

The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast #19 Julio Cabrera 'Questionnaire on Antinatalism'

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HhFZ38zYQ8> [Sep 15, 2020]

[0:00:16]

Hello everyone, and welcome to the 19th episode of The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast, a podcast all about the subject of antinatalism, created by antinatalists. My name is Amanda “Oldphan” Sukenick, also known as ForeverWolfFilms on YouTube, and today I’m proud to announce is an extremely special edition of Exploring Antinatalism. Today’s episode is a rare, exclusive look into the Negative Ethics of prolific and legendary South American antinatalist Julio Cabrera!

Due to the language barrier between Mr. Cabrera and myself, a simple one-on-one interview was impossible to produce. However, because Mr. Cabrera sincerely wished to be a part of the podcast, and to answer all the questions submitted to him by the antinatalist community, he proposed instead to painstakingly produce this short film, which includes both text answers as well as exclusive video footage of Mr. Cabrera answering our questions himself! Longer, written versions of this interview, where Mr. Cabrera answers even more of the questions that were sent to him, will also soon be available on the Exploring Antinatalism website, in multiple languages no less!

On behalf of the entire antinatalist community, I wanna say the most sincere thank you for all the time and effort Mr. Cabrera put into producing this interview. Thank you so much, Julio! And now, on with the show!

Questionnaire on Antinatalism.....	[0:01:45]
<u>(1). About my philosophy</u>	[0:02:52]
<u>Question 1</u>	[0:03:00]
<u>Question 2</u>	[0:04:26]
<u>Question 3</u>	[0:05:23]
<u>Question 4</u>	[0:06:41]
<u>Question 5</u>	[0:09:00]
<u>Question 6</u>	[0:11:07]
<u>Question 7</u>	[0:13:19]
<u>Question 8</u>	[0:15:09]
<u>Question 9</u>	[0:17:24]
<u>Question 10</u>	[0:21:20]
<u>Question 11</u>	[0:23:22]
<u>(2). Antinatalism: pro and against</u>	[0:32:57]
<u>Question 12</u>	[0:33:06]
<u>Question 13</u>	[0:39:07]
<u>Question 14</u>	[0:40:40]
<u>Question 15</u>	[0:42:35]
<u>(3). Autonomy, activism and manipulation</u>	[0:44:24]
<u>Question 16</u>	[0:44:31]
<u>Question 17</u>	[0:55:53]
<u>(4). Animals and veganism</u>	[0:58:20]
<u>Question 18</u>	[0:58:27]
<u>Question 19</u>	[1:02:45]
<u>Question 20</u>	[1:09:23]
<u>(5). Abortion</u>	[1:12:40]
<u>Question 21</u>	[1:12:47]
<u>(6). Benatar and analytic antinatalism</u>	[1:26:38]
<u>Question 22</u>	[1:26:45]

[0:01:45]

Questionnaire on Antinatalism

Julio Cabrera

Some of my responses – involuntary sterilization ([Question 16](#)), animal ethics ([Question 18](#)) and abortion ([Question 21](#)) – are extremely controversial, although they are carefully argued. Remember that my answers are just lines of argument that I do not intend to impose, but only to propose. I hope that my interlocutors will do the same.

Sometimes, after reading or listening to one person speak, the other says: “It is very interesting, but I don’t agree.” This is trivial because disagreement is what is expected; impossible to agree with everything we hear.

Our lines of argumentation can be very different, but each of them can be correct according to their own assumptions. Euthanasia, sterilization or abortion may be immoral in some lines of argument and moral in others.

I did the text and subtitles in English myself. If someone finds my English very poor, I remember that I prefer to express my ideas in Spanish, but the readers’ Spanish is perhaps more defective than my English.

Julio Cabrera

[0:02:52]

(1). About my philosophy

[0:03:00]

Question 1:

How did you originally come to the subject of Antinatalism?

You were creating Antinatalist works long before there was a word for this idea in popular use – When was the first time you heard the word ‘Antinatalism’?

Cabrera:

The origin of my pessimism is autobiographical. The terrors of existence were revealed to me as a child. Since childhood I felt that my existence was a mistake, something that should not have happened. I don’t know when I first heard these ideas, but I have lived them since I have a memory. This did not come from reading books, antinatalism is not an academic issue for me. The University only gave me the technical tools.

I talked on the immorality of procreation in my book *Projeto de ética negativa* (“Project for a Negative Ethics”), from 1989. The British philosopher G. E. Moore is considered the creator of “metaethics” despite his never using that term. Likewise, I should be considered the creator of “antinatalism” despite the fact that I never used that term. That is why I say, in my 2018 bioethics conference, that antinatalism was born in South America.

The publication of Benatar’s book in 2006 did not teach me anything new but gave me more courage to publicly expose my ideas. Brazilian philosophy professors considered the immorality of procreation “an absurd idea”. Now they had to swallow the bitter pill that even the Oxford University Press published “absurdities”.

[0:04:26]

Question 2:

Can you explain to me your general position on the subject of antinatalism?

Cabrera:

I accept the central idea: better not to be born, better not procreate. But I have three reservations. First, antinatalism is, in my case, just a part of a negative ethics, which is based on a negative ontology. The problem of procreation is a special problem, not the central one; and it does not appear out of nowhere, but within a complex system of ideas. Secondly, my antinatalism is not centered on the issue of suffering, but on manipulation. Thirdly, antinatalists are ethical pessimists, but they remain logical optimists. All of these questions will be clarified throughout the questionnaire. But these ethical and logical reservations are not enough to undermine the central antinatalist idea.

[0:05:23]

Question 3:

What has been the reception of your Antinatalist ideas in South America?

Cabrera:

I was born in Argentina, but I spent half my life in Brazil. I cannot say what their reception would have been had I stayed in Argentina. In the Brazilian academia of philosophy, this reception was bad on the part of the teachers, but the younger students were very interested.

At the beginning of the century, undergraduate monographs and master’s dissertations on negative ethics began to appear, but always amid the skepticism of Brazilian academics. In 2012 I organized a seminar on negative ethics and procreation with two colleagues from the University of Brasília, both opposed to pessimism and antinatalism.

There is, to my knowledge, no outstanding philosopher who is antinatalist or even pessimistic in the Brazilian philosophical community, although there are, of course, many “experts in Schopenhauer’s philosophy”. In Brazil, the only philosophical work appreciated is the commentary and interpretation of European philosophers, classical or contemporary.

When I gave lectures in Mexico, Uruguay and Colombia, I had the same impression: skepticism from the teachers, interest from the students. In Mexico I had a discussion with Enrique Dussel on the issue of suicide and I gave a seminar on negative ethics in Xalapa, but I found almost no one who agreed with my ideas.

I have no notice about the existence of an academic antinatalism in Latin America, although on the Internet young people argue a lot about the subject.

[0:06:41]

Question 4:

We are living in an era where virtually anyone can be an Antinatalist and come to Antinatalist conclusions with very little education and very little exposure to any kind of academic philosophy. And there is currently a very large divide between Antinatalists that are of the academic world and the world of Antinatalism that has grown up significantly out of the YouTube and social media. What are your thoughts on this divide?

Do you follow the development of Antinatalism through the internet at all? YouTube? Facebook? Anything from the Antinatalist social media world?

Did you know that there is a Brazilian Antinatalist Facebook group that currently has over 100k members? It’s currently the largest Antinatalist community in the world!

Cabrera:

The identity between “philosophy” and “academic philosophy” still prevails. I have directed heavy criticisms against academic philosophy in my book *Diário de um filósofo no Brasil* (“Diary of a Philosopher in Brazil”) (2010) and in many articles (see [Question 5](#)). The divide between academic philosophy and philosophical reflection by other means – cinema, literature, popular art, Internet – affects any philosophical discussion, not just antinatalism.

This leads to the very serious question of who can and who cannot do philosophy in our communities, what are the credentials that allow us to think. In the particular case of antinatalism, I believe it is very important that its central theses leave the academic sphere and reach larger audiences.

