

## “Is Not Giving Birth a Virtue?” A Theological Critique of Antinatalism from the Perspective of Islamic Theology

“Doğurmamak Bir Erdem midir?” Antinatalizme İslam Kelamı Açısından Teolojik Bir Eleştirisi

Fikrullah ÇAKMAK<sup>1</sup>, Aynur ÖNAL<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Atatürk Üniversitesi, İlahiyat Fakültesi, Kelam Anabilim Dalı  
Assist. Prof. Dr., Atatürk University, Faculty of Theology, Department of Kalam, Erzurum, Türkiye

<sup>2</sup> Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi, Atatürk Üniversitesi, İlahiyat Fakültesi, Kelam Anabilim Dalı  
Master's Student, Atatürk University, Faculty of Theology, Department of Theology, Erzurum, Türkiye

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## ABSTRACT

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This study examines antinatalism, one of the foremost philosophical and ethical objections to the idea of having children in the modern age. The antinatalist argument, which centers on the claim that birth is a non-consensual act that causes suffering, challenges the very existence of humanity, the institution of family, and the concept of moral responsibility, forming the central problem of this study. The aim of the study is to analyze the intellectual foundations of antinatalism, critically evaluate this approach, and offer a theological response based on Islamic thought, particularly the discipline of kalām. While philosophical and socio-ethical perspectives are included in the analysis, theological criticism is methodologically limited to the Islamic tradition in order to ensure conceptual consistency. In this context, antinatalism is discussed not only as an individual ethical stance but also in relation to modern processes of individualization, loss of meaning, and social fragmentation. Studies that address the ethical, philosophical, and religious aspects of antinatalism together are quite limited. This study aims to fill this gap. The research is based on descriptive analysis and critical analysis methodology. Contemporary antinatalist texts, classical theological views, and modern theological approaches are evaluated comparatively. The study demonstrates that antinatalism can be understood as a philosophical symptom of contemporary crises of meaning, alienation, and moral decline. It argues that Islamic thought can offer an alternative framework that reinterprets birth as mercy, family as responsibility, and life as a meaningful journey.

## ÖZET

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**Anahtar  
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Bu çalışma, modern çağda çocuk sahibi olma fikrine yöneltilen başlıca felsefi ve ahlâkî itirazlardan biri olan antinatalizmi incelemektedir. Doğumun rıza dışı bir eylem olduğu ve acıya yol açtığı iddiası etrafında şekillenen antinatalist argüman, insanlığın varlığını, aile kurumunu ve ahlâkî sorumluluk kavramını sorgulayarak bu çalışmanın merkezi problemini oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı, antinatalizmin düşünsel temellerini analiz etmek, bu yaklaşımı eleştirel biçimde değerlendirmek ve özellikle kelâm disiplini çerçevesinde İslam düşüncesine dayalı bir teolojik cevap sunmaktır. Analiz sürecine felsefi ve sosyo-etik perspektifler de dâhil edilmekle birlikte, kavramsal tutarlılığı sağlamak için teolojik eleştiri yöntemi olarak İslam geleneğiyle sınırlandırılmıştır. Bu bağlamda antinatalizm yalnızca bireysel bir etik tutum olarak değil, aynı zamanda modern bireyselleşme süreçleri, anlam kaybı ve toplumsal parçalanma ile ilişkili olarak ele alınmaktadır. Antinatalizmi etik, felsefi ve dinî boyutlarıyla birlikte ele alan çalışmalar oldukça sınırlıdır. Bu çalışma, söz konusu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, betimleyici analiz ve eleştirel analiz yöntemine dayanmaktadır. Güncel antinatalist metinler, klasik teolojik görüşler ve modern teolojik yaklaşımlar karşılaştırmalı olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışma, antinatalizmin çağdaş anlam krizleri, yabancılaşma ve ahlâkî çöküşün felsefi bir semptomu olarak anlaşılabilirliğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca İslam düşüncesinin, doğumu rahmet, aileyi sorumluluk ve hayatı anlamlı bir yolculuk olarak yeniden yorumlayan alternatif bir çerçeve sunabileceğini ileri sürmektedir.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the family structure in Turkey has undergone significant transformations, with noticeable dynamics such as a decline in marriage rates, an increase in the average age of marriage, and a rise in divorce rates. The growing number of divorces, particularly due to factors such as economic problems, infidelity, domestic violence, and lack of communication, has heightened societal concerns about the sustainability of the family institution. A key aspect of this transformation is that young people are postponing marriage or even distancing themselves from the idea altogether. Career aspirations, economic instability, and increasingly individualistic lifestyles are among the main reasons behind this attitude.<sup>1</sup> However, this change is not limited to marriage and divorce rates; it also affects fertility trends. According to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), the total fertility rate, which was 2.38 in 2001, dropped to 1.51 as of 2023, indicating that Turkey has fallen below the population replacement level.<sup>2</sup> As Turkish society moves away from the traditional extended family model, having children is increasingly becoming a personal choice, and parenthood is no longer viewed as a natural stage of life.

