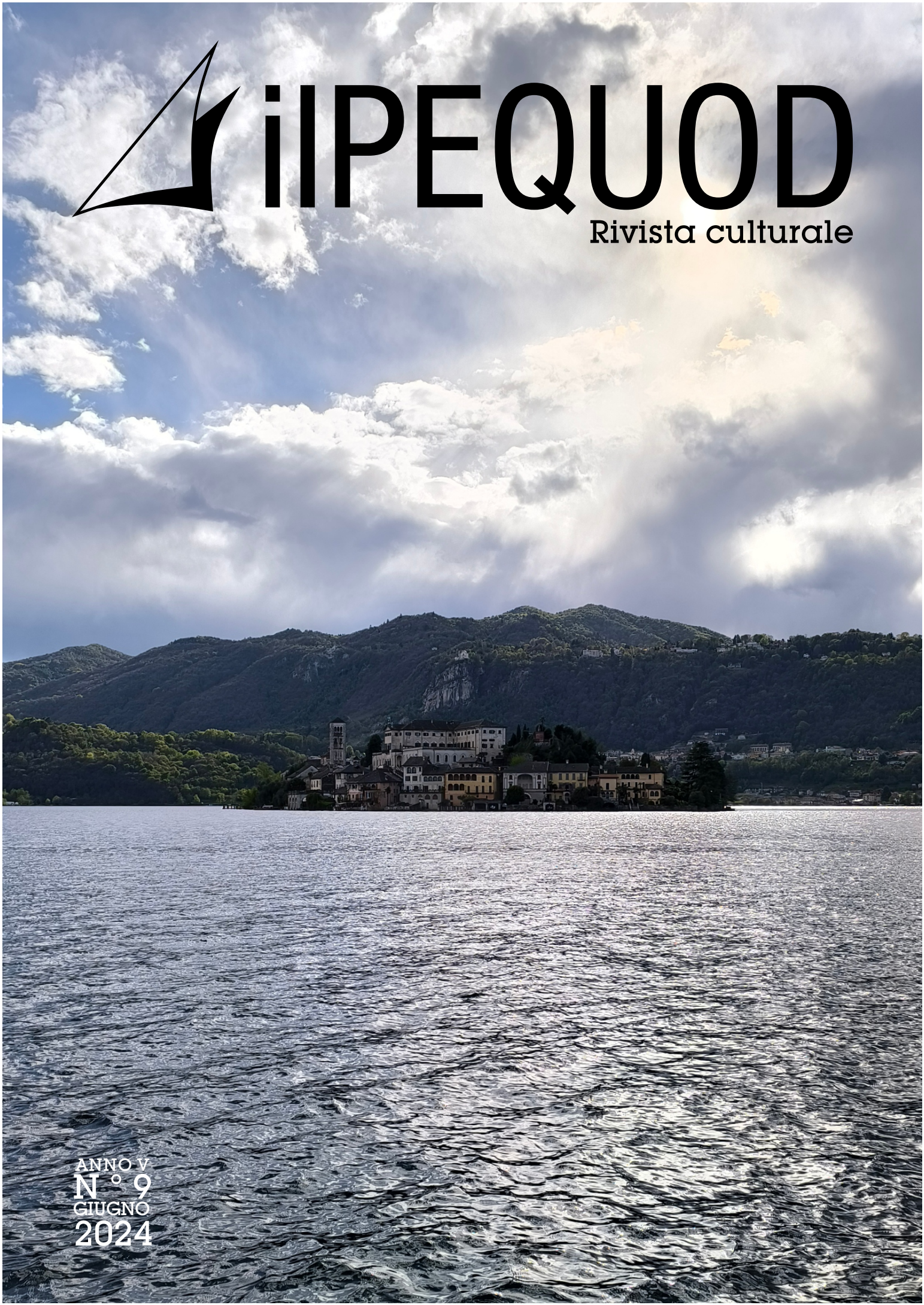




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### **Motto**

*Carta si face perché homo è fallace*

### **Copertina**

(Foto di Enrico Palma. Grafica di Michele Accardo)

Le immagini presenti nel numero, ove non diversamente specificato, sono degli autori di ciascun contributo.

