

Liberation Natalism

On Anti-Natalism

Julian Langer

24/4/2021

While I have already written less detailed critical opposition to anti-natalist philosophy; I intend to present here a broader critique of the philosophies that are located within this cartography of thought, after which I will affirm a position against the ideology. My approach to this is one of defiance and rebellion, against those who would assert themselves as a moral authority on the matter of whether it is bad to be born and/or bad to pro-create.

From the outset, I acknowledge that there are individuals for which the idea of being a parent is terrible. To impose parenthood, out of an embrace of (pro)natalism, would not fit the energy of rebellion this analysis is fuel by. For the sake of ensuring that this does not become co-opted by any authoritarian projects, consider this to be a work of anarchist-natalism, natalist-anarchy, anarcho-natalism, liberation-natalism, emancipatory-birth-advocacy and so on – as an effort to resist repression and liberate desire.

Another point that is worth acknowledging here, before I go on, is that there individuals who have undergone certain experiences that have left them feeling like it would have been better not to have been born. These individuals have these feelings, but do not attempt to put moral pressure on other individuals not to reproduce, and do not have any desire to coerce any other individual into not having children. This meditation/analysis/argument is not written with any disregard for these individual's feelings and is not an attempt to encourage them to do something they have no personal desire to do.

Before considering more recent arguments and advocates for anti-natalism, I am going to explore some older religious traditions that are relevant. This is not to attempt historical tracing, but to suggest the type of (poor) ideological-soil from which anti-natalism has grown from.

The first religious tradition to be considered here is Marcionism, an early Christian sect, very similar to many of the Gnostic traditions. It takes its name from that of the individual whose teachings they followed, Marcion of Sinope. Marcion is reported to have been a follower of Paul the apostle, and was denounced as a heretic by the early church fathers, for his beliefs on Christ and God. Marcion taught that the Christian God is not the God of the Hebrew bible, which he saw as evil and should be rejected, as it has (according to Marcion) nothing to do with Christ. Following this, Marcion preached a form of dualism, where the world the Hebrew God created, full of suffering and death, should be rejected, in favour of the Christian God. Jesus, according to Mar-

cionism, didn't have a body and was an entirely spiritual being. So, to embrace God, Marcionism rejects this world, and child birth with it, in search of salvation.

Similar to the Marcionite Christians, the Gnostic Christian followers of Mani believed in an intensely dualistic onto-theological world-view. For Manichaeism, the world is split between 2 fundamental realms of Light and Dark, i.e. good vs bad. With this, humanity was said, by them, to be captured by the Dark realm, with Manichaeist Christianity being a route to salvation. The followers of Mani advocated avoiding procreation, out of a desire to not trap more Light in the realm of Dark.

The last Christian tradition that I will mention here are the Encratites Gnostic sect, whose disregard for procreation stems from their belief that women and sex are the work of Satan, so should be rejected – not an entirely dualistic position like the Marcionite and Manichean, but still a salvationist-type reasoning, as their opposition to sex, which negates procreation, was out of an effort to save their souls. This soteriological theme is not limited to Christian theology though. Both Buddhism and Hinduism have a salvationist ontotheological structure to them, with enlightenment, nirvana and moksha being routes out of the cycle of birth and death, called samsara – Schopenhauer's links to anti-natalism coming from his embrace of Eastern spiritual ideas, though it is questionable if he is an anti-natalist. I personally ceased my Buddhist practice after my experiences as a cancer patient ignited a fire of life desire, with the idea of life (birth-death) renunciation being revolting – the catalyst for much of my thinking since. I am not going into further detail on religious anti-natalist-type arguments here, as it does not seem necessary to do so.

Demarcating a differentiation in the focus of this analysis, from religious arguments that are both similar to and likely the soil from which anti-natalist philosophy has grown from, to the ideology itself, questions come to me. Why would these people come to the position that they must be saved from existence/life/Being? What feeling does this grow from? Two thoughts immediately strike me when considering these questions. The first of these is how much this line of reasoning fits what is known in anti-civilisation thought as ideology-of-victimisation – where someone adopts the identity of someone who has had something morally wrong done to them, and so must be saved from it. The second thought is that this reminds me of the existentialist concepts of bad faith and resentment, as an attempt to deny freedom and the self-deception of a position of weakness before an imagined cause of frustration – an evil authority is assumed to deny responsibility.