In this context, the individual choice not to have children can be regarded not only as a consequence of socioeconomic conditions but also as an expression of philosophical inquiry. Particularly, the existential crises faced by modern individuals, concerns about the future, and a sense of ethical responsibility have increased the appeal of intellectual movements that problematize the very act of birth. At this point, antinatalism has emerged as one of the prominent philosophical currents among these tendencies. At the core of antinatalism lies the belief that, due to the inherent pain and suffering in life, procreation is not a moral obligation but rather an act that ought to be avoided.<sup>3</sup> Although this perspective does not constitute an organized ideological movement today, it is becoming increasingly visible in Turkey, particularly through digital platforms and social media, and is providing an intellectual foundation for individual attitudes that distance themselves from the idea of having children.<sup>4</sup> Antinatalist thought manifests itself not only through social media platforms but also through literary works. In this context, when considering the pessimistic themes found

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<sup>1</sup> Arif Akbaş, "Türkiye Toplumunda Evlilik ve Aile: Sosyolojik-Psikolojik Perspektiften Yakın İlişkiler", *NOSYON: Uluslararası Toplum ve Kültür Çalışmaları Dergisi* 13 (30 June 2024), 141.

<sup>2</sup> Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK), *Doğum İstatistikleri 2023* (Accessed 20 May 2025).

<sup>3</sup> David Benatar, *Keşke Hiç Olmasaydık Var Olmanın Kötülüğü*, trans. Cansu Özge Özmen (Ankara: Doğu Batı Yayınları, 2023), 48.

<sup>4</sup> "Antinatalizm", *Twitter* (22 April 2025); "Uygarlık Yolu", *YouTube* (Accessed 22 May 2025); "Antinatalizm", *Facebook* (Accessed 23 May 2025); Felsefe Parrhesia, "Antinatalizm (doğum karşıtlığı) hakkında olumlu ya da olumsuz ne düşünüyorsunuz?", *Twitter* (29 May 2025, 13:34).

in Şule Gürbüz's works *To Die with Enthusiasm (Coşkuyla Ölmek)* and *The Doomsday Retiree (Kıyamet Emeklisi)*—such as the meaninglessness or burden of existence,<sup>5</sup> the desire for death<sup>6</sup> and anxiety toward procreation<sup>7</sup>—it becomes evident that the inner world the author reflects to the reader significantly overlaps with antinatalist thought.

In the modern world, the tendency to remain childless is shaped not only by economic and cultural transformations but also by existential inquiries into the meaning of life. Within this context, antinatalism has emerged as a philosophical and ethical stance that problematizes procreation, often defining life in terms of suffering, dissatisfaction, and imposed harm. While these arguments are typically explored through secular philosophical lenses, they also raise fundamental theological and metaphysical questions. This article does not merely aim to describe antinatalist thought, but to engage critically with its central claims—both through classical philosophical reasoning and, more specifically, through a theological response grounded in Islamic thought. It focuses on how antinatalist ideas about birth, suffering, and consent intersect with core Islamic concepts such as divine wisdom (hikmah), human nature (fiṭrah), moral responsibility, and the metaphysical value of existence. The study includes philosophical and socio-ethical critiques, its theological analysis is deliberately confined to the Islamic tradition, particularly the discipline of kalām, due to the systematic metaphysical and moral framework it provides. This focus is a methodological choice to ensure conceptual consistency and analytical clarity.

Descriptive analysis and critical analysis methods will be used in the study. Descriptive analysis aims to systematically present the subject matter as it is, with minimal theoretical intervention, and to contextualize it within its philosophical and historical background.<sup>8</sup> In this framework, the study introduces and explains the key arguments of antinatalist thinkers such as David Benatar and Théophile de Giraud—particularly “the asymmetry between pleasure and pain,” “being brought into existence without consent,” and “the escape from ethical responsibility”—together with their foundational concepts and historical backgrounds. Critical analysis goes beyond merely describing ideas; it questions their underlying assumptions, value systems, and intellectual frameworks.<sup>9</sup> This study adopts

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<sup>5</sup> Şule Gürbüz, *Coşkuyla Ölmek* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2021), 42; Şule Gürbüz, *Kıyamet Emeklisi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2022), 1/116.