I know of the existence of that group that you mention, *Antinatalismo - Não ter filhos é um ato de amor* (“Antinatalism – not having children is an act of Love”), created in 2019, I think, and with more than 2,000 members. The group is linked to a Facebook page with the same name that has more than 100,000 followers (not necessarily members of the group). Their objective is to organize a social and political movement in favor of the right of non-procreation and they study authors such as Mainländer, Benatar, Schopenhauer, Cioran, Ligotti and Cabrera, among others.

I don’t interact with them, and I don’t use Facebook, but I am happy to see alternative spaces emerging to discuss philosophical issues. As Amanda Sukenick says in one of her videos about my work, I transit in an intermediate space between academic and non-academic. I have a long academic career, but I always try to keep an accessible and popular tone, avoiding the jargon. In this my masters are Schopenhauer, William James and Ortega y Gasset.

Our book *Porque te amo, não nascerás* (“Because I love you will not be born”) (written with Thiago Lenharo) is a popular philosophical novel accessible to all kinds of audiences.

[0:09:00]

Question 5:

Can you tell me about some of your most recent works, as well as what you hope to produce in the future?

Cabrera:

I am very satisfied with my last triad of books. First, *Mal-estar e moralidade*, published in 2018 in Brasília, in Portuguese, a 700-page book that contains the sum of my ethical thinking, dealing with the sensible and moral value of human life, moral impediment, the outline of negative ethics and the long arguments on procreation and abortion. The book covers also the issues of health, Nazism, freedom, religion, death penalty, war, sexuality and the ethics of animals.

The English version of this book, “Discomfort and Moral Impediment”, which appeared in England in 2019, contains all the most important issues of the Brazilian book, but many topics were not included. Interestingly, the topic of suicide is dealt with more extensively in the English book than in the Brazilian one, in chapter 17: “From Procreation to Suicide”.

The third book, published in England in late 2019, “Introduction to a Negative Approach to Argumentation”, is not about negative ethics, it is about negative logic, but it should be read together with my ethics books. I was a professor of logic for several years, and I have been always interested in the logic of philosophical argumentation.

In this book I deal with metaphilosophical issues such as the difficulties of reaching consensual conclusions in philosophy, the endless character of philosophical discussions and the usual philosophers’ claim that they are “not understood” by other philosophers. With this book I want to tell antinatalists that just as our lives are never as good as we believe they are, neither are our arguments as good as we believe they are.

It is a pity that you do not read in Portuguese or Spanish because a very important part of my recent work consists of articles about the issue of thinking from Latin America. The book *Diário de um filósofo no Brasil* (“Journal of a philosopher in Brazil”) (2013, 2nd edition) and many articles like *Europeu não significa universal. Brasileiro não significa nacional* (“European does not mean universal. Brazilian does not mean national”) (2015) and the *Esbozo de una introducción al pensamiento desde ‘América Latina’* (“Outline of an introduction to thinking from ‘Latin America’”) (2018). (References can be found in the section “Selected works” of my website.)*

At the moment I am not writing new books, only articles. All my ethical work is published, but it is still little known. For this reason, my future projects go more towards diffusion of what I have already produced.

[0:11:07]

Question 6:

Can you envisage a plausible mode of living that avoids (or diminishes to a trivial level) the “Moral Impediment” or is this an intrinsic feature of life that is inescapable?

Cabrera:

The thesis of moral impediment is very important in my philosophy, and it helps to understand why my pessimism is, above all, an ethical pessimism, not a hedonistic or sensible pessimism. I am not primarily pessimistic because of suffering, but because it is impossible to be moral with others and because others cannot be moral with me. My antinatalism is also primarily moral: not to procreate not only to save someone from suffering, but because procreating is a manipulative act (therefore immoral) and because it creates another morally disabled being, beings who will be structurally incapable of morality.

* URL: <https://philosopherjuliocabrera.blogspot.com/p/complete-works.html>.

Of course, I do not maintain that we are never moral; we can be, but we are never moral to anyone without harming other humans. The central idea is that the room for maneuver in the situation in which our parents placed us is very narrow; this makes it impossible for us to be morally correct with everyone in all circumstances. We are already born in immoral societies constituted on the basis of the exploitation of most people.

It is not always something intentional, but the human situation disables us even when we intend to be good and correct with everyone; moral impediment is something that happens to us, not always something that we provoke. That is why it cannot be identified with the thesis that “we are all immoral”.

Even so, the moral impediment thesis appears to be quite counter-intuitive; any careless reader will find it exaggerated and absurd, because people have the strong impression that they are moral and that morally incorrect people are just a few, the crooks, the delinquents, the corrupts. But if we see well, we are constantly incorrect and aggressive towards others, even since childhood, in order to survive, to pave the way and nurture our self-esteem without which it is impossible to live.

To answer your question I would say that, in principle, it is not possible to escape moral impediment. As long as you want to continue living, the chances of you falling into moral impediment multiply (including the possibility of procreation). Even dying can also be unethical. I believe that the moral impediment thesis – as exposed in “Discomfort and Moral Impediment” – is one of my most important contributions to negative thinking and antinatalism, and readers should try to understand it properly.

[0:13:19]

Question 7:

Why is there no Portuguese version of *Crítica de la moral afirmativa*?

Will more of your work see (proper) translation to English?

Why aren't more of his works translated into English?

Cabrera:

As the ideas of the *Projeto de ética negativa* (“Project of Negative Ethics”) were not discussed in the Brazilian academia, I decided to publish my second book on the subject in Spanish. The *Crítica de la moral afirmativa* (“Critique of affirmative morality”) was written in Madrid in the early 90s and published in 1996; the second edition includes a discussion with Benatar. There was never a Portuguese version, I wrote it directly in Spanish. Many years later, in 2011, I had an English translation of this work done, but despite the translator's efforts it was very imperfect.

In 2017, Joshua Queirós translated *Porque te amo, não nascerás* (“Because I love you, you will not be born”) (written with Thiago Lenharo) and the first chapter of the *Projeto de ética negativa* (“Project of Negative Ethics”) of 1989, *Paternidade e abstenção* (“Paternity and abstention”), and some conferences and articles. In the same year, the entry “Julio Cabrera” on Wikipedia was designed by a group of readers, especially Piotr Miron, in three languages, English, Portuguese and Polish.

In 2019 Cambridge Scholars Publishing published the books, “Discomfort and Moral Impediment” and “Introduction to a Negative Approach to Argumentation”. In the English version of my website there are several short articles.

Why are there no more works of mine in English? Well, why should there be? In 2018, I posted on my page the text “Why what is not written in English does not exist? Language as ontological policy”.* I think that people should make an effort to read in Spanish and Portuguese and stop thinking that what is not written in English does not exist.

* URL: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_e9vR3ALfkVISzSibVL2yjG4_6SFIBII/view.

[0:15:09]

Question 8:

Did you have a good time working with Thiago Lenharo di Santis and Márcia Tiburi? Please, talk about the creative work behind *Porque te amo, não nascerás* and other collab books.

Cabrera:

The collaboration with Márcia Tiburi was excellent, but it was about cinema and philosophy. I think that would take us away from the subjects of this interview. I prefer to talk a little about my work with Thiago Lenharo.

He was my student in the beginning of the new century. He had little participation in class discussions, but he seemed obsessed with the issue of procreation and birth. He was very involved in discussions about this topic, always presenting convincing arguments. I remember once that I quoted in the classroom Max Frisch's sentence in *Homo faber* ("The Traveler"): *Ich halte nichts von Selbstmord, das ändert ja nichts daran, daß man auf der Welt gewesen ist* ("Suicide is no use; it does not erase the fact of having been"). Thiago exclaimed, quite irritated: "Nothing erases the fact of having been!"

He had read all my texts on procreation with great interest. A few years later, around 2007, the idea of writing a book together spontaneously arose. We started to discuss and take notes. I was surprised by the fact that he did not have a library, as if he didn't want to pile up many things. I pointed out many formal corrections to his text, and he always accepted them without any problem; we never had any disagreement, and he was always in an excellent mood.

