

BOOK REVIEW

The Metaphor of Omelas

Matti Häyry and Amanda Sukenick. *Antinatalism, Extinction and the End of Procreative Self-Corruption*, Cambridge University Press, February 2024, DOI: 10.1017/9781009455299, Pages 84.

Antinatalism, Extinction, and the End of Procreative Self-Corruption is a pivotal addition to the scholarly literature on antinatalism. Matti Häyry and Amanda Sukenick delve into the historical and theoretical foundations of antinatalism, offering a comprehensive and critical analysis that stands out in contemporary discourse on the topic.

The book is structured into three main sections. The first section traces the evolution of antinatalist thought in Western philosophy, from early thinkers to modern proponents. It highlights the recurring antinatalist tendencies and reactions to them throughout history, providing a valuable framework for understanding the persistence and resistance to antinatalist ideas.

In the second section, the authors confront the most significant consequence of antinatalism: human extinction. They argue that if humanity ceases to procreate, extinction is inevitable. This section examines the philosophical implications of extinction and contrasts various viewpoints. Some thinkers perceive extinction as a tragic outcome of antinatalism, while others view the end of humanity as preferable to continued existence under suffering. Häyry and Sukenick present a nuanced analysis of these perspectives, engaging with both historical and contemporary debates on the subject.

The third section explores the practical implications of procreation, questioning the moral justifications for bringing new life into the world. The authors argue that procreation is inherently linked to suffering and that traditional arguments for having children often fail to address this ethical dilemma adequately. Häyry and Sukenick critique popular arguments against antinatalism, such as the quality of life, asymmetry between good and bad experiences, and lack of consent. They assert that these arguments, while valuable, do not fully capture the ethical issues surrounding procreation.

One of the book's strengths is its critical engagement with alternative approaches to antinatalism that do not necessarily lead to human extinction. The authors discuss transhumanism, posthumanism, and ahumanism as potential solutions. They critique transhumanist visions like those of David Pearce, who suggests that technology could eliminate suffering, thereby rendering antinatalism unnecessary. Häyry and Sukenick argue that such proposals, while intriguing, ultimately fall short of addressing the core ethical issues of procreation.

Häyry and Sukenick propose that a more effective approach to antinatalism involves a voluntary cessation of reproduction. They emphasize the importance of recognizing the inherent wrongness of procreation and suggest that this ethical awareness should be the starting point for any serious consideration of antinatalism. Their analysis is grounded in a deep understanding of both the historical context and the contemporary debates surrounding antinatalism.

The book also provides a comprehensive synthesis of the historical and theoretical aspects of antinatalism. Häyry and Sukenick's work is particularly valuable for its detailed examination of the philosophical and ethical dimensions of the antinatalist perspective. They offer a mind map (Figure 1, p. 30) that effectively illustrates the richness and variety of antinatalist arguments, making the book a crucial resource for scholars and students alike.

In their discussion of procreation, Häyry and Sukenick address the “Standard Arguments for and against Having Children.” They critically examine David Benatar's asymmetry and quality of life

arguments, Seana Shiffrin's consent argument, and Julio Cabrera's reflections on the legal and moral value of parental choices. The authors state that while these arguments have merit, they often fail to gain widespread acceptance due to various limitations.

A particularly compelling part of the book is the authors' use of Ursula K. Le Guin's fictional story to illustrate the moral implications of procreation. They argue that every act of bringing a child into the world contributes to a cycle of suffering, akin to the *creation of Omelas*, where the happiness of the many depends on the suffering of one. This metaphor underscores their assertion that procreation is fundamentally unethical.

Häyry and Sukenick conclude by acknowledging the challenges in spreading antinatalist ideas. They recognize that despite the ethical arguments against procreation, people are likely to continue having children due to biological and social imperatives. Nonetheless, they advocate for a voluntary end to reproduction as a positive and ethical choice.

In summary, *Antinatalism, Extinction, and the End of Procreative Self-Corruption* is an essential and well-informed contribution to the field of antinatalist philosophy. Häyry and Sukenick provide a thorough and critical exploration of antinatalism, engaging with historical and contemporary arguments and offering a compelling case for the ethical rejection of procreation. Their work is a significant resource for anyone interested in the philosophical and ethical dimensions of human existence and procreation.

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