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### **HUSBAY: 3 June 2020 – speaker notes**

After-zoom note: Folks mentioned an interest in seeing the material showed on my shared screen. Here it is. Clearly, not a ready-for-prime-time, document, but you may find it interesting. Folks are welcome to contact me at [dan@dandana.us](mailto:dan@dandana.us) Thanks for your interest and participation.

#### **ANTINATALISM**

- First/only presentation on this topic
- Provocative, contrary to dominant paradigm re “value of life”, risk of being misconstrued as morally repugnant

From HUSBAY session announcement:

“On a global scale, what is the balance between pain and pleasure as experienced by sentient creatures, including humans? If you think the total amount of pleasure exceeds pain, you are a natalist -- "life is good." If you think pain exceeds pleasure, then you are an antinatalist – "Life is not good.” Dan will examine this issue as an abstract philosophical question, as well as a practical matter that guides our own individual life-choices. Come prepared to question one of humanity’s most enduring assumptions. “

Sources:

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antinatalism>
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sentientism>

Ethical philosophies:

- humanism – wellbeing of humans is of prime importance and basis for ethical choice, not supernatural matters
- sentientism – wellbeing of all sentient creatures (can feel pain/pleasure), including humans, is of prime importance and basis of ethical choice
- natalism – birth (life) is a good thing – derived from religion (god’s creation/image)
- antinatalism – birth (life) is not a good thing (pain exceeds pleasure, globally)

Epistemological worldviews/beliefs:

- supernaturalism – belief that something can exist beyond the natural world – baryonic/“normal” matter and energy/radiation
  - myth irrelevant to antinatalism/sentientism/humanism
- science – study of the natural world (physics, chemistry, biology, geology, astronomy, cosmology, social sciences(?), etc.)
  - scientism – the only way to discover objective truth/external reality
    - spiritualists/religious disagree

### Assume secular worldview

- Life is not “sacred,” “holy” – god’s creation
- No supernaturalism, e.g, sentient afterlife – same void as before birth/conception

### Usage of term “antinatalism”:

- government/institutional/social/political policy:
  - China 1-child, ZPG
    - pronatalism: Israeli Arabs, Catholics/contraception (“another soul for heaven”)
- philosophy/ethics
  - how to measure “good” life?
  - pain/pleasure balance (globally, not individually)

### My interest/psychohistory: high empathy/empathic pain

- no personal trauma, ordinary hurts/disappointments
- Empathy with pain/suffering of nonhuman animals
  - farm youth: “working” cattle, seasonal round-up: branding/dehorning/castrating
    - Witnessed killing of bovine “friend” for meat – orphan calf
    - Maltreatment of animals raised for human food
  - Killing for sport - hunting
  - 99% die by predation (eaten alive)
  - Evolution -- common ancestry with other animals, sameness of capacity for pain/suffering, even emotional pain (fear/grief)
  - Animal rights -- religion views animals as categorially unlike humans
    - no pain, or doesn’t matter
    - antisentientistic policies/practices
      - meat industry, food animals
      - “hunting seasons” for sport-killing
      - animal sacrifice rituals
- Human suffering
  - Genocide, holocaust, slavery, atrocities, poverty, wars/military/civilian casualties, torture, imprisonment, starvation, child/spouse abuse, racism, criminal violence, pandemics, etc.
  - Economic inequality/classism
  - Vietnam, objectification of “gooks”, gratuitous cruelty
  - I avoid violent movies, depictions of pain/terror
- Would we wish this fate on another planet?
  - How would discovery of sentient life on exoplanet be viewed?
    - Both scientific discovery and antiscience mythology are expanding
    - What role for science-based education?