The book was published in 2009; we made a presentation at the Carpe Diem restaurant; there were many family members and friends of Thiago who congratulated him with great affection. He was very happy. A while later, I proposed to him to write another book, this one about suicide, but he refused; he said he was not interested in anything else, that our book had completely satisfied him. He was very busy with its diffusion, including international, and sent many copies abroad. It was an extraordinary experience where an old teacher had the opportunity to learn from a young student.

Around 2010, I believe, he moved with his family to the interior of São Paulo, and we never met again; we maintained sparse correspondence until approximately 2014. In 2015, his sister contacted me saying that Thiago had committed suicide. I was very surprised because we always talk about suicide in a theoretical and literary way; I never thought he could put this into practice. I was very sad. After the first impact, I tried not to be too shaken as a sign of respect for his thinking. Thiago was a pessimistic philosopher, so that, from his point of view, mistakenly or not, he had succeeded in getting out of a life that he considered dark and painful. We had no right to be selfishly devastated just because we would be forever deprived of his luminous and stimulating presence.

[0:17:24]

Question 9:

Does he think that death is bad for the one who dies? In other words, does he disagree with the "epicurean argument"? And if he does think death is bad for the one who dies, does he think death is bad because it deprives the one who dies of more life, or some other account (or in addition to the deprivation account) of the badness of death, like a desire to live, or Jeff McMahan's "time-relative interest account"? And what difference does he make between humans and other animals regarding this?

Cabrera:

Following Seneca's footsteps, I distinguish between punctual death and structural death; the latter coincides with birth. We are born mortals, live mortally and finally die; death runs through our entire life, it is not something that awaits us only "in the end". Certainly, against Epicurus, structural death is bad for those who live it, and suffer it as a constant, inevitable and irreversible decline. Punctual death is bad, but its evil is derived, not primitive; overriding fact is that we were born mortals, with a time bomb hanging from our necks. I do not, therefore, accept the Epicurean argument because it applies only

to punctual death. But punctual death is not bad because it “deprives” of a “good life”, but because it consummates, in general in a painful way, the evil of being born. In negative ethics, to say that death is bad is to say that our (inevitably mortal) life is bad, that being born is bad. We did not lose anything by dying that we had not already lost at birth. Precisely, one of the most effective antinatalist arguments is that we harm those who are born by placing them not only in punctual death, but in structural death, in the slow decline of their existences until its consummation at any time.

(I’ll talk about animals later.)

[0:21:20]

Question 10

What is your meta-ethical position?

What’s your meta-ethics?

Cabrera:

This is a very important question. There is a narrow sense of meta-ethics that comes from analytic philosophy that studies moral language and the meaning of ethical concepts. A broader sense encompasses epistemological, anthropological and even ontological questions. The most interesting meta-ethics for negative ethics is this broader one.

But I think that it is very important to ask this same question to all ethics that include antinatalism. From what we see, when antinatalists claim that procreation is immoral they do not mean that they do not like to see people having children or that they disapprove of procreation; they want to point to something objectively and absolutely wrong. The meta-ethics of antinatalism appear to be of a strong cognitive type, but this is rarely explicitly said.

From a negative ethics the three following meta-ethical questions can be answered this way:

- (A). Is it possible to argue in ethics? Negative ethics thinks that it is perfectly possible to argue in ethics, but always in an endless and inconclusive way; no philosophical question is definitively over; there is no checkmate in philosophy, there is no match point in philosophy.
- (B). Do moral statements point to objective facts? Negative ethics is perspectivistic, not subjectivist; so, moral statements can be true or false, but always relatively to a perspective. When negative ethics claims that procreation is morally wrong, it means that we can defend this thesis with arguments; it is not something purely subjective or emotive. But, on the other hand, it is objective always from a point of view. (This position is largely in line with ideas of the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset.)
- (C). Is the human being capable of morality? Negative ethics sustains that humans are able to formulate the moral requirement on the level of discourse, but they are not in conditions to fulfill it in practice. (This is the core of the moral impediment thesis.)

So, I would say that the meta-ethics of negative ethics is epistemically cognitivist but logically perspectivistic and anthropologically pessimistic (a negative meta-ethics).

[0:23:22]

Questions 11:

How has literature and cinema influenced your philosophy?

What is the purpose of the arts in the grand scheme of things?

Knowing that you are also a film scholar, I’m curious what potential, if any, you see Antinatalism having, as a fairly unexplored narrative and motivational tool in the future of film/video, theater and storytelling?

Cabrera:

(1). About my philosophy

I have always had a huge passion for literature and cinema. As a teenager I eagerly read Kafka, Joyce, Dostoevsky, Julio Cortázar, Ernesto Sábato, Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, (Borges,) Virginia Woolf, Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus. My gloomy conception of life was stimulated by their ideas long before my systematic studies at the Faculty of Philosophy. Sartre, in particular, was a natural bridge between literature and philosophy; I went very smoothly from *La Nausée* (“The Nausea”) to *L’Être et le Néant* (“Being and Nothingness”). European philosophy began to interest me only in the 19th century: Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud, Henri Bergson, Heidegger, Sartre, precisely the philosophers closest to literature and poetry.

Cinema also appeared in my adolescence and never abandoned me. Here my masters were Luis Buñuel, Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, Carlos Saura, Louis Malle, Michelangelo Antonioni, Ingmar Bergman, John Cassavetes. Much later I met great pessimistic filmmakers like Lars von Trier, Michael Haneke and Béla Tarr. In my mature work in this area, my crucial idea was that cinema creates concepts through images constituting an alternative non-academic way of doing philosophy. I wrote three books on this subject – the more important was *Cine: 100 años de filosofía* (“Cinema: one hundred years of philosophy”), and many articles, but nothing is translated into English.

What could be the relationship between cinema and antinatalism? Well, if cinema can think philosophically through images, antinatalist concepts would be created by the same mechanisms as any other concept. To do this, it is not necessary to make films that focus specifically on the subject, such as “Capernaum”, but films that show the dark and terrible face of human life. Many films do this, but they do not take the consequences that such a life is not worth living. I think that an antinatalist cinema has yet to be invented, an antinatalist genre just as there is a cinema about eating, war cinema, trials cinema, weddings cinema, etc. Antinatalist issues should be dramatized; for example, films about involuntary sterilization, animal extinction, child manipulation, veganism and abortion, elaborating these concepts with images.

Our book *Porque te amo, não nascerás* (“Because I love you, you will not be born”) is an antinatalist philosophical novel, and I have had for many years the idea of filming my “phenomenology of the child” – as it appears in “Discomfort and Moral Impediment” – making a film that shows the unhappiness of small children in shopping malls, restaurants and in their homes.

On the purpose of the arts in the grand scheme of things, if I understand your question, I wrote in “Discomfort and Moral Impediment” a brief topic called “If we should not procreate, for whom do we write our books?”. While we are alive, of course it is better to create philosophy and art than children. Precisely, one of the recommendations of negative ethics is to lessen procreative anxieties by using our strengths in creating cultural works or engaging in political activism. But there is a very good objection that has been presented to me by Brazilian students and that I have never seen antinatalists address the topic: If we don’t have children, but we keep writing books and making films, doesn’t that imply an expectation that humanity will continue? We don’t have children, but we want readers and spectators for our works, someone will have to procreate. Wouldn’t it be more coherent to stop writing and making works of art, including intellectual creation within the antinatalist project? If it is not worth bringing children into this world, why should it be worth bringing books into the world?

Here my answers are as follows:

- (1) We can always make our works for the current generation;
 - (2) From the thesis of moral impediment, we know that, in fact, humans will continue to procreate, because they always place the impulses of life above morality, and our readers and audiences, unfortunately or not, will never end;
 - (3) The antinatalist thesis will take priority over any desire to create intellectual works. Or more colorfully said: If humanity is finishing, I shouldn’t stop the **process just because a wonderful idea for a book or a film popped into my head.**
-

[0:32:57]

(2). Antinatalism: pro and against

[0:33:06]

Questions 12:

What is the most rational argument you've read against AN? I still haven't found one.

What does he think is the best argument against antinatalism that he has heard of?

I would like to ask Julio Cabrera: Can one be rationally and logically justified in rejecting philosophy of antinatalism and what is the best argument for antinatalism in his opinion?

What are some other arguments for antinatalism that you find interesting or compelling?