<sup>6</sup> Gürbüz, *Coşkuyla Ölmek*, 189; Gürbüz, *Kıyamet Emeklisi*, 1/140.

<sup>7</sup> Gürbüz, *Coşkuyla Ölmek*, 44; Gürbüz, *Kıyamet Emeklisi*, 1/116.

<sup>8</sup> Zeki Karataş, ‘Sosyal Bilim Araştırmalarında Paradigma Değişimi: Nitel Yaklaşımın Yükselişi’, *Türkiye Sosyal Hizmet Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1/1 (29 June 2017), 78–79.

<sup>9</sup> Umut Şah, ‘Eleştirel Söylem Analizi: Temel Yaklaşımlar’, *Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi* 7 (15 December 2020), 211–212, 226–227.

such a lens to uncover the moral and metaphysical foundations of antinatalist thought. Focusing on key concepts from the Islamic kalām tradition—such as divine wisdom (ḥikmah), human nature (fiṭrah), and the value of existence—it critically engages with antinatalism’s claims about life, suffering, and moral responsibility. In doing so, it presents antinatalism as a comprehensive worldview and facilitates a meaningful dialogue with Islamic theology

## 1. The Conceptual Framework and Historical Origins of Antinatalism

### 1.1. Conceptual Framework

The term *antinatalism* is derived from the Latin root *natalis*, which pertains to the beginning of life, that is, the moment of birth. The prefix *anti-* originates from Greek and conveys meanings of opposition or negation.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in terms of its linguistic structure, antinatalism expresses the idea of being against birth or negating the act of birth. As a specific philosophical concept, the term gained a systematic conceptual framework in 2006 through David Benatar’s *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence* and Théophile de Giraud’s *L’Art de guillotiner les procréateurs: Manifeste anti-nataliste*. These two works are regarded as the first systematic modern antinatalist texts, advocating the moral wrongness of procreation and rejecting the notion of coming into existence.<sup>11</sup>

The definition of antinatalism has been presented in various philosophical and academic sources with similar expressions, albeit with nuanced differences. Christopher Belshaw defines antinatalism as “the view that it would have been better never to have been born, and thus that procreation is wrong.”<sup>12</sup> Importantly, antinatalism is not limited to opposition against reproduction; it treats the very act of coming into existence as a moral problem. Blake Hereth and Anthony Ferrucci place antinatalism within a more specific framework: “Antinatalism is the view that bringing a child into existence is morally impermissible. Antinatalism is a moral stance concerning future-directed procreation. Thus, it is a moral thesis against procreation aimed at creating new human beings.”<sup>13</sup> This definition highlights antinatalism’s ethical sensitivity not only toward existing lives but also toward potential lives that have not yet come into existence. This approach reframes antinatalism not merely

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Geoffrey William Glare (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), “Natalis”, 1157.

<sup>11</sup> Masahiro Morioka, “What Is Antinatalism? Definition, History, and Categories”, *The Review of Life Studies* 12 (May 2021), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Belshaw, “A New Argument for Anti-Natalism”, *South African Journal of Philosophy* 31/1 (1 January 2012), 117.

<sup>13</sup> Blake Hereth - Anthony and Ferrucci, “Here’s Not Looking at You, Kid: A New Defence of Anti-Natalism”, *South African Journal of Philosophy* 40/1 (2 January 2021), 14.

as a personal existential concern, but as an ethical position that emphasizes responsibility toward potential future lives.

The definition offered by Faith L. Brown and Lucas A. Keefer is presented in a simpler and more general form: “Antinatalism is the ethical view that human reproduction is morally wrong.”<sup>14</sup> This definition maintains a human-centered perspective while presenting antinatalism as a general normative position.

In addition to these academic definitions, definitions of antinatalism have also emerged at the popular level. According to one of the early antinatalist communities on Facebook, the Antinatalism group: “Antinatalism is a philosophical position that assigns a negative value to birth.”<sup>15</sup> While this definition lacks the conceptual depth found in academic discourse, it strongly conveys the core intuition underlying antinatalism—namely, the belief that coming into existence carries an inherently negative value.