The salvation line of reasoning within religious anti-natalism is continued within the philosophical tendency, noticeably in the essay *The Last Messiah* by Peter Wessel Zapffe. His argument is primarily that, as Man-kind has (apparently) over-developed its consciousness through evolutionary processes, Man-kind is intellectually capable of recognising the world as insufficient and unsatisfactory. This argument is embraced by Ligotti, in his *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, which is more ideologically anti-natalist than Zapffe's essay (though Zapffe was an advocate for anti-natalist ideology). The immediate and painfully obvious issue with this argument is one that anyone with even a secondary school understanding of evolutionary processes can identify. Evolution isn't a development from lower to higher forms; it is not changing in a developmentally teleological fashion, which humanity has over-reached. The journey from dinosaur to chicken was neither progressive nor regressive development, but biological-becoming out of will-to-life. The idea that humanity is over-evolved fits an Abrahamic-theological world-view,

which humanity sits on top of the great chain of being as ontologically superior creatures – an entirely fallacious and frankly ridiculous idea.

Anti-natalism is largely founded upon negation and the negative. Julio Cabrera's negative ethics, which argues that procreation is a form of manipulation, rests upon the idea of opposition to affirmative ethics. The negative utilitarian perspective – which is extremely Buddhistic – relies on the claim that the nonexperience of suffering is better than the experience of happiness. These rest upon the claim that not-Being is morally superior to Being. This is, like the Marcionite and Manichean positions, a highly dualistic form of argument. Dualism falls apart as a position though, when you bring up the issue of interaction – how do truly separate-planes of existence interact? But there is another issue for me. How can you really build an ideology on the negative, the less than zero, on what is less than nothing? To build upon less than nothing seems like an even more pointless endeavour than the guy in Jesus's story, who built his house upon the sands. As such, my suspicion is you cannot. If you cannot then perhaps what is happening within anti-natalism is actually a half-arsed affirmation of the actual, as a disgruntled affirmation of Being. It seems strange to me though, to only go half of the way – if you're going to affirm Being in any sense, why not affirm the experience of suffering as something egoistically valuable in an individual's personal-empowerment, or procreation as life/Being. Even if a human individual does not procreate sexually other human individuals and participate in vaginal or caesarean birth, when they die they/their-body will decompose and become new life, giving birth to new Being through affirmative creativity. The attempt at negation is rendered pointless. The matter that would have been the children they birthed has only given birth to other beings. In the academic field of logic there is a concept where the negative is seen as failure – the anti-natalist negation seems to fit this concept here. Not-Being seems to be a realm of phantasms and spooks, which anti-natalism attempts to build upon.

While Benatar's anti-natalist hedonism is in many ways similar to negative utilitarianism, it is not the same argument. One of the foundational axioms of Benatar's argument, which is similar, is that pain is bad and that the absence of pain is good. This totally overlooks the desirable qualities of pain. Psychologically, painful experiences can feel good – this is often embraced in sexual masochism. Also a life experience that was totally devoid of pain would seem totally insufficient – doesn't the desirability of painful art, such as horror films, tedious but brilliant books and paintings that are beautiful and depressing, suggest that we really desire painful experience? It seems to me that we value pain as a means of reminding us that we are alive, as an affirmation of Being.

I mention here Emil Cioran, his *The Trouble With Being Born* and the anti-natalist philosophy he presents, only to have included it here, due to its popularity among many nihilist-anarchists. In truth, I find it thoroughly devoid of insight and a work of indulgent psychological-weakness, appealing for pity from an ideological position of victimisation. The only aphorism of real note, in my opinion, within the text is when Cioran points out that it is already too late to kill yourself. A criticism might be that I am missing some sort of nuance to Cioran's position of neither life nor death being preferable, but whenever I look at the text I'm struck immediately with a sense of revulsion towards the piteous content and my desire for authenticity is greater than my interest in tolerating what simple comes across as drivel to me.