### **Epigrafe del numero**

*Vivo ogni giorno nella fiducia che torneranno giorni migliori e che il giorno in cui ci rivedremo, liberi, sarà molto più bello.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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## Dalle parti degli infedeli

### Debating Anti-Natalism. Interview with David Benatar, Alberto Giovanni Biuso and Théophile de Giraud<sup>1</sup>



by Sarah Dierna

*Critical ideals need thinking people to take root.*

Anti-natalism is one of that controversial philosophical issues which is more difficult to accept than to understand. Even if in the last decades the argument has been discussed more than before, in my opinion it should have a wider diffusion because of the purpose of it. In question is the pain that is there and that could not be there, that is there and that could be avoided.

For this reason, I decided to hand the floor over to three Anti-natalist philosophers: David Benatar (DB), Alberto Giovanni Biuso (AGB) and Théophile de Giraud (TdG) who have exposed their perspectives in several and different ways. Since they have already expressed their ideas about the main aspects of Anti-natalism in their books or articles, I tried to pose them questions which regard other issues related to Anti-natalism. So, I started with a personal question about their anti-natalist awareness, and I asked them for questions which focus on other animal, anthropocentrism, and any future development of anti-natalist perspectives. Intentionally I posed them only a few questions because I

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<sup>1</sup> [David Benatar](#) is Emeritus Professor at the University of Cape Town; [Alberto Giovanni Biuso](#) is Full Professor at the University of Catania; [Théophile de Giraud](#) is a Belgian writer, philosopher, and activist of Anti-Natalism.

<sup>2</sup> M. Häyry and A. Sukenick, *Antinatalism, Extinction and The End of Procreative Self-Corruption*, Cambridge University Press, February 2024. The quotation that opens this interview gives the spirit from which I decided to make this work and I chose to pose my questions to these three scholars.

would like that their answers are read in order to have an idea of Antinatalism and its philosophical grounds.

The idea of this interview is the result of my work on Anti-natalism. Studying this argument, I had the opportunity to discuss with each of them about my studying and to receive their advice and feedback which improved a lot my research. This interview represents only a summary of the dialogue we had in these two years.

I am sincerely grateful to David Benatar, Alberto Giovanni Biuso and Théophile de Giraud and I thank them for their availability to answer my questions. I would also like to thank the Editor-in-Chief Enrico Palma and all the Editorial Board of *IlPequod Journal* for their open-mindedness and availability to host this interview.

1) *Respectively in the English, in the French and in the Italian cultural discussion you are three of the most influential thinkers in Anti-natalism. I would start with a partially 'personal' question: how and from what you have come up with Anti-natalism?*

**DB:** For as long as I can remember, it has struck me as *obvious* that it is better never to come into existence. I have changed my mind about some things, but not about this.

**AGB:** My interest on Antinatalism arises from my overall philosophical work. It was completely natural that the knowledge of the Greek world, of the anthropological structures of the human animal, of the entire history of philosophy and metaphysics converged in Anti-Natalism as the synthesis of a gaze that fears nothing, because philosophy is exactly this gaze.

**TdG:** Having been born in 1968, in the middle of the Cold War with its constant and dangerous risk of a global nuclear conflict, my childhood had been swamped by bad news on the dreads of Nazism; of the Shoah; of the atomic bomb; of the risk of overpopulation; of the Vietnam war; of the Ecological Crisis; and of the animal exploitation. Although I had good parents and a happy childhood, I have been disgusted of having been born in such a violent and foul world. During the adolescence, I read Schopenhauer's and Cioran's books which helped me to confirm my perspective of life and brought me to an Anti-natalist conclusion. At the age of 27, after a long work on dreamlike data with a Jungian psychoanalyst, it became obvious to me that anti-natalist activism was a necessary step before possibly committing suicide. If you have experienced the misfortune of being born, you might as well try to avoid it for others defeating pro-natalist ideology and propaganda.