A common feature across definitions of antinatalism is that they essentially involve a value judgment. Antinatalism is not merely an opposition to the biological act of reproduction; it also represents a moral, metaphysical, and ontological questioning of existence itself. This fundamental view includes two orientations. The first is retrospective: it claims that all existing individuals would have been better off had they not been born. The second is prospective: it argues that there should be no further procreation. The first can be described as *the negation of birth*, while the second may be understood as *the negation of procreation*.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.2. The Intellectual Origins and Historical Development of Antinatalism

Antinatalism is more than a modern ethical stance; it is an intellectual tradition shaped by longstanding reflections on birth, existence, and the value of life across different historical periods. In many cultural contexts, birth has been regarded not as a universal joy but as a symbol of profound existential unease. In this respect, antinatalism is not only a contemporary philosophical movement but also a modern reflection of enduring metaphysical and moral crises that have persisted throughout history.

Even before antinatalism gained systematic conceptualization, the human mind had developed critical attitudes toward birth and life across various cultures. In Ancient Greece, Sophocles’ statement in *Oedipus at Colonus*—“Never to have been born is best”—is not merely an expression of personal regret but a poetic articulation of a universal questioning of

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<sup>14</sup> Faith L. Brown - Lucas A. Keefer, “Anti-Natalism from an Evolutionary Psychological Perspective”, *Evolutionary Psychological Science* 6/3 (1 September 2020), 284.

<sup>15</sup> “Antinatalism | Facebook” (Accessed 26 May 2025).

<sup>16</sup> Masahiro Morioka, “What Is Antinatalism? Definition, History, and Categories”, 2.

birth.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in the works of early Greek poets such as Theognis, the idea that nonexistence is more virtuous than life itself comes to the fore. These examples demonstrate the historical continuity of an approach that views birth – rather than existence – as a moral problem.<sup>18</sup>

This critical perspective is not limited to Greek thought alone. A deep unease regarding birth can also be sensed in the Hebrew sacred texts. In the books of *Job and Jeremiah*, the individual's cursing of their own birth reveals that suffering has reached such an intensity that it prompts a questioning of life's very beginning.<sup>19</sup>

A similar metaphysical framework can also be found in Ancient Egyptian belief. In the *Book of the Dead*, birth is depicted as the soul's departure from immortality and its entry into a transient and troubled world. This defines birth not as a beginning, but rather as a rupture and a period of trial.<sup>20</sup> In Zoroastrian cosmology, birth is not viewed as an ascent but rather as a fall – the soul's descent into the world to fight against darkness. Here, coming into the world is seen as a deviation from pure light and the assumption of a cosmic responsibility.<sup>21</sup>

One of the traditions in which birth is explicitly negated is early Theravāda Buddhism. *Dukkha* (suffering) encompasses all states of existence, and birth perpetuates this cycle of pain. *Nirvana* represents liberation not only from the mind but also from the cycle of birth. In texts such as the *Sutta Nipāta*, the state of never being born again is praised as the highest form of salvation.<sup>22</sup> However, Buddhism advocates this view not as a universal doctrine, but as a means for individual liberation; thus, it relates to antinatalism not directly, but at the level of metaphysical resemblance.

Although Islamic thought does not offer a systematic theory of antinatalism, some Muslim thinkers have articulated ideas that resonate with antinatalist themes. Abu'l-'Ala al-Ma'arrī is one of the notable figures in this context with his critical attitude towards bringing children into the world and his pessimistic mindset. Both his pessimistic discourses reflected in his

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<sup>17</sup> James Daly, "Oedipus Coloneus: Sophocles' 'Threpteria' to Athens. I", *Quaderni Urbinati Di Cultura Classica* 22/1 (1986), 75; Sophocles, *Oidipus Kolonos'ta*, trans. Ari Çokona (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2016), 50.

<sup>18</sup> H. Ranston, "Ecclesiastes and Theognis", *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 34/2 (1918), 107.

<sup>19</sup> Kutsal Kitap: *Tevrat, Zebur, İncil* (İstanbul: Kitabı Mukaddes Şirketi- Yeni Yaşam Yayınları, 2003), Job.3:1-11; Jer.20:14-18.

<sup>20</sup> Foy Scalf (ed.), *Book of the Dead: Becoming God in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2017), 123.

<sup>21</sup> Huzeyfe Sayım, "Zerdüştilik'de Kozmogoni ve Yaratılış", *Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 1/16 (1 June 2004), 93.

<sup>22</sup> Vegard Skirbekk et al., "Is Buddhism the low fertility religion of Asia?", *Demographic Research* 32 (6 January 2015), 5; *The Sutta Nipāta: A Poetic Translation*, trans. Laurence Khantipalo Mills (Melbourne: SuttaCentral, 2015), 3:2; 5:4; 5:6.

poems and his will to be inscribed on his tombstone, “This is the (sin/murder) that my father committed against me; I have never committed such an evil/murder against anyone.”<sup>23</sup> are clear reflections of his antinatalist mindset.