Cabrera:

The best argument against antinatalism I did not "hear" from another, I presented it myself. It is a meta-ethical objection. (At the level of ethics I do not find strong objections either.) It is not an argument against antinatalism, but against the imposition of antinatalism on everyone, even against their will. (I will talk about this later in the item "Autonomy, activism and manipulation".) Antinatalism has to be a choice. In favor of antinatalism, I think that the manipulation argument is more striking than the suffering argument. The thesis "We should not have children because they will suffer" face many counter-arguments; for example: there are also many good things in a human life, we are well equipped to endure suffering, suffering is relative to peoples and so on. On the contrary, the thesis "We should not have children because we manipulate them when we make them be born" it is something impossible to deny. There may be people who suffer little during their lives, but they were certainly manipulated at birth. Anyway, I use both arguments in my books: manipulation and suffering, but in that sequential order. When my adversary admits manipulation but he sustains that it is justified in this case because life has a great value, I show that life is full of suffering and that, therefore, the "value of life" cannot justify manipulation. In the interview with Benatar, Samuel Scheffler's idea was mentioned that the fact that there will be future generations gives meaning to our existences, while knowing that there will be none can sink them into meaninglessness and depression and become pointless. I have two answers for that: pessimistic and antinatalist, the fact that there will be no new generations would not be depressing at all, but encouraging. And second, those who have children to give meaning to their lives and avoid depression thus manifest one of the highest degrees of manipulation that one could imagine. The official story is that life is a precious gift that parents give their children for which they should be forever grateful, and that parents love their children and live only for them in total generosity. But the love for children can serve as a powerful support for the parents' dark and insignificant lives; it is the other way around: parents should be forever grateful to their children who saved them. Precisely, the profound morality of not procreating resides in being able to bear the painful burden of existence without having to have children to help us get rid of it.

[0:39:07]

Questions 13:

If it was possible to completely abolish involuntary suffering in the future, would you still say that procreation is unethical in such a hypothetical future?

What hypothetical scenario would convince you to (pro)natalism? Atheists are often asked what would convince them to believe in God to see whether they are open minded. It seems to be fair.

Cabrera:

Certainly, I would continue to claim that procreation is immoral in this future world; and here it is clear again why it is convenient to center the argument of the immorality of procreation on manipulation and not on suffering. For even having children in a hypothetical world without suffering, this act would continue to be inevitably manipulative, and therefore immoral. Furthermore, there would still be conflicts between beings without suffering, and boredom and restless desire would be inevitable.

I sustain a structural pessimism about human life, not a mere empirical pessimism of balance between “good things” and “bad things”, with a predominance of “bad things”. This is not my line. In “Discomfort and Moral Impediment” (p. 23 onwards), I present a long argumentation about the lack of sensible and moral value of human life based on what I call “terminality of being”, the decaying and frictional being received at birth. As long as this structure is maintained procreation will be immoral.

From the pessimistic and antinatalist point of view, we can state that there is no reasonable scenario where it is better to be than not to be, no type of being that can compete with the sublime perfection of nothingness.

[0:40:40]

Question 14:

Philosophers Karl Popper and Mario Bunge have argued that, if taken to its ultimate conclusion, negative ethics and negative utilitarianism (the philosophy that propounds that ethics should aim at decreasing pain instead of at augmenting pleasure) would entail that the whole of humanity should go extinct, which, according to them, would be absurd. Why do you think that it is possible that such high-profile philosophers consider antinatalism a *reductio ad absurdum*, and, consequently, any argument that concludes in it as being necessarily fallacious?

Cabrera:

Popper and Bunge are not lucid philosophers; they were just “brilliant”, they were able to think of very difficult technical problems, but they remained in the shallowest common sense on the crucial questions of human condition. That is why I do not consider them great thinkers; I am not impressed by their academic “high profile”.

My compatriot Bunge’s statements about Heidegger, for example, are simplistic; he is unable to understand a psychologically or existentially complex text. (See my article “Mario Bunge’s irrationality” on my website.)* The “argument”: “if everyone stopped procreating, the world would end; but this is absurd; so we don’t have to stop procreating” is very poor.

It is too difficult to understand for minds like Popper’s and Bunge’s that the survival of humanity is not an ethical requirement; it is not mere survival that ethics demands, but a dignified survival. At the individual level, Kant taught that moral dignity is above the mere desire to continue to exist. We can extend this to the whole of society and to humanity.

IF the arguments about the immorality of procreation based on manipulation and suffering are correct, THEN the disappearance of humanity for ethical reasons must be placed on the philosophical agenda, however much it clashes common sense, even the intellectual common sense as represented by Popper and Bunge.

[0:42:35]

Question 15:

In his last book, Julio Cabrera details what he calls a “negative approach to argumentation”, could he tell us how the principles of this way of debating can help antinatalist activists when arguing with natalists?

Cabrera:

According to my negative approach to argumentation, no philosophical idea can be defended except within a certain line of argument, starting from certain assumptions (definitions of terms, assumed premises, types of logical sequencing, etc.). The conclusions obtained will always be relative to these assumptions; they will never be absolute outcomes.

* URL: <https://philosopherjuliocabrera.blogspot.com/2019/11/mario-bunges-irrationality.html>.

Julio Cabrera: *Questionnaire on Antinatalism*
(2). Antinatalism: pro and against

Each of the parties in the dispute has a different perspective, a particular organization (or *Gestalt*) of the question discussed (procreation, abortion, death penalty). Each party can be right if we accept the assumptions; but we can always reject them and therefore also reject the conclusions. But there is a characteristic of logic in general: it can support either side. There is not an antinatalist logic and a natalist logic; both sides use the same logic.

What must be demanded is that each party really presents arguments and not mere feelings or intuitions, as the optimist usually does (speaking of the “miracle of life” and things of the sort); they are obliged to present their assumptions and set up an argument, but when the arguments are presented, the negative approach to argumentation does not favor either side.

[0:44:24]

(3). Autonomy, activism and manipulation

[0:44:31]

Question 16:

If it were so that the only way to stop people from procreation was something akin to involuntary sterilization, you say that the end justifies the means? Do we have a moral obligation to prevent others from committing the ultimate moral transgression – procreation? If yes, then how? If no, then why not?

While I greatly appreciate your concept of manipulation being a core aspect of your Antinatalist ethics, I must ask – at what point do you feel we would be abdicating human responsibility in not intervening in sentient life? In other words, when **MUST** we act, when is intervention necessary? When is it wrong to not intervene?

Cabrera:

Involuntary sterilization would be something totally immoral within a negative ethics, in a certain line of argumentation, of course. I have one theoretical line and another practical.

(1). At least within a deontological and not utilitarian ethics such as negative ethics, in order to decide something ethically we have to take into account the autonomies of those involved. In this case we have two autonomies to consider: the real autonomy of the procreators and the conjectured autonomy of the procreated. Within a negative ethics, the autonomy of the procreators, their desire to procreate cannot be ethically justified, as procreation is immoral. But even so, we cannot prevent others from procreating, since at least in an intellectual democracy, people have the right to disagree with the antinatalist theses. Even though it is immoral to procreate from the antinatalist perspective that we assume, there are other perspectives that present reasonable counter-arguments. (In fact, Benatar is frequently answering objections because the question is highly controversial.) In fact, the vast majority of people procreate automatically, without philosophically questioning their action. We would have to come up with a very powerful justification for intervening in the lives of all these people, to prevent them from doing something that we consider to be immoral, but which they consider to be moral or morally neutral. I am not saying that we cannot intervene; I say that in order to prevent others from procreating, we should have a reason much stronger than the reason that leads us to not have children ourselves. Intervention is a very strong action that must be very well justified. The antinatalist has a good argument to maintain that we have to intervene, a particularly uncomfortable argument for negative ethics, where procreating and killing are the two capital crimes. If we have the right not to respect the autonomy of the murderer when he is about to kill someone, why would we not have the right to not respect the autonomy of the procreator when he is about to generate someone? I reply that in the case of existing people, we can clearly see that the victim of a murderer wants to continue to exist. (And if he does not want to – as in the case of assisted suicide – we can also know this.) But in the case of non-existent people, antinatalists assume uncritically that the non-being wants certainly to continue not to exist. (Cfr. Benatar (2006), p. 94, 97, 102.)