2) *Even if all of you share Anti-natalism and its purposes, your anti-natalist perspective is based on different approaches. David Benatar, you are a moral philosopher; Alberto Giovanni Biuso, you are a theoretical philosopher; Théophile de Giraud, you are one of the most important activists who struggles for Childfree and Antinatalism as it can also be seen in your radical books. Could you expose “where” do you situate Anti-natalism in your philosophy? What is the reflection which bring forth this?*

**DB:** Anti-natalism is only one of many subjects on which I have written. Thus, while it is a recurring theme in some of my writing, it is by no means my only philosophical interest.

**AGB:** As I said in the previous answer, the question of being born is a synthesis of my entire philosophical work. However, I would add that the opposite is also true: reflection on the meaning of coming into the world and of being there helps me to understand every aspect of human thought and action, of course the various theoretical questions (scientific, aesthetic, metaphysical, political) do not fall into line with existential/moral questions, but maintaining the autonomy of each topic and of the different methodologies with which different issues must be addressed.

**TdG:** Anti-Natalism is the core of my philosophy and the most discussed issue in my essays and in my speeches. In my opinion, Anti-Natalism is the crowning and the haven of the humanist ethic and of the non-violent culture. Suffering is part of existence. The only way to avoid suffering is do not procreate. If it is true that the most important aim of ethic is do not harm others, and if it is also true that being born means being subjected to potential damages, then it follows this syllogism: *Making others suffer is incompatible with ethics. But to live means to suffer. So, giving life is incompatible with ethics.* Antinatalism is therefore the logical and necessary conclusion of humanist ethics and the culture of non-violence.

3) *Most of the people believe that life is, despite everything, beautiful. That there is not only bad in life and, if there is, it is balanced from the good. What is your opinion about this quite spread conviction? How would you reply to this?*

**DB:** My view is that this conviction is mistaken – for reasons I have presented in *Better Never to Have Been* and *The Human Predicament*. In short, I do not deny that life can contain good. However, whatever good occurs within a life is good for the person whose life it is, but it is not a reason to have created the person in the first place. Moreover, I do not think that the good outweighs the bad. The reason why many people do not see this is that they are prone to such psychological phenomena as an optimism bias.

**AGB:** I reply that this is an attitude that is probably necessary for most human beings to avoid despair. This does not mean that it is not a completely partial attitude, which avoids the deepest questions, the most objective and most lucid questions about the human condition.

**TdG:** It is not needed to quote the well-known «Sarvam dukkham» (everything is suffering) which constitutes the first noble truth of Buddhism, it is easy to show that life is made by more evil than good, which could be physical or psychological. This evidence is what I called « Décalogue bionomique » in the first chapter of my *Manifeste anti-nataliste*. I do not have much space to enunciate these 10 laws of existence which highlight the ontological asymmetry between the certain pain and the uncertain pleasure of one life. I report only the first one which assesses that « *Le Malheur abonde, le Bonheur tend à se dérober. Il s'avère incomparablement plus aisé d'être malheureux, sur cette planète de combats incessants, que d'y trouver le bonheur. Ne rien faire suffit à nous accabler de souffrances, alors qu'en revanche d'opiniâtres efforts ne suffisent pas toujours à nous garantir la béatitude ! Cette loi ruine à elle seule, et définitivement, toute prétention optimistique [The evil is enough while the good runs away. It turns out to be much easier to be unhappy on this planet of incessant conflict, than to find happiness there. Doing nothing is enough to overwhelm us with suffering while, on the other hand, stubborn efforts are not always enough to guarantee us bliss! This law alone removes, and definitively, any optimistic pretension]* ». How can we deny that the worst is always at our own fingertips than the best? Unhappiness is easy to find and sometimes very lasting. Happiness is difficult to find and often very weak. In all existence, evil therefore largely outweighs good, a priori.

4) *In the last twenty years (more or less), Anti-natalism has achieved more attention than before in the philosophical and scientific debate and this also thanks to Benatar's book Better Never to Have Been and to de Giraud's Manifeste anti-nataliste which are fundamental and really clear in discussing Anti-natalism. If you agree with me, do you believe there are any reasons that motivates this increasing attention, or it depends only on the fact that someone decided to talk about it? According to you, does it correspond some consequently practical behavior to this theoretical diffusion? Are people deciding to not have children because they are aware of the evil of generation? Always according to you, in the future, human beings will choose to not procreate for philanthropic reasons which are aware of the unborn's interests?*

**DB:** My own sense is that the increased attention to anti-natalism is the result of the books that have been published about it over the period you mention. However, we need to draw a distinction between the anti-natalist ideas receiving attention, and people putting the ideas into practice. I have a much less clear sense of how many people are putting the



ideas into practice. Of course, we do know that globally the birth rate has declined, but at least most of this decline is not for principled anti-natalist reasons.