Arthur Schopenhauer, who combined the Greek opposition to birth with the Indian rejection of rebirth, considered never having been born to be the best option. He aimed to break the cycle of rebirth by suppressing the will to live. In this respect, he is regarded as one of the philosophical forerunners of modern antinatalism.<sup>24</sup>

These approaches have regarded birth not merely as a biological beginning, but as a metaphysical burden, a spiritual trial, or a fall. This indicates that birth has not always been sanctified; rather, in some cultural and religious frameworks, it has been regarded as a subject of questioning. Although these perspectives do not fully align with the terminological framework of modern antinatalism, they exhibit a similar metaphysical stance through their negative outlook on human existence.

Contemporary antinatalism, which can be defined as the ethical and ontological rejection of procreation, became more prominent in the 20th century. In technologically advanced and secularized societies, the meaning of life, values, and responsibility were re-evaluated, and the moral legitimacy of involuntary birth was brought into question. Antinatalist thought began to organize itself particularly in the digital age, first gaining visibility through virtual communities on Facebook in 2007 and later on Reddit in 2010.<sup>25</sup> During the 2010s, its activist dimension also came to the forefront; in 2016, the Antinatalist Manifesto, published under the pseudonym “Antiprocreation,” described birth as a non-consensual violation of rights. The same author’s periodical publication Antinatalism Magazine and the 2018 article Why Never Being Born Is Always Better pushed the idea toward a more radical promortalist position.<sup>26</sup>

Antinatalism gained philosophical seriousness at the academic level during the second decade of the 21st century. The conference titled “Antinatalism: To Be or Not to Be?” held in 2017 at the University of Ostrava, stood out as the first comprehensive academic event in this field. One of the participants, Kateřina Lochmanová, later became the editor of the work History of Antinatalism. This event was followed in 2018 by the Antinatalism Under Fire

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<sup>23</sup> Abū’l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abī Bekr b. Ḥallikān al-Irbilī Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafiyāt Al-A’yān Wa Anbāu Abnāi al-Zamān*, critical ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut: Dāru Ṣādir, 1391), 1/115.

<sup>24</sup> Benatar, *Keşke Hiç Olmasaydık Var Olmanın Kötülüğü*, 78.

<sup>25</sup> Masahiro Morioka, “What Is Antinatalism? Definition, History, and Categories”, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Luca Lo Sapio, “Antinatalist Procreationism and Humanity’s Cosmic Significance”, *Journal of Ethics and Emerging Technologies* 34/1 (30 June 2024), 2.

conference in Prague, which featured David Benatar, Roman Landau, and Saul Smilansky as participants.<sup>27</sup>

Founded in 2020, Antinatalism International developed an influential discourse in digital platforms, defining antinatalism not only as a metaphysical stance but also as a form of political and cultural critique. One of the significant academic contributions in this field is Ken Coates's work titled *Anti-Natalism: Rejectionist Philosophy from Buddhism to Benatar*. Coates argued that antinatalist thought is not limited to modern philosophy but is also rooted in ancient religious and metaphysical traditions.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. Arguments and Critique of Modern Antinatalism

### 2.1. Arguments of Modern Antinatalism

In order to evaluate the core claims of modern antinatalist thinkers, this section will first outline their main ethical arguments, especially those concerning suffering, consent, and the perceived burden of existence. These arguments will then be subjected to a multi-layered critique—philosophical, epistemological, and theological.

Antinatalism gained a prominent position in ethical philosophy in the 20th century, particularly with David Benatar. According to his “asymmetry of pleasure and pain” argument, pain is bad and should be prevented, while the absence of pleasure is not problematic if there is no one to experience it. Therefore, procreation generates avoidable suffering, while non-procreation is a safer choice.<sup>29</sup> According to Benatar, since consent cannot be obtained from a being who does not yet exist, every birth is an act carried out without consent. This renders birth ethically problematic.<sup>30</sup> In his view, life involves serious suffering, making existence akin to an “ethical game of Russian roulette,” where the risks outweigh potential happiness.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to concerns about consent and suffering, antinatalist thinkers also incorporate issues such as disability, dissatisfaction, and social injustice into their arguments. They particularly consider the intentional birth of a child with disabilities to be a serious ethical concern. Within the framework of the “expressivist argument,” this raises worries about discrimination, as it may imply that the lives of individuals with disabilities are not worth

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<sup>27</sup> Masahiro Morioka, “What Is Antinatalism? Definition, History, and Categories”, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Ken Coates, *Anti Natalism Rejectionist Philosophy From Buddhism To Benatar* Ken Coates, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Benatar, *Keşke Hiç Olmasaydık Var Olmanın Kötülüğü*, 48.

