

The Selfishness of the World-Saving Antinatalists

Have you encountered the [antinatalists](#) yet?

This is a growing phenomenon in contemporary America, especially among the young. We might call them the “No Children Movement,” as they advocate a rejection of parenthood as a conscious political act, saying it is morally wrong to have children.

You have only to plug the search term *antinatalist* into Twitter to find a mountain of disturbing material. Here, the possibility that you might bring a child into the world who is as unhappy with life as the antinatalists claim to be is [presented](#) as justification for antinatalism.

Each generation comes with people who celebrate and regret life. I don't think the creation of happy people justifies creating people who wish they were never born. [#antinatalism](#) [#antinatalist](#)

– Lawrence Anton (@lawrence_anton1) [November 4, 2022](#)

In this vein, one antinatalist philosopher titled his book [Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence](#). I invite the reader to reflect for a minute on that title. The writer did not see a contradiction in his beliefs: On one hand, he points to the horror of existence, but on the other, he is thankfully sufficiently attached to this awful world to stick around and publish a book on the belief.

Other antinatalists clothe their misanthropic position in abstract and high-minded concern for all already-existing humans and for the entire planet.

An [article](#) in *Scientific American* sees antinatalism as the antidote to “environmental catastrophe.” The article’s logic, properly extended, would suggest that the environment achieves its highpoint of “healthiness” when there are no people at all. It is, after all, “our planet’s fate,” and not our own, that ought to be the centerpiece of our moral considerations.

This rhetoric is bearing fruit. Here’s a [recent example](#): A young college woman wrote a CNN editorial explaining, “As climate catastrophes are already well in motion (coupled with a host of related socioeconomic and equality issues), I feel as if I would be doing an increasingly irreparable injustice to any children I would bring into this world with my inability to offer them a future.”

The basic claim of the antinatalists arguing from this purportedly moral position is along these lines: “I cannot contribute to the burden on our ecosystem and the additional material hardship that would be borne by all fellow humans by bringing another life into the world.”

For the CNN writer, it is not the nihilist logic of the life-hating philosopher that has resulted in her taking up her position. It’s because she loves the planet, poor people in other countries who will bear the brunt of the supposed looming [climate disaster](#), and even the child she will never have.

A misguided kind of love, this, that when logically extended fervently hopes for a world with fewer and fewer and, ultimately, no people.

This ideology reneges on the primordial pact of exchange that goes back to the beginning of our species and made life itself possible: The antinatalists’ parents raised them, fed them, and dressed them, but the antinatalists will not pass this on. The CNN writer acknowledges this, though only in passing. Young people in previous generations faced great challenges

and fears, too, she admits: world wars, genocides, and the threat of nuclear annihilation, to name only the most alarming of a long list of terrors that had to be conquered.

Those earlier young people, when they became parents, brushed their children's teeth, read them stories, and cleaned their kids' bottoms. They combed their kids' hair, bought them toys, and played games with them. Throughout human history, parents unselfishly assumed the role of adults to make life possible for the next generation.

Somebody did all that for them. Now, antinatalists are refusing to pass the same gift along to the generation to come.

Whatever their rationale for this refusal, what they are saying is *"It ends with me."*

Kant's categorical imperative comes to mind here: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law."

"I reject the chain of the gift of life" made a universal law is "life ends."

It is the most radical imaginable position. It is saying, "No!" to an unbroken succession of life that extends back as far as recorded history goes. It is looking at that unending process of life producing more life and asserting, individualistically, egoistically, that it is over.

That temptation to say, "No more!" comes to me often during the not infrequent, though mostly low intensity, suffering involved in dealing with my own children. Especially on difficult mornings when they don't want to get out of bed, or eat breakfast, or brush their teeth, or pay attention to the clock so we can get into the car and to the school door on time.

How demanding it all is, I sometimes think. And I'm so tired, and this seems too much to have to do. I just want to go back to bed.

But then I remember that all this was done for me. I recall all the love and attention that was showered on me. All the labor that went into making it possible for me to become the person I have become, to achieve what I have achieved, and to have experienced all the joy I have experienced.

We must not break that sacred chain. We must not selfishly and cynically refuse the moral obligation we have to those who bore, nurtured, and raised us.

We must lovingly pass the gift on.

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Image credit: [Pexels](#)