**AGB:** Yes, I believe that there are any reasons that motivates this increasing attention and that these reasons are numerous but the most important is that there are researchers, intellectuals, philosophers who have developed the awareness that one must not remain silent about anything, and hide nothing, not even the most extreme questions. Otherwise, philosophy and culture would not exist. I do not know if there are any significant practical implications. I believe that Anti-Natalism is certainly a minority position and I therefore hope that it will spread more and more as a practice.

**TdG:** It is true that the increase of anti-natalist books in the last 20 years contributed to a greater spread of Anti-natalism debate and it should be hoped that the numbers of publications which deal with this issue continue to increase in the future. Nevertheless, in my opinion people do not chose to not procreate for some philosophical awareness of the problem of coming into the world. Instead, as it can be seen in the Birth Strike movement, it is the feeling of anxiety related to the Global warming and to the apocalyptical scenery of GIEC which influence the decision do not procreate. It is really encouraging because it shows the more importance given to ethics instead of that given to biological desires to reproduce. Apart from this evidence, it is likely that unborn interests will become more and more central in parents' decision in the future. This is shown from the so-called 'Wrongful life' situations and in the legal action related, even if they regard only that pathological case in which fetus manifests some handicap which has been diagnosticated in the pre-natal period. [...] Even if this law still is not available, there is the possibility that within a century or two, this right will be recognized by some of the most progressives states in the same way with which the right to die (even if in an incomplete way) is accepted because the suffering of the first person has the priority over the mythology of having to live at all costs in order not to upset or demoralize other people.

5) *What scenarios do you predict for the future? In light of these scenarios, how could Anti-natalism be spread and be achieved (for example through Institution, Political action, Education etc.)?*

**DB:** The prediction business is a dangerous one! It is too easy to be wrong. Some might think that if global warming increases and conditions on earth become less hospitable that people will have fewer children. But I do not think that we can be confident that even in response to such climatic conditions, people would have fewer children. For most of human history, conditions on earth have been exceedingly inhospitable to humans, but that

did not stop them having children. Indeed, it is possible that to some extent people have more children when child-mortality rates are high.

**AGB:** I believe that in the political sphere the most fruitful action is that which is summarized in Metapolitics, that is to say in the elaboration and diffusion of ideas and critical perspectives on the world. This also applies to the reduction of the enormous amount of pain caused by the birth of humans. I do not think political intervention is desirable because it would be authoritarian, rather I hope in the slow but profound diffusion of an anti-natalist perception. The political powers, in any case, mostly tend to favor the multiplication of the workforce, cannon fodder, individuals over whom to exercise command.

**TdG:** Since I have not any optimistic bias, in my opinion the most likely scenario is that in which humanity does not disappear for its voluntary decision (accepting antinatalist ideas). Nevertheless, thanks to Feminism – in this sense their fight against the patriarchy is fundamental – it is quite predictable that the world population will decrease in the XXII century. We see in fact that the more a woman has access to education, existential and economic autonomy, as well as contraception and abortion, the more she spontaneously chooses to have very few children, or even none. [...] Moreover, if the antinatalist philosophy, as a logical outcome of the culture of non-violence, were taught to adolescents as part of school programs, there could only be a progressive but ultimately meaningful reduction of the number of human beings.

Beyond all this, human beings will continue to procreate [...]. The DNA influences a lot of human behaviours and it is to be feared that procreation, like violence, is impossible to eradicate, our best hope as antinatalists being a slow but powerful reduction in these behaviors harmful to others. The main tools to allow antinatalism to achieve its maximum practical purpose (drastic reduction but not suppression of the human population) are therefore: political action via feminism and support for ecological organizations fighting against the problem of growth global demographics (“Population Matters” for example), the extension of the concept of “Wrongful life” and its institutional anchoring in legislation, the education of adolescents via school programs, the proliferation of books (essay, novel, theater, poetry), academic publications, films, documentaries, antinatalist songs and works of art, and finally activism through actions which are likely to attract media attention to make people aware as wide as possible.