They easily go from the premise

- (I) The world is a bad place,

to the conclusion

- (II) Nobody wants to live in a bad place.

But this sequitur is controversial. If our conjecture about the interests of the non-being is totally rational, it is certain that it would prefer to continue in the same state. (Schopenhauer says that if we were purely rational, it is the non-being that we would certainly choose.) But if the conjecture is made on the basis of humans we know, emotions will prevail over reason and the interests of the non-being could be, despite everything, to come into existence. After all, we are recreating the autonomy of the procreated

in pure speculative terms, guided by certain philosophical ideas; but there are perspectives guided by other ideas according to which the non-being wants to exist and is asking for it. This, of course, is equally speculative. But how can one untie between two equally conjectural conceptions of the interests of the not being? Pure speculation about the desires of the not being, in the impossibility of deciding between speculations, is strong enough for me not to procreate, but it seems too weak to prevent others from procreating. What is a strong reason for making my own decision may not be strong enough to justify intervention.

(2). If this highly theoretical line of argumentation does not satisfy, there is another more pragmatic: In order to implement a systematic policy of non-procreation with powers to practice involuntary sterilization, we will need an enormous centralized power that compels people not to procreate. In the domain of real politics, a totally unconscious sterilization resource is unthinkable; many people would realize that, in this New Antinatalist Order, they are forbidden to reproduce, and that could generate a genuine state of antinatalist terror. Here everything happens as with socialism: it is a good cause – based on equality and solidarity – that may have to resort to some type of violence to be implemented. The instinctive force to procreate is so high that no weak police could contain it. For this, thousands of other immoral actions would have to be committed just to prevent the immorality of procreation. Even if the procedures were soft, they are intrusive and violent, in one way or another. (As in the conquest of America, converting to Christianity by guns or converting by prayer were two forms of violence against the religious beliefs of the indigenous people.) What would an antinatalist say if a natalist society – like ours today – decided to apply fertilizing substances to everyone without their consent? Here everything seems to depend on who has the political power to impose their beliefs on the opposing side.

[0:55:53]

Question 17:

What do you think about Antinatalist activism?

What kind of things would you like to see Antinatalists do in the world?

Cabrera:

From what I said before, I think there are three degrees of antinatalist activism:

- (1) First degree: Writing books and articles on the issue, giving lectures, etc.: an intellectual activism.
- (2) Second degree: In addition to (1), talking to people – when possible and without creating embarrassing situations – trying to convince them of not having children: a social activism.
- (3) Third degree: Take action to compel people not to have children: an interventionist activism.

It seems clear, from what I have argued before, that I would commit myself to an antinatalist activism of degree 2, because only degree 1 would seem to me very weak, but I would never reach degree 3 of antinatalist interventionist activism. But this is just my position, of course, within a possible line of argument.

[0:58:20]

(4). Animals and veganism

[0:58:27]

Questions 18:

It is true that your philosophical and ethical beliefs are unique but there are some unique principles you promote (such as the injunction against manipulation) that intuitively apply to animals as well. Do animals deserve any consideration in a Negative Ethics framework?

Can animals be harmed in similar way as you describe people can: the moral impediment, discomforts? What moral obligation or duties (for us, humans) follow from this?

Cabrera:

First of all, I want to express my surprise at the huge number of questions on the topic of animals in this questionnaire, a number that far surpasses other questions that seem more dramatic (there are not questions about suicide, for instance). In my philosophy the animal issue is a less important point. In my book *Mal-estar e moralidade* (2018), written in Portuguese, there is a section called *Historia Animalium* where I present my ideas on ethics with animals. Unfortunately, this section was not part of the English book “Discomfort and Moral Impediment”.

I actually start from an abyss between human and non-human animals. Here I followed two masters of the human condition, Schopenhauer and Heidegger.

Schopenhauer clearly distinguishes between human and non-human animals due to their place in the degree of development of the nervous system, which makes human suffering *sui generis*, much greater – according to him – than the suffering of non-human animals; awareness, reflection, feeling of past and future and the certainty of death increase suffering, while non-human animals are privileged by their unconsciousness and their closure in the present.

(Arthur Schopenhauer: *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* I, § 56 [ZA Bd. II, S. 385–389] / *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume 1, § 56, pp. 363–367 *Hübscher*;

Arthur Schopenhauer: *Parerga und Paralipomena* II, Kapitel 12: „Nachträge zur Lehre vom Leiden der Welt“, §§ 153–154 [ZA Bd. IX, S. 318–324] / *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Volume 2, Chapter 12: “Additional remarks on the doctrine of the suffering of the world”, §§ 153–154, pp. 311–317 *Hübscher*.)

Heidegger, for his part, in the book *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik* (“The fundamental concepts of metaphysics”) (1929–1930) clearly differentiates the ontological way of being from humans and non-human animals; not human animals are not *Dasein* nor “towards death”, they simply die.

(Martin Heidegger: *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, Zweiter Teil, Drittes Kapitel: „Der Beginn der vergleichenden Betrachtung im Ausgang von der mittleren These: das Tier ist weltarm“ [GA Bd. 29/30, S. 273–294] / *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Part Two, Chapter Three: “The Beginning of the Comparative Examination, Taking the Intermediate Thesis That the Animal Is Poor in World as Our Point of Departure”, pp. 185–200.)

The main ethical problem is: how to assume this abysmal difference, without making it a presumed “superiority” of humans over nonhuman animals that would allow predatory or prejudicial actions against non-human animals.

In terms of my philosophy, the abysmal difference between human and non-human animals is already expressed in moral terms: non-human animals have no moral impediment. They are not open to the domain of morality; therefore, they cannot fail to be moral as humans fail, they cannot be disabled for something in which they have never been enabled. This is sufficient to understand that we cannot have ethical-negative relationships with non-human animals; there can be no ethical relations between beings with moral impediment and beings without it. Therefore, there can be no “incorporation of animals into the moral community” in negative ethics.

However, in this ethics morality has two basic requirements, not to manipulate and not to harm. Although there is no reciprocity between human and non-human animals, we can say that we manipulate and harm non-human animals when we treat them badly, when we hunt and eat them, because they – at their own level – feel pain, fear, want to continue living, live comfortably, etc. But strictly speaking, we cannot say that we have moral relations with them; we can only be moral about them asymmetrically, but not together with them.

In Spanish and Portuguese there is a triad of similar terms that does not exist in English, and that allows me to describe my attitude towards animals: *trato*, *contrato*, *maltrato*, treatment, contract and mistreatment. We can only have contracts with other humans, because a contract requires moral (or immoral) interaction. But this must not lead to mistreatment. It is incorrect and disgusting to make animals suffer or kill for fun, but it is not “immoral”, because morality requires reciprocity; it causes us discomfort to see animals suffer, but not all discomfort is a moral discomfort. If we cannot have contracts with non-human animals, and we don’t want to mistreat them either, we must find some kind of treatment with them, which consists of not harming them and benefiting them if possible.

Two related questions about animals are as follows:

- (a) Should we include animals in the antinatalist project?
- (b) Being antinatalist, should we refuse to eat animal meat?

These two topics are covered by the following two set of questions; they are so many that I had to put them in large packages.

[1:02:45] Questions 19:

Are you familiar with the subject of EFILism, and if so, what do you think about it? EFILists essentially believe that sentient life should be placed in plaintive care, in hospice so to speak, and that there should be direct intervention in ending wildlife suffering, even if the only option is to find a way of euthanizing them. What are your thoughts on that? I believe that Antinatalism/EFILism is essentially the final civil rights movement – that there is nowhere for the subject of suffering mitigation to go from there, and that not being imposed upon to exist can and should be seen as a sentient creatures most supreme civil right. What do you think of this idea?

Do you believe that the concept of Antinatalism should be extended to all sentient creatures? Do you believe that a goal of Antinatalism should be the extinction of both humans and animals? I feel it would be the greatest tragedy we could allow, for humans to go extinct before the animals, nature is where most of the suffering is on planet earth – thoughts?

