Suddenly, the same act that was mercy for the dog becomes, in many jurisdictions, a crime. The difference is not located in the suffering, which may be equivalent or worse in the human case. It is not located in the capacity for consent, which the human possesses and the animal does not. It is located in something else entirely: in the theological residue that persists inside secular biopower, the sense that human life has a categorical value that places it above the reach of mere preference, even the preference of the person living it.

Derrida's intervention on the question of the animal is again useful here, though from an unexpected angle. If the boundary between human and animal is less categorical than the Western tradition requires, then the asymmetry in how we treat dying across that boundary becomes harder

to sustain. We are not defending human dignity when we refuse euthanasia. We are defending a specific metaphysical claim about the specialness of human life, a claim that floats free of any evidence and survives, as such claims do, by feeling self-evident. The feeling of self-evidence is not the same as truth. It is, as we have already seen, the primary product of a conditioning apparatus that has been running for a very long time.

What anti-life does not say

It is necessary to be precise here, because imprecision on this terrain causes real harm. Anti-life, as a position within AHALAN, is not a claim that people should die. It is not a devaluation of any particular life, or lives in general. It does not say that suffering always warrants death, or that the desire for death is always rational, or that the complex, often ambivalent relationship a person has with their own continuation can be resolved by a simple policy position in either direction.

What it says is narrower and, in a sense, more radical than any of those claims. It says that the default assumption (that life must continue, that the burden of proof lies entirely with those who wish to leave, that the desire for death is inherently a symptom rather than a position) is not a neutral fact about the value of life. It is a political arrangement. It serves specific interests. It is maintained by specific mechanisms, including the theological inheritance that Land identifies running through secular humanism, the biopower apparatus that Foucault describes, the necropolitical calculus that Mbembe traces through colonial and postcolonial governance. To see it clearly is not to say that everyone should die on request. It is to say that the question of when and how a person may exit their own life should belong to the person, and that a society which places that decision primarily in the hands of the state, the medical system, and inherited metaphysical assumptions about human exceptionalism has not solved the problem of death. It has merely redistributed its management.

The line of flight that dying opens

Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between two kinds of becoming: the arborescent, which grows toward a fixed destination within a pre-given structure, and the rhizomatic, which moves laterally, connects unexpectedly, refuses the destination. Most thinking about death is arborescent. It moves along a trunk (life is good, death is bad, the goal is to stay alive as long as possible) from which every branch extends and to which every conclusion returns. The hospice movement, the palliative care movement, even most of the euthanasia reform movement: these are branches on the same trunk. They negotiate the conditions under which death may be permitted; they do not question the structure that requires the permission.

A rhizomatic thinking about death would look different. It would not begin from the trunk. It would begin in the middle, where most people actually find themselves when the question becomes urgent: not at the beginning of a philosophical argument about the value of life, but inside a specific experience of living that has become, for reasons that are their own, something they cannot continue. It would take seriously the lateral connections that experience makes: to the body, to the history of the person, to the relationships that frame their suffering, to the political and economic conditions that have shaped what options are available to them. It would

refuse the arborescent conclusion (you must stay; your desire to leave is a symptom) without simply inverting it (you should go; death is always available). It would hold the question open, which is the only honest thing to do with a question this large.

The line of flight that dying opens is not a destination. It is a direction. To think seriously about the right to die is to begin loosening the grip of the apparatus that manages life, not because death is better than life in some abstract sense, but because the grip itself is the problem. A life held in place by a system that refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of wanting to leave is not a free life. It is an administered one. And the administration of life, as we have seen, is not neutral. It serves something. The question that anti-life asks is not: should people die? It is: who decided that the system gets to answer that question, and what would it mean to take it back?

/On sources:/ Mbembe's /Necropolitics/ (originally published in /Public Culture/, 2003, expanded into book form); Foucault's /Society Must Be Defended/; Land's "Circuitries" in /Fanged Noumena/ and his early engagements with Freud's /Beyond the Pleasure Principle/.