6) *Some researchers discussed about the risk that human extinction could have on other animals increasing their sufferance because of our passing. Others sustained that Anti-natalism could be considered a sort of anthropocentric thought because it theorizes that humans would have the arrogance to choose by themselves about their life and to decide when to stop procreating and ceasing to exist. Moreover, in*

*doing so, humanity seems to be able to separate from the nature or to act in an unnatural way. Do you believe that Anti-natalism is a sort of anthropocentric perspective? Could you tell me the reason of your reply?*

**DB:** There seem to be a few questioned embedded here and not all of them are clear to me.

Yes, there are those who think that human extinction would only increase animal suffering because humans contribute so significantly to animal extinction, and extinct animals cannot suffer. The problem is that humans are bringing about animal extinctions in terrible ways – by causing significant amounts of animal suffering. It really is very difficult to do the very long-term and complex consequentialist calculations. There is too much scope for error.

We humans have the kind of control over our own reproduction that we do not have over the reproduction of wild animals. We should thus focus on not reproducing ourselves and not reproducing the domesticated animals that we breed in massive numbers to their very serious detriment.

**AGB:** My anti-natalism is part of an anthropocentric philosophy. I consider nihilistic (as well as unsustainable) any anthropocentrism, any sacredness attributed to an entity that is like all the others, with its own characteristics, of course, as every entity (living or non-living and the living are a tiny percentage of being) has its own. Instead, I believe that it is profoundly Greek and contrary to every ὕβρις not to attribute any particular value either to the ζώη or to the βίος, as I believe neither the early thinkers nor Plato attributed it. Anti-natalism is not “unnatural” because otherwise every human action would be unnatural, including lighting a match taken from a box sold in a tobacconist (in nature there are neither matches nor tobacconists). So, dying is also natural and trying to prevent it with medicine would be completely unnatural. In reality, there is nothing anthropocentric in this attitude but only an attempt to avoid - if possible - the multiplication of suffering.

**TdG:** Of course, human demise will bring to decrease of non-human animal suffering, but it will also bring to increase of wild animals, that means an increase of their sufferance, since their life is not idyllic as the naturalist Théodore Monod highlights in his book *Révérence à la vie*.

I do not understand the criticism made against Anti-natalism. This charge is similar to that against the right of abortion, the right to euthanasia or the right to homosexual marriage. Nor do I understand the criticism made against Antinatalism for acting in an unnatural way. *Homo Sapiens*, like everything that exists, is a product of Nature (physis): the atomic bomb is as natural as a rhododendron and the refusal to procreate, like medicine, football or algebra, does not is other than one of the innumerable manifestations of Nature

(physis). As for the question of whether antinatalism represents a sort of anthropocentrism because it allows itself to decide about life or non-life choices going against theocentric ideology, I would rather say that antinatalism is much closer to biocentrism than to anthropocentrism since antinatalism develops a universal ethic which aims to include in its soteriological approach all living beings sensitive to suffering.

7) *In most of the scientific literature, Anti-natalism addresses human beings and it does not include other animals or other form of sensitive life. Other animals stop to reproduce when they became a lot; they are able to maintain balance in their ecosystem; moreover, most of the animal's sufferance depends on human behaviors. Considering this, what do you think about the possibility of including other living beings in the anti-natalist theory? Could it be sufficient human extinction in order to solve the animal suffering? If a sort of animal Anti-natalism is possible, how it could be pursued?*

**DB:** This question connects with the previous one. I have *always* maintained that all my arguments for why it is better never to come into existence, apply not only to humans but to all sentient beings. However, when it comes to reproduction itself, there is a crucial difference between (a) us, (b) the animals we breed, and (c) the wild animals whose procreation we do not control. Procreation and breeding can be morally wrong only for those who are capable of making the relevant moral choices – namely moral agents. Normal adult humans are moral agents, but other animals probably are not, at least with regard to procreation. Accordingly, other animals cannot do anything morally *wrong* in reproducing, even if it would be better if they did not reproduce.