Cioran's ideology of indulgent-victimisation, resentment and bad faith, is reminiscent of Seana Shiffrin's argument that the unborn cannot consent to being born. This runs along the moral principle that the only things that ought to be experienced by an individual are those they

agree to. From this argument, the rain is evil, as no one gave rain their consent to fall on them. We must also consider earthquakes to be evil, as the tectonic plates didn't gain the consent of those they have shaken. Bird song too is evil, as we did not grant them our permission to force us to hear them! It seems to me that the consent argument positions the unborn as a psychic-authority to determine what potential parents might do. I do not take this argument very seriously. Like Cioran, it embraces a position of weakness that I simply find to be revolting.

My response to the anti-natalist advocates of ideological-victimisation is basically; yes, we are condemned to existence – now deal with yours!

There are those who advocate anti-natalism from environmental and animal-oriented concerns, which are very different from religious and philosophical justifications for the argument. Both positions generally come down to the availability of resources and the cruel use of animals within the anthropological-machine Reality of civilisation. Of all the arguments for anti-natalism, these are those that I am most sympathetic towards and have the most respect for. My disagreements with this variant of anti-natalist thought I write here with an appreciation for the values that they come from and a feeling of empathy for those advocating it. The first of these disagreements is that this overlooks that, as much as a human body is a body, it is also an environment and a world to many living beings, who live lives that are ontologically valuable, from a perspective that is willing to recognise them. As environmentalists, we value the potentiality for forests found in soils and rains, so why not value the potentiality within a mother's egg and a father's sperm? There is also potential within human procreation for individuals to grow into de-humanised animals, who actively deconstruct and destroy the anthropological-machine Reality that inflicts cruelty upon animals (both human and non-human) – who raising, protecting and caring for seems like an excellent activity for those individuals who feel revolted by what this culture has built. Really, this line of anti-natalist thought embraces a position of human-exceptionalism, under the lens of a misanthropic-ecological ideology.

Finally, there are those anti-natalists who come from a position of class prejudice and ability supremacism. Individuals from this variant of the ideology are typically those found on reddit and other web-forums, who make the claim that it is immoral for individuals with certain health conditions or who live in financial poverty to reproduce. The shallowness and vulgarity of these arguments warrant little-to-no response or consideration, as they are barely even thoughts. I only mention it here to have not left any anti-natalist-type arguments out of consideration. While far less thoughtful than any of the other arguments already mentioned, this is likely to be the motivation for any potential anti-natalist political program, along side other positions flirting with eugenictype thoughts (or just straight up advocacy).

On Anarcho-Natalism

So far, I have focused on attempting to deconstruct and destroy anti-natalism, in as many of the various forms it takes, as I am aware of (though there likely are arguments I have neglected to reflect). Some of the flavour of what I am playfully calling anarcho-natalism/liberation-natalism will no doubt have permeated through sections already, but I will dedicate the rest of this piece to exploring the topography of this idea in more depth, with a personal reflection at the end. As with surveying any space, it is impossible to see all of it all at once, some areas will likely be explored in less detail (possibly missed), and the exploration of the space is only as it is encountered here, today, as I (and you) find it.

To reiterate a point I made earlier – like how there are anarchist advocates of capitalism and anarchist advocates of communism who imagine that the other wishes to enforce a life experience on them that they do not desire, there may well be individuals who would read this in bad faith and make the claim that what is being advocated here is some kind of stateless enforcement of procreation. To anyone reading this who is suspicious of such a sub-textual or subliminal intention within the content, I am stating here that this is not at all what I am advocating. While I am putting forward what could generally be considered a “pro-life” position, I am entirely opposed to the idea of anyone being coerced into parenthood, either hypothetically or in actually-occurring situations (such as those experienced by many women across the world), as someone who is pro-choice/freedom/self-liberation/individual-empowerment – there is no opposition to access to contraception or abortion here.