Part III — The Asymmetry

The question no one is asked

Every person alive was brought into existence without being consulted. This is not a complaint; it is a structural fact about the situation. Consultation is impossible before existence, and so the decision to create a new person is always made entirely by people other than the one most affected by it. The child who will live the life in question, who will feel its pain and its pleasure, who will one day have to make sense of having been born into whatever circumstances they find themselves in, has no say in the matter. They arrive after the decision has already been taken. This is not unusual or remarkable by the standards of how we normally think about reproduction. It is, in fact, how everyone has always thought about it. And that is precisely what makes it worth examining.

David Benatar's argument in /Better Never to Have Been/ begins from a deceptively simple observation about the asymmetry between pleasure and pain in relation to existence and non-existence. The presence of pain is bad. The absence of pain is good, even if there is nobody to enjoy that absence. The presence of pleasure is good. But the absence of pleasure is not bad, unless there is already someone who is deprived of it. This asymmetry, which Benatar argues most people implicitly accept in other contexts, has a consequence that most people find deeply uncomfortable: coming into existence always involves the certainty of some harm (pain, suffering, loss, death), while not coming into existence deprives no one of anything, since there is no one there to be deprived. The calculus, followed honestly, suggests that bringing a new person into existence is always, to some degree, an imposition on them.

The standard objection is immediate: but life also contains pleasure, joy, love, meaning. Why should we weight the pain more heavily? Benatar's answer is not that pain outweighs pleasure in every life (though he argues it does in most lives, more than people are willing to admit). His answer is structural. The pain is guaranteed. The pleasure is contingent. And the guarantee of some harm, inflicted on a person who did not consent to be placed in the position of receiving it, is an ethical fact that the warmth of the anticipated pleasures does not dissolve. You cannot justify imposing a harm on someone by pointing to the good things they will also receive. The harm is still imposed.

Why people do not believe this, and why that is interesting

Benatar's argument is not difficult to follow. It is difficult to accept, and the difficulty is itself informative. Most people who encounter it feel an immediate, powerful resistance that arrives before any counter-argument; a kind of visceral recoil, a sense that something has gone wrong with the reasoning even before they can identify what. Benatar calls this the Pollyanna principle:

the systematic bias toward optimism about our own lives and the lives we intend to create, a bias so consistent across populations and cultures that it appears to be something close to hardwired.

Fisher's capitalist realism is useful here, though it arrives from a different direction. Fisher was concerned with the way capitalism forecloses the imagination of alternatives; not by arguing against them but by making them feel unreal, by saturating the available emotional landscape so thoroughly that anything outside the system produces a specific feeling of groundlessness. The same mechanism operates on the natalist consensus. It is not argued for, in most people's lives. It is felt. The desire for children, the sense that a life without reproduction is somehow incomplete, the anxiety that surfaces when someone announces they have chosen not to have children: none of this is the product of deliberate reasoning. It is the product of a system that has been producing these feelings for a very long time, through family structure, through legal incentives, through the architecture of social life, and now, with increasing precision, through the algorithmic curation of what a good life looks like.

The rhizome, again. The natalist consensus is not a trunk with branches; it is a network so dense and so pervasive that it is nearly impossible to find a point outside it from which to think. Every connection leads back. The childless person is asked when they are having children. The person who says never is asked why, with an expression that already contains the answer: something must be wrong, something must have been missed or refused or failed. The question is not actually a question. It is the system checking in, running a diagnostic, confirming that the node is still connected.

Reproduction as capital

Silvia Federici's work on the enclosure of women's reproductive capacity as a foundational act of early capitalism is not usually read alongside Benatar, but it should be. Federici traces how the transition to capitalism required the transformation of reproduction from a matter of community and individual practice into a matter of state interest; how the witch trials were, among other things, an attack on women's knowledge of their own fertility and their capacity to control it; how the womb became, in her formulation, public territory. The body that reproduces is not, under capitalism, simply a private body making a private choice. It is a productive unit contributing to the labor supply, the consumer base, the tax base, the continuation of the system. Reproduction is not encouraged because children are good for the people who have them. It is encouraged because children are good for the system that needs them.