<sup>30</sup> Erol - Zor, “Doğum Karşıtı Düşünce Akımlarının Sosyal Medyadaki Yansımaları”, 272.

<sup>31</sup> Masahiro Morioka, “What Is Antinatalism? Definition, History, and Categories”, 20.

starting. However, Benatar offers a more inclusive response to this critique by arguing that the birth of not only individuals with disabilities, but of all humans, is morally problematic.<sup>32</sup> Another prominent antinatalist, Théophile de Giraud, characterizes procreation as an inherently unethical act. According to him, the act of having children is a moral choice that has not been sufficiently questioned, and he advocates for a radical ethical approach to this issue. He even suggests that children should possess legal rights against their parents.<sup>33</sup> This line of thought extends beyond the individual, reaching a point that questions the procreation of the entire human species. In response to environmental disasters and global crises, radical movements like VHEMT (Voluntary Human Extinction Movement) view the voluntary extinction of humanity as an ethical responsibility.<sup>34</sup> Although not a direct antinatalist, Masahiro Morioka approaches this anti-birth perspective through his inquiries into the meaning of birth and the inevitability of death. He argues that the resolution to these problems lies in developing an ethical awareness about the origins of life.<sup>35</sup> All of these perspectives demonstrate that antinatalism is not merely a personal reaction but a serious moral and philosophical stance. At its core lie two fundamental ideas: that existence generates suffering, and that initiating life without consent is unethical. These two axes form the theoretical framework of the antinatalist position

## 2.2. Philosophical, Theological, and Socio-Ethical Critiques of Antinatalism

This section offers a multi-dimensional critique of antinatalist thought by examining its core assumptions through philosophical reasoning, theological analysis, and socio-ethical reflection. The critique is structured around three main evaluative lenses: the ontological status of existence, the moral framework grounded in consent and responsibility, and the social implications of rejecting procreation. While some critiques draw upon classical metaphysical and epistemological thought, others are rooted in Islamic theological concepts, particularly from the kalām tradition. This holistic approach enables a critical yet balanced assessment that addresses both the internal coherence of antinatalist positions and their broader philosophical and social implications.

In the context of antinatalism's *asymmetry of suffering argument*, the question of the value of existence comes to the forefront: Does existence truly carry an absolute meaning when compared to non-existence? Value judgments can only gain significance through a conscious

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<sup>32</sup> Benatar, *Keşke Hiç Olmasaydık Var Olmanın Kötülüğü*, 134.

<sup>33</sup> Théophile de Giraud, *L'art de Guillotiner Les Procréateurs: Manifeste Anti-Nataliste* (Le Mort-Qui-Trompe, 2006), 82.

<sup>34</sup> "VHEMT" (Accessed 22 May 2025).

<sup>35</sup> Masahiro Morioka, "What Is Antinatalism? Definition, History, and Categories", 24.

being. Claiming that non-existence is preferable because it avoids suffering may result in a significant ethical problem, since value judgments are only meaningful in relation to an actually existing consciousness. Absence does not provide a basis for value judgments.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, it can be suggested that antinatalist judgments rely more on intuitive assumptions than on fully demonstrable rational foundation

Being is the carrier of all qualities and the precondition of meaning. All human qualities such as thinking, feeling, understanding, or acting are only possible depending on the state of being. Therefore, it can be said that existence is not only an actual reality but also the foundation of all values. Conversely, since non-existence is not a thing in itself, it can be argued that it entails no value, harm, or benefit — regardless of whether it is considered possible or impossible.<sup>37</sup>

One of the most debated aspects of antinatalism is its proposition that, if consent could be obtained on behalf of a being that does not yet exist, that being might not wish to be born. However, in classical epistemology, knowledge can only be based on what actually exists. It is impossible to generate obligations on behalf of an imagined being, because something that does not exist cannot, by definition, be proven, or asked for consent. Producing consent on behalf of someone who has never existed relies not on knowledge but on intuition, and thus remains philosophically speculative.<sup>38</sup> Since non-existence entails a lack of the capacity for will or consent, there is no ethical subject to which obligations can be assigned. Therefore, birth becomes an act to which concepts such as consent and responsibility cannot meaningfully be attributed. At this point, antinatalist claims appear to face a moral paradox that raises questions about the ontological ground on which they stand.