A friend commented on an earlier draft of this that they feel that natalism needs no advocacy, as life simply happens, and that we are already saturated in anarcho-hyphenations. As much as I see the points they raise, I still feel a desire to put forward an argument for the radical potential for natalism. The moralideological structure of anti-natalism is ultimately restrictive and so lends itself to authoritarian thinking – as the authorisers of acceptable behaviours. And regarding (yet) another anarcho-concept being introduced here; my anarchistrebellion is inclined toward guerrilla-ontological actions of creating new destructive incendiary concepts and the acceleration of the deterritorialisation of the Reality we live in – so I’m more inclined towards supersaturating, to the point of forming phase changes that crystallise into new forms of perception.

Imagine for a moment this – due to the pressures of ecological collapse and depleted resources, as well as a cultural embrace of anti-natalist philosophy and theology, an ideologically misanthropic totalitarian world government is formed, similar to Maoists and Nazis in many ways, which seeks to enforce a global nobirth policy. You are fertile, you have not had a vasectomy or been sterilised and you wish to become a parent. You do not share the perspective of the society at large philosophically and have different religious feelings (possibly atheistic).

Are you going to conform to social and political pressures not to live as you want to, or are you going to find a space for yourself to live as you wish, an autonomous zone, and be a parent as you desire? Of course, this is just an imagined future. But I would hope that, under the circumstances, you would rebel!

The ground from which anarcho-natalism grows from is one of rebellion. Rejectful of the moral appeals to conformity within anti-natalist advocacy, anarcho-natalism has the energetic quality of individualist-amoralism, which refuses to bend to social pressures. Like nudists, queers and egoists, this natalist embraces their desires and refuses repression.

The anarchist natalist has come to appreciate the praxis of parenthood, as they know that there is no one right way to live, for any of us, but are choosing parenthood for themselves. My experience of talking about their being-parents with radical-dads and anarcho-mummies is entirely of their feeling that there is no right way to live, to parent and so on, but that it is what they want to do and that they wouldn’t do anything else. These parents also have a desire to encourage their children to deconstruct authoritarianism, to live a life that rebels against the system and to be beautifully creative (in their destructive passions) – while also appreciating that the children they guide have their own adventures to explore, inclinations, minds and desires. This is what liberation natalism seeks to bring – the opportunity for a generation raised with the

energy of rebellion, liberation and primal anarchy. Not to oblige or force anyone into parenthood, but to embrace the desires of individuals to parent and parent as they wish.

Rather than being reasons to not procreate, anarcho-natalism is prepared to stake the claim that living through a mass extinction event and the systemic collapse of global-civilisation makes this space we live in one where new-life is more desirable. Yes, there will be struggle. Yes, there will be suffering. Life has always involved suffering and struggle though, and will always. However, now holds far greater potential for resurgency, through struggle and suffering, and for the joys of wild adventures and creative liberation.

There are anarchists for whom anti-natalist praxis, that is personal as opposed to moral, fits their desires and preferences, which this is not a challenge of. If you do not want to be a parent, don't. If you resonate more with the arguments in the French zine *The Future Is A Scam*, as an anarchist anti-natalist whose rebellion is more inclined to refuse feelings of societal pressure to adopt parenthood, anarcho-natalism is not your praxis and that is likely to not be contended by anyone who finds resonance with liberation natalism.

Liberation natalism is resistant against the push for non-creation and the effort, whether pressured socially or through legislation and police, to coerce loneparents, couples and polyamorous families out of procreating, by proponents of anti-natalism who would seek to deny anyone their desire to become-parent. It is also the act of taking a chance, in the way that life is always taking a chance – especially in the context of rebellion – in the potential for new desirable experiences.

This comes from a similar feeling of defiance towards the rhetoric of eugenics, in particular with regards to the Zapffe-Ligotti type arguments, where human-type consciousness is not considered a desirable evolutionary trait, so should be erased from the gene pool, and those who are prejudicial towards those living in poverty or deemed less-able – this is not to say that either Zapffe or Ligotti are advocates of eugenics, but is a comment on how their arguments would fit the rhetoric of eugenics advocates of fixing “evolutionary mistakes”. Anti-natalist dogma, taken into the realms of biopolitics, would suggest a type of political programming even uglier than efforts in ethnic-cleansing – of course, this is an imagined potential future, but it warrants consideration. Liberation natalists would immediately resist any current or future effort in enforced sterilisation, or vasectomies.