Land's framing makes this even starker. If capital is an inhuman process that uses human desire as its substrate, then the desire for children is not exempt from that analysis. The warmth of the feeling, the genuine love that parents feel for their children, does not place the feeling outside the system that produced it. The system is very good at producing genuine feelings. That is how it works. The question is not whether the love is real (it is) but whether the love, and the reproduction it motivates, serves interests beyond the people involved in it, and whether those interests have had a hand in shaping the desire in the first place.

This is not a conspiracy. It does not require anyone to be deliberately engineering reproductive desire from a control room somewhere. It requires only that systems which depend on population growth for their continuation will, over time, through the ordinary operation of selection pressures on cultural forms, tend to produce and reinforce the cultural forms that encourage re-

production. The family, in its modern nuclear configuration, is one such form. The idea that a life without children is somehow lesser is another. The specific emotional texture of the natalist consensus (the warmth, the sense of completion, the social belonging it confers) is not the evidence that reproduction is good. It is the mechanism by which the system reproduces itself through the people inside it.

The consent that cannot be given

Benatar's asymmetry argument is sometimes misread as a claim about the quality of life: that most lives are so bad that they are not worth living. He does make a version of this argument, and it is worth taking seriously, but it is not the core of the position. The core is simpler and, in a sense, more irrefutable. It is about consent. Not the quality of what is experienced but the structure of the situation in which experience becomes possible.

To bring a person into existence is to make a decision for them that they cannot unmake. They can, in principle, end their lives; but the decision to have been born in the first place is not one they can revisit. They are committed, from the moment of their creation, to a trajectory that includes suffering, loss, and death, none of which they agreed to. The person who creates them has agreed to none of this on their behalf, because you cannot agree to something on behalf of a person who does not yet exist. You can only decide, and then the person exists, and they live with what was decided for them.

Most ethical frameworks treat consent as a foundational requirement for actions that significantly affect another person. The one context in which this requirement is universally suspended is the creation of a new person. Here, the impossibility of prior consent is treated not as an ethical problem to be grappled with but as a simple fact of the situation, unremarkable, not worth dwelling on. Anti-natalism dwells on it. It asks: given that consent is impossible, given that the person being created will certainly experience suffering and will certainly die, and given that the pleasures they may experience do not dissolve the certainty of the harms, what justifies the decision to create them? The answer that most people give, when they give any answer at all, is some version of: because it will be good for them, or because it will be good for us, or because it is what people do. None of these answers actually addresses the question. They assume what needs to be demonstrated.

What anti-natalism is not saying

Anti-natalism, within AHALAN, is not a program. It does not tell anyone not to have children. It does not claim that people who have children are doing something wrong in any simple or actionable sense; the structural forces that produce reproductive desire are powerful, the love that follows is genuine, and the ethics of individual decisions made within a system that one did not design and cannot easily exit are always complicated. What it says is prior to all of that.

It says: the natalist consensus is not a natural fact. It is a political and economic arrangement, produced and maintained by specific mechanisms, serving specific interests, and experienced as natural precisely because those mechanisms are effective. To see it clearly is not to condemn the people inside it. It is to restore to the question of reproduction the ethical weight it actually carries and that the consensus works, constantly and efficiently, to prevent people from feeling.

The decision to bring a person into the world is one of the largest decisions a human being can make. It is currently treated, by the culture and by most ethical frameworks, as one of the smallest: as something that requires no justification, that carries no burden of proof, that is its own answer. Anti-natalism says only: look at that.

The child at the end of the algorithm

The algorithmic curation of desire that we described in Part I operates on reproductive desire as on everything else, and it operates with particular intensity. The platform knows, with considerable precision, that images of infants produce strong positive affect in most users. It knows that content about pregnancy, about parenthood, about the milestones of child-rearing, generates high engagement. It knows that the community formed around parenthood is one of the most durable and emotionally intense communities available for platform colonization. And so it surfaces this content, relentlessly, to users in the demographic window where reproductive decisions are typically made, reinforcing the feeling that this is what life looks like, that this is where meaning is located, that the people on the other side of the screen who have children are living more fully than those who have not.