The consent-based antinatalist argument also produces a profound moral paradox: If existence is judged as bad because it occurs without consent, then the consciousness making this judgment must itself be a being that has come into existence. In other words, any ethical evaluation of existence can only be constructed by a consciousness that is already, in fact, existent.<sup>39</sup> In this case, even to claim that non-existence is preferable, one must have existed at least once. Thus, even when an individual fundamentally rejects existence, this very rejection takes place within the framework of being. The subject is thereby forced to endure the

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<sup>36</sup> Abū Hāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iqtisād Fī al-ʿItiqād* (Beirut: n.p., 2004), 28.

<sup>37</sup> Sayyid Sharif Jurjani, *Sharh Al-Mawāqif: Mawāqif Commentary*, ed. İbrahim Halil Üçer, trans. Ömer Türker (İstanbul: T.C. Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2021), 1/549.

<sup>38</sup> Gerald K. Harrison, "Antinatalism and Moral Particularism", *Essays in Philosophy* 20/1 (2019), 5-6.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Kroner, "What Is Really Real?", *The Review of Metaphysics* 7/3 (1954), 351–362.

ontological condition it denies—existence itself. This results in a consciousness that attempts to deny existence yet cannot logically transcend it.

Antinatalist thought argues that birth constitutes an ethical problem because it inevitably imposes suffering on the individual.<sup>40</sup> However, this claim contains serious shortcomings from the perspectives of moral philosophy, theological conceptions of responsibility, and the human search for meaning. The value of existence depends on the response given to suffering. The Abrahamic religions and many philosophical traditions view life as a purposeful process and the human being as a creature bearing responsibility. Antinatalism, by evaluating life primarily through the lens of suffering, may underrepresent the broader complexity of human experience. Yet human experience is not passive in the face of suffering—it is a producer of meaning. The value of life lies not in the absence of suffering, but in the capacity to generate meaning despite it. Inevitable suffering is not merely a passive fate, but can be transformed into a moral responsibility that the individual assumes. In this way, one can confront the tragic dimension of existence without denial and embrace life with a sense of moral responsibility.<sup>41</sup>

From a theological perspective, creation is not arbitrary but a manifestation of a wise and purposeful will. God's act of creation is based on certain divine purposes, such as servitude and the cultivation of moral values. In this understanding, existence is not merely a state of being, but a meaningful choice imbued with purpose.<sup>42</sup> The fundamental element that gives substance to this existential framework is the concept of trial.

In Islamic thought, life is regarded as a test: "He who created death and life to test which of you is best in deed."<sup>43</sup> In this view, suffering is not merely perceived as a transient discomfort, but as a potential means for cultivating moral growth and spiritual awareness. Concepts such as patience (*ṣabr*), trust in God (*tawakkul*), and hope are often seen as active virtues that are integrally linked to responsibility and ethical maturity. From this perspective, suffering can attain meaning within the broader theological framework of human freedom and divine justice.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, some antinatalist perspectives tend to evaluate suffering as an absolute disvalue, which may lead to a more pessimistic or nihilistic

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<sup>40</sup> Benatar, *Keşke Hiç Olmasaydık Var Olmanın Kötülüğü*, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Viktor E. Frankl, *İnsanın Anlam Arayışı*, ed. Cem Mumcu, trans. Selçuk Budak (İstanbul: Okuyan Us, 2015), 24-24,134-135,149-153.

<sup>42</sup> Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī, *The Book of Monotheism (Kitāb al-Tawhīd)*, trans. Bekir Topaloğlu (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Foundation Publications, 2002), 421-430.

<sup>43</sup> *Kur'ân-ı Kerîm Meâli*, trans. Halil Altuntaş, Muzaffer Şahin (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2009), al-Mulk 67/2 see also al-Baqara 2/155.