Have you thought about extending your ideas about antinatalism to the whole of animal kingdom? Jeremy Bentham asked “the question is not, Can they reason? Nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?” Today we know the answer. Animals do suffer. What can we do about that? What are Cabrera’s thoughts on wild-animal suffering and that there would be much more of it if only humans went extinct?

Would you extend antinatalism to nonhuman animals as well? There is an enormous amount of suffering in the nonhuman world, do we have an ethical duty to end that suffering? What can we do knowing that people will still be procreating? What can we be doing knowing that the antinatalist project will never come to be? Does that also extent to animal rights?

Cabrera:

I am not very familiar with efilism. I understand that efilism maintains that all sentient beings suffer; if antinatalism wants to end human suffering, there is no reason not to “extend” this project to end also the suffering of non-human animals; and it is important that the extinction of non-human animals happens

sooner than ours, because they could not organize their own disappearance. If that is the central idea I will try to answer.

As we saw in the previous question, in negative ethics we cannot have ethical relations with animals, as they have no moral impediment. Therefore, if negative ethics were in agreement with the extinction of non-human animals, it could not be for ethical reasons, strictly speaking. That is why I would not accept this idea of “extending” the ethics of humans to non-humans; because as they have ontologically different ways of being, there is nothing to “extend”; the attitude towards non-human animals must be invented post-morally in a particular way.

Leaving aside the contract, which is impossible, we are left with treatment and mistreatment. We have to see if the extinction of non-human animals could be included in treatment, or if the extinction would generate some kind of mistreatment. If the first were possible, negative ethics could approve the procedure. But if in order to extinguish them we had to mistreat them some way, negative ethics cannot accept to suppress nonhuman animals, even if the extinction is intended to be “for their own good”.

The extinction procedure, even inspired by this beautiful purpose, can generate suffering in the animals that we are trying to benefit. The sterilization or euthanasia of non-human animals, within a macro project, can make them suffer. Maybe it would be necessary to create concentration camps for non-human animals; it would not be a peaceful procedure.

When Peter Singer refers to a possible elimination of carnivorous species – something much more modest than the elimination of all animals – he comments: “Judging by our past record, any attempt to change ecological systems on a large scale is going to do far more harm than good. [...] we cannot and should not try to police all of nature.”

(Peter Singer: *Animal Liberation*, Chapter 6: “Speciesism Today ...”, p. 226.)

Furthermore, this process would make many humans suffer; the lives of human and non-human animals are intricate to each other; it seems impossible to make nonhuman animals suffer without also affecting humans as well.

Ultimately, I consider humanity as the primordial biological catastrophe of nature and think that life is not so calamitous if it does not have reflexive self-awareness. Returning to Schopenhauer we can see that suffering is not the same in humans and non-humans. I do not mean that it is less intense, only that it is different. Schopenhauer declares that humans accumulate past, present and future, suffering through memory and prediction; the suffering of animals is almost entirely concentrated in the present: *Daher die beneidenswerthe Sorglosigkeit und Gemüthsruhe der Thiere*. (“Hence the animals’ unconcern and tranquility, so worthy of envy.”)*

Animal suffering is much more integrated with nature; it is not enough to say, like Bentham: “they also suffer”.

At the beginning of the last chapter of his book “The View from Nowhere”, the American philosopher Thomas Nagel tells an experience, when he tried to “save” a spider that swam in the urinal of a bathroom. Apparently the animal suffered a lot because it tried to get out and couldn’t because of successive water discharges; “His life seemed miserable and exhausting.”, Nagel writes, “I arrived [...] at the decision to liberate him”; he took a paper towel and rescued the spider from its apparent torment; but shortly after that the spider died. And Nagel comments, “It illustrates the hazards of combining perspectives that are radically distinct.”**

I really wouldn’t have a problem with a planet without humans and with non-human animals living in their natural surroundings. What did not work is the human life; the other animals are fine as they are

* Arthur Schopenhauer: *Parerga und Paralipomena* II, § 153 [ZA Bd. IX, S. 319] / *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Volume 2, § 153, p. 312 Hübscher.

** Thomas Nagel: *The View from Nowhere*, Chapter 9: “Birth, death, and the meaning of life”, pp. 208–209.

and would be much better off without the sufferings introduced by humans. God should have stopped Creation before the sixth day. It would be good to leave nonhuman animals in their lives of harsh survival and spontaneous violence. It is true that humans care for animals and protect them from certain hostile environments, but it is also true that they hunt, eat and mistreat them. I think the best thing we can do for animals is to disappear and leave them alone.

[1:09:23]

Questions 20:

Many (but not all) antinatalists are vegans due to the incorporation of animals into their moral community. Are you a vegan? Irrespective of the answer: why?

Why isn't he vegan?

Is forcing animals into the world for human consumption or to any other benefit compatible with antinatalism? And with that is there an ethical duty for antinatalists to be vegan and not pay for others to be brought into the world for their benefit?

Cabrera:

As there is no possibility for me to incorporate animals into the moral community THAT cannot be the reason for being vegan or vegetarian. I have said before that this provides no reason to mistreat animals. The problem is that it seems evident that we mistreat them when we kill them for food. Therefore, it seems that we should radically refuse to feed on them.

I am not particularly vegan or even vegetarian, although I completely eliminated beef, pork and fish from my diet many years ago; but I eat chicken often. This would seem to be a clear contradiction between my thinking and my life. Even though we cannot have ethical relationships with animals, and even though I am not concerned with extinguishing them, I agree with not mistreating them, and eating them clearly seems to be a kind of mistreatment.

The first argument to come out of this blatant contradiction is that I may need to eat some meat to preserve my health. The thesis that one can live in good health without eating animal proteins is controversial. I have consulted all kinds of medicines, orthodox and heterodox, and the opinions are the most varied, although each part affirms with total certainty to be right. On the other hand, one cannot speak generally of "human health", but of individual bodies; what is not necessary for certain organisms may be necessary for others.

In my particular case, I feel weak and sleepy if I don't eat some chicken meat for several days. Accepting that completely suppressing the consumption of some meat was clearly bad for my health, should I take the requirement not to mistreat animals to the point of damaging my health?

In negative ethics, we have no moral obligation to preserve our life or our health just to continue living; we can and must risk our lives because of some ethical requirement. But since we have no strictly ethical obligations to non-human animals, it would seem that this requirement to harm me in order to preserve them cannot be ethically justified. Nevertheless, we decided not to mistreat non-human animals, but since this is not a moral principle, but only a beneficial practice, we can have the right to balance it with other morally relevant considerations, not to take it as a requirement without exception.

If I choose to preserve my health by continuing to eat birds, I could claim that I need my health not for satisfying frivolous gastronomic pleasures or for gluttony, but for to be able to continue doing things that I consider as morally important as the act of not eating animals; for example: fighting injustices, defending social movements, finishing a book against racism or doing activism in the antinatalist cause. I cannot assume a fanatic vegetarianism; I would have to consider, in specific cases, what are the social costs – not just personal, selfish or hedonistic – of stopping eating meat entirely. We cannot escape "speciesism" by falling into a kind of "animalism"; in some cases we may have to favor human animals and in others our option will be for non-human ones.

[1:12:40]

(5). Abortion

[1:12:47]

Questions 21:

Your ideas surrounding abortion seem to be counter-intuitive to many in the antinatalist community. Is a fetus a “moral person” that deserves to be free of manipulation? Does this moral personhood begin even before consciousness is possible?

I’d like to understand why he feels that abortion is a violation of the foetus’ autonomy if the foetus is not conscious and aware of its existence, and why the principle of not violating the ‘autonomy’ of something unaware of its own existence is more important than the suffering that would be prevented by aborting it. This is something I find utterly baffling about Cabrera’s antinatalism, and I will be interested to hear if he can explain it – People have said he’s anti-abortion. Questions regarding abortion: Does he think it’s important to preserve the life of something that has not even developed a capacity to desire to exist?