This is not a claim that social media invented the desire for children. The desire is older than any platform and is shaped by forces that run much deeper. But the platform intensifies and focuses it, in the same way it intensifies and focuses every desire it identifies as productive; productive for engagement, for the retention of users in their most emotionally vulnerable states, for the sale of the products that surround every image of a new life being welcomed into the world. The child at the end of the algorithm is not a conspiracy. It is the ordinary operation of a system optimizing for its own continuation. Which is, of course, exactly what reproduction is.

/On sources:/ Benatar's /Better Never to Have Been/ (Oxford University Press, 2006) and /The Human Predicament/ (2017); Federici's /Caliban and the Witch/ (Autonomedia, 2004); Fisher's /Capitalist Realism/ (Zero Books, 2009).

Part IV — Lines of Flight

What remains after the argument

A text like this one does not end with a solution. It would be dishonest to pretend otherwise, and the dishonesty would undo most of what the text has tried to do. The problems AHALAN has been circling are not the kind that arguments resolve. They are the kind that arguments, at best, make visible; make strange; make harder to ignore. Whether that is enough is not a question the text can answer. It is a question you carry out of it.

What remains, after three sections of patient and sometimes uncomfortable thinking, is not a program and not a consolation. It is closer to a clearing. A space where certain assumptions have been removed from the furniture, where the room looks different than it did before you walked in, where you can move around more freely precisely because some of the things that were taking up space have been named for what they are. The natalist consensus. The biopower apparatus. The anthropocentric hierarchy. The theological residue inside secular humanism. The algorithm that tells you what feels real. None of these disappear because they have been named. But they lose, in the naming, some of their invisibility. And invisibility is most of their power.

Deleuze and Guattari wrote about lines of flight: not escapes, exactly, but directions; vectors along which something can move that was previously held in place. A line of flight is not a destination. It is the moment when a connection becomes possible that the structure was designed to prevent. AHALAN is, in this sense, less a set of positions than a set of lines of flight; directions in which thinking can move once certain assumptions have been loosened. You do not have to follow them to the end. You do not have to agree with everything they pass through. You only have to be willing to move.

On living inside the argument

There is a question that every text of this kind eventually faces, and it is usually posed as a gotcha, though it deserves a serious answer. If you believe what this text argues, how do you live? If the natalist consensus is a machine for producing desire in the service of capital, if biopower administers your life without your consent, if the anthropocentric hierarchy is a philosophical fiction that has caused incalculable harm, if the algorithm is curation all the way down: what do you do on a Tuesday morning? How do you move through the world?

The honest answer is: approximately the same way as before, but differently. Not because the argument changes nothing (it changes how things feel, which is not nothing) but because most of the structures described in this text are not ones that individual awareness dissolves. Knowing that the natalist consensus is politically produced does not make the desire for connection and continuity evaporate. Knowing that biopower administers your life does not place you outside its reach. Knowing that the algorithm curates your sense of the real does not give you access

to an uncurated real. You are still inside the machine. What you have is a different relationship to being inside it; a relationship that includes knowing it is a machine, which is different from believing it is nature.

Fisher was honest about this in ways that cost him. He knew that capitalist realism was not dissolved by seeing through it. He knew that the depression he wrote about so carefully was not a misunderstanding to be corrected by better theory. The structure and the feeling were real and persistent even after the analysis was complete. What the analysis gave was not freedom from the structure but a different quality of attention to it; a refusal of the specific additional suffering that comes from believing the structure is inevitable, natural, the shape of things rather than the shape of this particular arrangement of things at this particular moment in history. That refusal is not nothing. It is, in fact, quite a lot.

The other species in the room

Something that AHALAN has circled throughout without fully landing on is the question of what a post-anthropocentric ethics actually feels like from the inside. Not the philosophical argument for it, which Parts I and III have made in their different ways, but the texture of daily life when the hierarchy has genuinely loosened. What does it mean to move through the world taking seriously the possibility that the dog at the end of the street, the bird on the wire, the insect in the grass, are not background to your life but participants in it; not resources or obstacles or aesthetic details but subjects, in some sense, of their own experience?