**AGB:** The extinction of the human species would be one of the main factors in decreasing the suffering of other species, which - at least since the Neolithic - have been subjugated, killed, devoured, tortured either in laboratories for arbitrary "scientific" reasons or often out of simple sadism. Naturally, animals also suffer for reasons independent of humans but, I repeat, they would find relief from our extinction, as Guido Morselli's novel *Dissipatio H.G.* also suggests. As you mentioned, other animals are mostly able to keep their numbers in balance, otherwise they become extinct.

**TdG:** In no way does human demise solve non-human suffering. As I said, suffering is part of existence, so the other animals suffered before human being came into the world and they continue to suffer after their extinction. But it is also true that humans cause a great amount of suffering to other species through their exploitation for human purposes. Nevertheless, it should be noted that *Homo Sapiens*, due to its status as a super-predator and its uncontrolled pronatalism which has led him to colonize every corner of the planet for his own benefit, has unintentionally been able to radically reduce the number of wild

animals, thereby reducing the overall suffering of those this, without of course resolving the problem of their individual suffering. The suffering of other animals intended for the well-being of our species (food, transport, labor force, religious sacrifices, scientific research, entertainment, etc.) will obviously cease with the disappearance of our species, but animal suffering persists as soon as animal will be alive. Not less.

If suffering is consubstantial with existence and if the avoidance of pain-suffering is a universal phenomenon in the animal world, it is not crazy to deduce that if a species other than ours had the cognitive and technical tools to develop the equivalent of our antinatalist philosophy, it would also attempt to implement it to avoid suffering through the cessation of reproduction.

Thus, Antinatalism should be spread to all sentient beings. This is the theory. In the practice, it is difficult to employ these methods to other species, so a future solution on a larger scale will probably come from biotechnology and its genome editing tools, such as the famous CRISPR-Cas9, which will perhaps one day make it possible to sterilize most animal species without violence. Moreover, the ethical question of whether the human species has the philosophical right to peacefully exterminate other species out of antinatalist benevolence will probably never find an answer other than speculative.

*8) I would like to close this interview with a more complex question. More and more researchers have been studying Anti-natalism but they focus on some particular aspect of the anti-natalist perspective. For example, some of them have deepened the problem of human extinction, others on the problem of consensus or on procreative duties. According to you, anti-natalist reflection is complete and ended in is theoretical aspects? Did Antinatalism thought expose all that could be said about it or it still misses something? If it misses something, if it could be done a further analysis, in which direction would do you search for it?*

**DB:** As with other philosophical issues, the discussion is never over. Not all of what is being said is equally valuable, but that is true of all other philosophical areas too. It is good that the subject is receiving so much more attention that it previously was.

**AGB:** No philosophy can ever be “closed and complete” because it would no longer be philosophy. I believe that the anti-natalist perspective still has a lot to say, discover and investigate. In my opinion, the most profitable direction to turn to is the one that strictly combines Antinatalism and Anthro-po-de-centrism.

**TdG:** I have not read all academic literature on Antinatalism, so it is difficult reply to this question. But we know that a philosophical debate is never complete, and it has the possibility of being deepen by the argumentative finesse of its opponents, by human

increasing knowledge and awareness. I nevertheless think that the theoretical and argumentative bases of antinatalism are now extremely mature and consistent. A strong signal of the intellectual solidity and vitality of antinatalist philosophy is that there are several currents with various nuances: philanthropic, misanthropic, environmentalist, pro-mortalist antinatalism, etc.

Beyond the essential question of the possibility to extend or not antinatalism to species other than ours, a question deserving to be powerfully debated and argued in the next future, another path may still be too little explored is that of what the different scientific disciplines could bring to the antinatalist argument. A “science-based antinatalism” would make it possible to supplement the classic theoretical bases with arguments of a more empirical nature and therefore perhaps more convincing in the eyes of our natalist opponents. An eloquent example: of the six basic emotions, only one is truly positive (joy), another is rather neutral (surprise) and the other four (sadness, fear, anger, and disgust) are frankly negative. The multiplication of this type of data could only further validate the antinatalist philosophy.