### Role of evolution:

- Selfish gene – individual is vehicle for genetic survival of species

- Pain (and fear of pain) is evolved mechanism to motivate individuals to avoid predators, survive to procreate
- orgasmic pleasure is evolved mechanism to motivate sexual reproduction
  - Non-orgasmic (nonhuman) females?
    - willing to mate during estrus/heat cycle (feels “good”?)
- “lower” animal behavior demonstrates fear/pain – mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, insects
  - “instinct” without sentience?
- Survival instinct overrides rationality

#### Cultural meme/belief: “life is good”

- Births welcomed with joy, celebrated
- (Selfish) desire for progeny/legacy, fantasy of immortality through descendants?
- Deaths grieved, even people whose futures are grim
  - We “put down” animal pets in compassion
  - Deceased are not sentient, survivors lose “attachment/love” (grief)
- Execution of capital criminals = greatest “punishment”?
  - Apart from desire for “justice”/revenge
- Why fear of death? Afterlife/hell belief? Fear of unknown?
  - (secular) reality: no sentience/awareness/pain/loss – pure nothingness

#### Abstract philosophy – personal choice/activism?

- Childlessness
  - $2^{10} = 1024$  direct descendants in 10 generations @ 2 kids per pair, 200 years
  - $2^{100} = 31$ -digit number, 100 generations, 2000 years
    - Earth population now, 7,600,000,000 = 10-digit number
- adoption vs natural birth
- end-of-life choice
  - How much time “on the cross” do you want at the end?
  - Advocacy for physician-assisted death
  - Advocacy for legal “rational suicide”
- abortion rights
- prebirth counseling re fetal anomalies
- contraception
- opposition/ active resistance to pro-natalism (Catholicism/etc)
- advocacy/removal of social stigma against non-coital sexual practices, masturbation, sex toys
- re nonhuman animals:
  - species extinction?
  - “beauty of nature”
  - veganism/vegetarianism – my moral dilemma/choice

#### Conclusion:

- antinatalism is a logical imperative for secular humanists/sentientists

## QUESTIONS:

- Can any amount of pleasure/joy justify the massive suffering of sentient creatures?
- How do those whose lifetimes of sentience have been relatively free of pain/trauma feel/think about those with a “negative balance” on the pain/pleasure scale?
- “personal sovereignty” right to decide one’s own death – you can’t decide for me
  - Health care power of attorney

Trilogy of antinatalism haiku quintets:

"On Antinatalism"

Is life good? I mean, really, is life good?

[http://dandana.us/poems/H35\\_NatalismHaiku.pdf](http://dandana.us/poems/H35_NatalismHaiku.pdf)

"Chicxulub Asteroid Impact"

Our lucky day?

[http://dandana.us/poems/H45\\_Chicxulub.pdf](http://dandana.us/poems/H45_Chicxulub.pdf)

"Thin Silver Lining"

~ End of young life may not be all bad.

[http://dandana.us/poems/H61\\_ThinSilverLining.pdf](http://dandana.us/poems/H61_ThinSilverLining.pdf)

For all 103 (so far) haiku quintets, visit [www.dandana.us/poems](http://www.dandana.us/poems)

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### On Antinatalism

question seldom asked:  
life's bowl of tasty cherries  
enjoyed by so few

pleasures exceed harms?  
consider world's balance sheet  
ask evil's victims

animal cousins  
billion years of sentience  
death-by-predator

will-to-live serves genes  
free choice? or faith's blind dogma?  
evolution's tool

ethicists debate  
common consensus can err  
paradigms can shift

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## **Chicxulub Asteroid Impact**

bad day for Earth-life  
mere sixty-six MYA  
K-T line moment

six-mile-wide space rock  
forty-four-K MPH  
Yucatan hit hard

global firestorms raged  
tough birds, wee mammals eked out  
instinct did its job

big dinos perished  
only pre-chickens survived  
and our parent shrews

lucky us, or not?  
since K-T, more joy than hurt?  
ethicists debate

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## **Thin Silver Lining**

early death pains us  
surviving loved ones grieve loss  
sentience foreshortened

thin silver lining:  
no generations ensue  
countless lives unlived

progeny spared risk  
no war, misery, torment  
-- comforting long view

pleasure warrants pain?  
antinatalists cast doubt  
better not to live?

we fortunate few  
tiny fraction of the whole  
happy we exist