Rather than a moral-act, it is an egoistic activity, embracing freedom through procreation, as it comes from the selfish desire to embrace your individual will-to-life/power, the desire to love and care for someone you have been part of the process of creating, and out of the refusal to sacrifice your-desires by notprocreating for some Cause. Rather than perpetuating narratives of repression and life-renunciation, liberation-natalism occurs when procreation is an embrace of the desires of the individuals involved. There are, without question, things people who become parents go without, when choosing to care for a child, but this is an embrace of their freedom, as they decide to care for the child and give up what is less desirable to them than caring for the child. To argue that they are forced to give up certain activities is bad faith, as by there being alternatives for them to choose from, they are choosing to not-do them.

In many ways, what anarcho-natalism is resistant towards is authoritarianpaternalistmorality of anti-natalists who would claim to know what is best for not-yet-born individuals. In this sense, the liberation natalist rebellion is equally one of child/youth liberation against the oppressive/repressive uber-Parent (who knows best). Like a bullying grandparent, who belittles their child's efforts in parenting, anti-natalists assume a position of knowing what is best for the child, before the child is even born or conceived, so attempt to take control of their fate.

To the anti-natalists, there is a problem – life/existence. So there is a solution – perhaps even a final solution(?). Those who believe in problems to be solved typically adhere to the logic of the solution is the right way, so people should follow the right way. If people aren't doing what they “should” do, society will usually turn to state apparatus to enforce correct behaviour. If anti-natalist morality were to follow this trajectory, the ideas presented here are intended as a spanner in the works, and are intended to encourage individuals to do as they wish.

Liberation-natalism, anarcho-natalism, rejects the idea that life is a problem to be solved! Rather, it is an experience to be embraced and a world to explore and an adventure! This could be considered procreative-rebellion as well.

Personal Reflections

While, as I write this, I am not yet a parent, becoming-parent is a personal desire of mine, which is also intensely shared by my partner.

I was born with a type of brain tumour that forms in the womb and is thought to be the result of genetics. The tumour went unfound until I was 19. I could resent my parents for bringing me into the world, condemned to be a cancer patient or die young before it could be found, through an agonising death, but I am grateful for all I have gained from the experience – and if I died from it, I had many experiences that were wonderful and valuable. Also, I could decide not to reproduce, to not risk that same genetic trait being passed on to any child I could father, but I would not, because I know that any life is going to have suffering through it and still be worth it, really.

There is the potential for my losing my fertility before I am ready personally and as a couple, to procreate, as an after-effect of the radiation therapy to my pineal gland and how it might eventually affect my pituitary gland. If this is the case, I may very well become a supporter of anarcho-natalism, who is unable to procreate. There is likely a degree to which I feel inclined to resist people being coerced out of biological-parenthood, given the possibility of my losing my chance biologically.

I write this reflection here for the most part to refute any claim that I have not considered this personally, or with sincere and sober reflection, but only academically or as a political concept.

Of course, my individual subjectivity will have impacted my interpretations of anti-natalist arguments and, particularly in the case of Cioran, my feelings of sympathy when reading them. Rather than attempting to deny this through reducing my thoughts to appear more objective, I have done my best to not depersonalise this.

It is also entirely possible that the claim could be made that I am in denial of my own bad faith on the matter, in how I have considered anti-natalism and how it lends itself to authoritarian thinking, as a restrictive moral-ideology. When I consider this introspectively, my feeling is that this is not bad faith, as I do not feel like anti-natalism holds any restrictive-authority over me individually now, but a pessimism towards the tendency of over-socialised individuals to seek out fascistic-type structures to enforce what they feel is the right way – the wish for oppression. A more optimistic reading of anti-natalism might question this and criticise me here, but given how anti-life the machinery of fascistic regimes are, from concentration camps, mass shootings and gas chambers, through to the authoritarian structures of societal daily life and totalitarian agriculture, I would be dishonest if I denied how intensely anti-natalism appears to lend itself to this form of ideology.

For me, being an anarchist means a commitment to the liberation of life and flows of desire, while destroying mediums of repression. I have tried my best to reflect that throughout this piece on liberation-natalism!

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