Does he think preserving the life of a nonhuman animal which is more sentient than a human fetus – a fish, for example – is more important or less important than preserving the life of a human fetus? – Why would preserving the life of a fetus be thought to be more important than 1, preserving the suffering that would be experienced as a result of the complete creation of a sentience, and 2, the desires of the unwillingly pregnant?

What are his views about anti-abortion laws? Does he think the unwillingly pregnant should be forced to stay pregnant by law?

Cabrera:

Whoever formulates the issue of abortion imposes his own approach in the very formulation. That the human must be defined by the appearance of consciousness is not a fact; it is a presupposition that we have the right not to assume. My anti-abortion argument from negative ethics is extensively exposed in my books. In this argument, the fact that the embryo or the fetus are not “people”, that they have no “conscience” or “desire to exist” are totally irrelevant. I adopt an ontological-existential notion of humanity, inspired by phenomenological-hermeneutical philosophies such as Heidegger’s, Ortega y Gasset’s and Sartre’s. (In the next and last question, I speak of the difficulties that antinatalists read only analytical literature, dispensing with the “continental”.)

This specific ontological mode of the human is characterized by the fact that he/she was asymmetrically thrown into the world contingently and towards death. This happens long before the intellectual properties of awareness, self-awareness, rationality or language arise. I start from the idea that humans are primarily existent; they are not primarily cognitive subjects. The impulse to live is prior to the intention to know. We inherited from the Greeks an intellectualist conception of the human being, which reappears in modernity with Descartes and Kant, and extends into the 20th century. What is relevant to our question here is that since the moment of conception in a human body, we already have an existing one thrown over there, contingent, meaningless and towards death, even if this being has no first-person awareness of that condition, nor any defined identity. In my own terms, it is a terminal human thing that has already begun to end, not potentially, but now.

Benatar claims that “coming into existence” cannot be determined only biologically (Benatar (2006), p. 134–135). I totally agree with him. In my approach, this terminal being and “towards death” aroused in the conception is not experienced, of course, in the first person, but is seen in the second and third person by the others involved. The humanity of a human is not just something given biologically, but also something socially constructed. The others will be able to confer or refuse human status to what is, for now, a heap of cells. They are capable to give the embryo and the fetus their humanity or refuse it. The

procreated may or may not be part of the moral community depending on the decision of these third parties. Humanity does not need to be experienced in the first person to be socially recognized.

In these terms, what is immoral about abortion? When you have an abortion, you eliminate in a manipulative and unilateral way someone else's terminality, even if it is not yet a determined person. Even though – in the pessimistic perspective that I endorse – life is something terrible, we have no right to decide for another being that is already as terminal, absurd and thrown in the world towards death as we are. In this line of argument, abortion is immoral because it is a manipulative act, done for our convenience and offensive to an autonomy that is in the present recognizable in the third person.

This line of argument is perfectly viable, and it will be seen as “counter-intuitive” only if the other parts impose their own assumptions; assuming mine, my posture is perfectly intuitive and theoretically sustainable. As I am also a logical pessimist, I do not believe in absolute conclusions. What I presented here was just a line of sustainable argument. Abortion can be morally legitimate in one line of argument and morally illegitimate in another. We don't need to destroy each other because of that.

People who read my writings without due attention, wonder how one can be antinatalist and anti-abortion at the same time. After all, if life is so bad, do we have a duty to prevent more humans from being thrown into this terrible world? But this is a very simple-minded argument. If we think more carefully, we can see that the situation of procreation and the situation of abortion have different logical and ethical structures.

In abstention we think from nothing, while in abortion we think from something. In the case of abstention there is nothing about which we have moral dilemmas before which we must stand. We can say that while procreation is preventive medicine, abortion is therapeutic medicine; and nothing can make abortion preventive.

Therefore, in the case of abstention, it is the consideration of the terrors of existence that prevails over autonomy, because there is no autonomy to respect (unless conjectured, with all the problems that this entails). In the case of abortion, the respect for autonomy prevails, an autonomy that already exists in the third person as a social and interactive fact.

There is, therefore, no incongruity at all in being antinatalist and anti-abortion; on the contrary: if the accent is put on manipulation (as is the case with negative ethics), it is almost mandatory to be both; because the same type of manipulation appears, only in opposite directions: when the child is desired, it is manipulated in procreation, and when it is unwanted it is manipulated in abortion; in both cases its terminal being is treated as a thing.

It is true that by not aborting we throw this being into the terrors of the world, but at least, later on, this terminal being will be in a better position to decide what to do with its terminality; this will not be entirely decided by the others.

Anyway, there is no logical sequence from

(I) Abortion is immoral

to

(II) One should never abort.

For we can be totally convinced of the immorality of abortion, but understand that, in many dramatic cases, women had to abort. Negative ethics is limited to saying that, as understandable as this act may be, these people will be doing something ethically wrong. Whoever aborts is certainly not a criminal (as the anti-abortionists sometimes rhetorically proclaim), but neither can we say that they are totally morally correct people.

I suppose that in order to solve the dramatic cases, it may be better to resort to some utilitarian or pragmatic procedure, even if the immorality of abortion is theoretically recognized (in my line of argument or other).

Up until now, I have always moved on a strictly ethical level, not on a legal level. Keeping the issue on the ethical level, I am in favor of the right of choice of those involved, especially women. But when we ask that the choice be free and personal, it must have all the dramatic character of a choice, without any legal interference, neither favoring nor inhibiting. If we accept that abortion should be a free choice, its practice must in no way be criminalized, but neither should it be supported by law, in the sense that nobody can be forced to participate in an abortion practice if it goes against their values and beliefs.

The topics of procreation and abortion are internally connected to the issue of sexuality. Humans are compelled in urgent ways to have sex in search of pleasure or escape from the pain of existing, and they end up procreating and often having abortions. The problems of procreation and abortion are, therefore, derived problems; the initial problem is the human immaturity in the use of sexuality. Sexual morality should be prior to any morality of procreation and abortion.

[1:26:38]

(6). Benatar and analytic antinatalism

[1:26:45]

Question 22:

Mr. Cabrera, can you describe your main objection to Benatar's axiological asymmetry, and are you satisfied with Benatar's answer to that objection? (...)

Cabrera:

As far as I know Benatar never responded to my objections to its asymmetry as exposed in my article "Quality of Human Life and Non-existence: Some criticisms on David Benatar's formal and material positions", 2011.* The article was sent to Benatar by the journal, which asked him for a reply, and I personally communicated with him about this text, but he was "too busy" to respond.

My central idea is that the asymmetry can only be formulated by committing an "equivocation fallacy" over the term "non-existent", which has at least two different meanings:

- (a) The empty notion, according to which the non-existent is absolutely nothing, and of which, therefore, we can know or say nothing.
- (b) The counterfactual notion, according to which the non-existent is represented and, therefore, we can speculate about what he/she wants or does not want.

I maintain that, throughout his argument, Benatar commits the equivocation by changing the meaning of that term during the argumentation.

This change may be not intentional, but, in any case, I maintain that only by committing this fallacy the asymmetry is sustainable. When we adopt the empty notion of "non-existence" we simply cannot say anything about the interests of this non-existent; we cannot even say that the absence of pain would be good or bad for him/her or that the absence of benefit would be good or bad. When adopting this notion, the question simply does not arise, because there is no one to whom to attribute these attitudes.

But when we adopt the counterfactual notion of "non-existent", depending on the terms in which we formulate the representation (in third person) of the interests of the non-existent, we can say that for him/her the absence of pain or the absence of pleasure would be good, bad, not good, not bad or any other possibility available. These possibilities, as we shall see, are not purely logical, but they are also axiological possibilities.

When Benatar claims that the absence of harm is good even for a "non-existent", he is using the counterfactual notion of non-existent, as he is assuming that, if he could manifest himself, the non-existent would have no interest in being born in a harmful world. But when he says that the absence of benefit is not bad for "non-existents", he is using the empty conception, as he is assuming that we cannot deprive anything of those who simply are not there, not even by proxy.

If the counterfactual conception was also used in this last case, it could be said that, if the non-existent could manifest his interests, he could say that for him the absence of benefit could be, for example, not good, or even bad. Likewise, if the empty notion were used in the first case, it could be said that just as one cannot deprive anything of those who simply do not exist, neither can one benefit it, because there is no one to benefit. Asymmetry, I maintain, can only be achieved by mixing these two notions throughout the argumentation and thus committing the fallacy of equivocation.