Most people have moments of this. The moment when an animal looks at you directly and something passes between you that is not nothing, that has the quality of recognition even if you cannot say exactly what is being recognized. The moment when you become aware, viscerally rather than intellectually, that the creature in front of you is having an experience; that there is something it is like to be that creature, right now, in this moment, regardless of whether that experience has language or theory or the capacity for self-reflection. Spinoza called this the conatus: the striving of every thing to persist in its own being, the drive that is common to all things that exist. It is not a moral argument. It is an observation about what existence is. Everything that exists is trying to continue. That striving is the basic fact, prior to any hierarchy we build on top of it.

To take that seriously is not to say that all strivings are equivalent, or that no distinctions can be made, or that you cannot kill a mosquito without a philosophical crisis. It is to say that the default assumption (that human striving counts and animal striving is background noise, that human suffering is the subject and animal suffering is a secondary concern, that the world is arranged for our benefit and everything else is scenery) is a choice, not a fact. And it is a choice with consequences that are now visible at a scale that is difficult to look at directly: the sixth mass extinction, proceeding quietly alongside the ordinary business of daily life, largely unregistered by the systems of attention and value that have been designed to register other things.

Smaller and less

The environmental argument that runs beneath all three pillars of AHALAN is not the most philosophically interesting part of the text, but it may be the most urgent. Fewer people means

less pressure on the systems that everything else alive depends on. This is not a controversial empirical claim; it is the straightforward consequence of the relationship between human population, consumption, and ecological carrying capacity. What is controversial is the conclusion that anti-natalism draws from it: that the ethics of reproduction cannot be considered in isolation from the ecology of the planet into which new people are born, and that a world in which billions of people are making reproductive decisions as though those decisions have no ecological dimension is a world that is not thinking clearly about what it is doing.

This is where Land's accelerationism and AHALAN's anti-natalism converge, uncomfortably. Land does not believe that human intentionality can redirect the trajectory of capital; he believes the system will accelerate to its own limit and that what comes after is genuinely unknown. AHALAN does not share the accelerationist's indifference to the suffering that the acceleration involves. But it shares the diagnosis: that the system is not going to be argued out of its trajectory by people who remain fully inside its logic, including the reproductive logic that feeds it. The line of flight here is not a political program. It is a direction of thought that, followed honestly, leads away from the assumption that more human life is always better; leads toward a different relationship with scale, with continuation, with what it means for something to persist.

Smaller and less. Not as a slogan, not as a policy, but as a direction. Less consumption of other lives. Less insistence on the categorical superiority of human experience. Less certainty that the people not yet born should be brought into the particular configuration of suffering and beauty and injustice that constitutes the present world. Less filling of the silence with the assumption that the silence needs filling.

Welcome

AHALAN does not resolve. It began as a conversation between four people who dispersed into their lives, and it ends, now, as a text that will disperse into whatever readings it finds. Some of those readings will be hostile; that is fine, and expected, and in some cases the hostility will contain corrections that the text needs. Some will be partial; readers will find one section useful and another unconvincing, will take a line of flight in a direction the text did not anticipate, will connect ideas here to ideas elsewhere in ways that were not planned. That is the rhizome working. It is not the author's text once it leaves the author. It never was.

What the text hopes for, if a text can hope, is not agreement. It is the specific quality of attention that comes from having been willing to think something through rather than stopping at the edge of it. The edge is where the conditioning works hardest; where the feeling of falling arrives, where the conversation changes subject, where the feed offers something more comfortable. To have stayed past that edge, to have followed the thought into the territory it actually opens rather than the territory you were told it opened: that is what AHALAN is for. Not a conclusion. A beginning that looks like an ending.

The word means welcome. It means: your entry will be easy. It means: you are like family here, in this uncomfortable place, thinking these uncomfortable thoughts, with no guarantee of where they lead. Ahalan.

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Anti-Humanism, Anti-Life, Anti-Natalism. A philosophical essay on the ethics of existence
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