Benatar had formulated a generic reply to those who dispute his asymmetry; he claims that his critics misconstrue the basic asymmetry as a logical rather than axiological claim. We certainly can logically

* Julio Cabrera: "Quality of Human Life and Non-existence: Some criticisms of David Benatar's formal and material positions", *Revista Redbioética/UNESCO* 1/3 (2011), 25–35. URL: <https://redbioetica.com.ar/revista-redbioetica-unesco-no-3/> / <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000212982>.

state that just as the absent pains in Scenario B are good, so the absent pleasures are bad, but he says that, even logically possible, we should not claim this. If we do, we would not be able to make the value judgments we do in the four supporting asymmetries.

This generic reply certainly does not answer my specific argument about the fallacy of equivocation, and in my 2011 article I already gave an answer to the question of the 4 support asymmetries. In this answer I do not confuse at all, logical with axiological. I cannot reproduce the entire argument here; I will rapidly comment just two of the asymmetries of support.

The second one says that “it is strange” to mention as a reason to have a child that this child will benefit from his birth, but “it is not strange” to mention as a reason for not having a child the fact that the son will suffer. What is “strange” or not depends on many social factors; it may not be strange to say that I am giving birth to someone who will enjoy certain benefits that the parents can, with a high degree of certainty, guarantee. On the contrary, it may sound very strange to say that we are not going to have children so as not to harm them; people can say that, despite everything, this is not a reason for not having children; it is the antinatalist who will be considered strange or even crazy; people may think that he has some physical or psychological disorder that he is hiding behind philosophy.

The fourth asymmetry states that we can legitimately feel sad for people who suffer in distant places, but we cannot feel similarly sad for the absence of happy people on uninhabited islands or areas of the earth or other planets; but why not? Suppose someone with enough money to build a huge amusement park in one of those remote places, has their license revoked to do that work. Why would it be counter-intuitive for this gentleman to feel deeply sad, not only for the frustration of his project, but for the fact that thousands of children cannot enjoy this park never constructed?

Note that in none of these arguments did I need to use logical elements; it is pure analysis of intuitions on an axiological level. At this point, we have, to say the least, a conflict of intuitions. (Benatar (2006), pp. 203, 206.) Ultimately, I think that if the material argumentation about the lack of value of human life is as solid as the texts by Schopenhauer, Cioran, Benatar and Cabrera, among many others, show, then we can totally dispense with formal argument and dispatch the famous asymmetry as perfectly unnecessary. (I refer the reader to the text “Better the asymmetry never to have been” on my website.)*

Although Benatar is an interesting philosophical figure, it seems to me that his thinking is limited by his exclusive affiliation to the analytical way of doing philosophy. This option for the analytical is intertwined with certain characteristics of academic philosophy in general. (On this topic I wrote and published on my website the text “AAA, Analytical Academic Antinatalism”).** At several crucial points in antinatalist discussions, the level of their understanding would greatly improve with the incorporation of “continental” literature. I will give some examples of this.

Parfit’s “identity problem”, that there is no possible basis for comparison between the quality of life of a real being and that of a non-existent one (Benatar (2006), p. 20), could be addressed using the Heideggerian distinction between ontological and ontical domains of human existence: although we know nothing about the states of a possible being on the ontical level, we have a lot of ontological information about him. Likewise, when we speak of “death” in a purely analytical bias, we always speak of literal death, not of the structural dying conceived by Seneca and developed by Heidegger in his idea of “being towards death”; this continental approach would enrich the notion of death and dying.

Another example: in an appreciation of the value of human life, pointing out objective catastrophes is not enough; the ways in which human beings experience these disasters must also be examined; the question of “lived experience”, so important in thinkers like Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer, is totally neglected in the analytical approach, or reduced to mere “psychological” problems.

* URL: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gJeG2kPmJc8Msl0LWsFmtUwbnN0XKzVb/view>.

** URL: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pam2NZFUWP4hnpFwCagLMoQIb_0PQF1A/view.

In philosophy, and particularly when we address the crucial questions of human condition, we also need a certain feeling of the problems. At times, antinatalist texts seem excessively linear and geometrical, as if the facts of human life could be measured, placed on a scale and calculated. There are many examples of this from Benatar's 2006 book. In chapter 2, when trying to show that non-existence is preferable to existence, the analysis is done in terms of a "cost-benefit" calculation (an economic vocabulary), as if coming into existence was like buying a car or renting a property. In other parts of the book, he speaks of "amounts" of good and evil, as if it were merchandise, using mathematical vocabulary (total amount of bad, equally bad, subtracting the disvalue of, no quantity of good can outweigh, modest quantities of good, fifteen kilo-units of value). (See pp. 60–63; other examples of calculations in 172, 175, 188, 198.)

Nevertheless, the adoption of non-analytical literature does not have to remove us from our pessimistic and antinatalist convictions. On the contrary, the pluralism and diversity of philosophical approaches will serve to help formulating pessimistic and antinatalist theses with a greater sensibility and diversity of perspectives. Attitudes totally closed to other philosophical styles can make academic life very restrictive and even aggressive, marginalizing much philosophical work of value written in other philosophical styles, causing unnecessary intellectual suffering. Academic antinatalism, in addition to denouncing the terrors of life, should try not to increase them further.

Links

Please visit Julio Cabrera at:

<https://filosofjuliocabrera.blogspot.com>

<https://philosopherjuliocabrera.blogspot.com/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julio_Cabrera_\(philosopher\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julio_Cabrera_(philosopher))

Cambridge Scholars Publishing:

<https://www.cambridgescholars.com/>

Group *Insurgência negativa e cinema vazio* (“Negative Insurgence and Empty Cinema”):

<https://groups.google.com/g/insurgencia-negativa-e-cinema-vazio>

Video edited by Léo Pimentel. Please subscribe to him on YouTube here:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/amantedaheresia>

Brazilian AN Facebook group mentioned in the video:

<https://www.facebook.com/AntinatalismoUmAtoDeAmor>

Music by Myuu. Subscribe to Myuu on YouTube here:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/myuujj>

Myuu songs used in this video: (Most of this playlist)

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLt4ZkJ3lYmFXG33Jk4BWaV4y0vypFCGtm>

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. | [0:01:45] | Disintegrating | URL: https://youtu.be/piFJVwr1YYA |
| 2. | [0:06:25] | Collapse | URL: https://youtu.be/ZvD8QSO7NPw |
| 3. | [0:09:43] | Lament | URL: https://youtu.be/iHXkU2Lkm50 |
| 4. | [0:13:55] | Deadly Sorrow | URL: https://youtu.be/9PuO7f3NLKo |
| 5. | [0:17:00] | Wind's Wreck | URL: https://youtu.be/DgwLOWAFg5o |
| 6. | [0:21:26] | Don't Die on Me | URL: https://youtu.be/Dz-tOLvN4C0 |
| 7. | [0:32:56] | Fernweh | URL: https://youtu.be/rILdNFvusWo |
| 8. | [0:39:06] | Tender Remains | URL: https://youtu.be/4qrFYVjsIM0 |
| 9. | [0:44:04] | Nostalgic Place | URL: https://youtu.be/5w0nnpnB5UpU |
| 10. | [0:58:49] | Beth's Theme | URL: https://youtu.be/xC2TWWE6QI0 |
| 11. | [1:02:26] | Rise and Fall | URL: https://youtu.be/uj3Gif77SYM |
| 12. | [1:08:50] | Moonlight Menschen | URL: https://youtu.be/uzpGEx_AT-I |
| 13. | [1:24:14] | Identity Crisis | URL: https://youtu.be/g5X6KZBk_6s |
| 14. | [1:28:00] | Wind's Wreck | URL: https://youtu.be/DgwLOWAFg5o |
| 15. | [1:29:25] | Happy Birthday (Sad Piano Version) | URL: https://youtu.be/2VgO27zxBh0 |
-

transcribed in March 2023

(v. 1.1 – 2023-06-27)