<sup>44</sup> Kādî Abdülcebbar b. Ahmed, *Şerhu'l-Usûli'l-Hamse Mu'teziele'nin Beş İlkesi*, trans. İlyas Çelebi (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2013), 2/32-35,44-49.

attitude toward existence. While such a view highlights real concerns about pain and vulnerability, it may understate the role of adversity in fostering moral resilience and existential purpose.<sup>45</sup>

Antinatalism regards both individual existence and core social institutions—particularly the family—as ethically and ontologically problematic. According to this perspective, having children is a responsibility that should be morally rejected. However, in Islam, the family is not merely a means for the continuation of lineage, but also a manifestation of divine mercy and tranquility: “And among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find tranquility in them...”<sup>46</sup> Having children is not merely a biological event, but an expression of ethical and social responsibility toward future generations. By ignoring the ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions of parenthood, some antinatalist views may undermine the value of the family as a foundational human institution. Yet, parenthood is not only a physiological phenomenon; it is an ethical obligation that transcends the self and extends into the future. In the words of Emmanuel Levinas, the child is a face that carries the absolute demand of the other, and their existence is the embodiment of ethical responsibility.<sup>47</sup> The antinatalist approach risks overlooking the capacity of existing individuals to generate hope, love, and value. Viewing childbirth as an “ethical Russian roulette” reflects a one-dimensional understanding of risk.<sup>48</sup> Parenthood, however, cannot be explained solely by pleasure; it is an act that involves relational responsibilities such as self-sacrifice, education, and love.

One of the frequently asserted claims of antinatalism is that the cessation of births would eliminate suffering. However, this view is hardly applicable when considering demographic realities and socio-political diversity. The sustainability of a society depends not only on functional structures but also on the continuation of generations. Therefore, antinatalism’s principled rejection of birth implies the dissolution of social existence and the rupture of historical continuity.<sup>49</sup> In this regard, an individual-centered antinatalist ethic may stand in tension with the collective structure of societies.

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<sup>45</sup> al-Māturīdī, *The Book of Monotheism (Kitāb al-Tawḥīd)*, 230–232; Mehmet Ali Taş, “Acının Dönüştürücü Gücünün Yaşamın Anlamına Etkisi”, *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 23/2 (19 December 2022), 406–410.

<sup>46</sup> al-Rūm 30/21.

<sup>47</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 276.

<sup>48</sup> Masahiro Morioka, “What Is Antinatalism? Definition, History, and Categories”, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Nihat Tosun - Hasan Aydemir, “Aile Hayatında Bir Sorun Olarak Kadının Nüşûz’ü / Muting As A Problem At Family Life”, *Gelecek Vizyonlar Dergisi* 5/2 (5 December 2021), 50.

Moreover, universally restricting birth creates a tension between individual freedom and social intervention that is difficult to resolve. Such an approach may lead to the invalidation of individual ethical choices and potentially pave the way for authoritarian interventions. Thus, while antinatalist claims may be driven by ethical concerns, they could unintentionally raise tensions with the principle of freedom, especially when considered on a universal scale. This paradox becomes even more evident in the context of the family institution. The family is not merely a place where children are raised, but a structure through which values are transmitted across generations. The elimination of birth would disrupt not only genealogical continuity but also the transmission of meaning, morality, and faith.<sup>50</sup> In this way, what risks being diminished is not merely suffering, but the deeper structures of meaning themselves. The antinatalist objection to birth must therefore be evaluated not only in sociological terms but also within the broader context of human nature.

Antinatalism often rests on the premise that human natural inclinations are irrational and harmful, thus considering reproduction an unethical act. However, this perspective carries the risk of veering toward a deterministic stance that denies human nature. In Islamic thought, the concept of *fitrah* (innate disposition) emphasizes that human nature is not limited to biological impulses but is shaped by reason and will. The verse, "*There is no change in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion,*"<sup>51</sup> highlights that the natural inclinations embedded in human creation cannot be denied. This *fitrah*-based perspective also reveals the profound spiritual role of the family in human life.

## Conclusion

Antinatalism is not only a denial of birth, but also a broader philosophical discourse that problematizes existence, responsibility, and so on. However, the logic on which antinatalism is built, i.e. the ethical evaluation of existence in terms of a hypothetical absence, raises unresolved paradoxes regarding the source and legitimacy of moral judgment.

In this regard, theological thought offers conceptual tools not to dismiss antinatalism outright, but to reposition its central concerns within a different metaphysical horizon. Kalām thought grounds human existence not on the notion of pre-experiential consent, but rather on the necessity of bearing responsibility after birth—within the framework of divine wisdom, innate human disposition (*fitrah*), and the belief that life is a test. In this context, suffering is neither denied nor glorified, but instead the individual is placed in a moral and

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<sup>50</sup> Melike Kiroğlu, "Ailedeki Değer Kavramının Farklı Kuşaklardaki Anlamı Üzerine Karşılaştırmalı Bir Araştırma", *APJEC - Academic Platform Journal of Education and Change* 7/1 (30 June 2024), 87–88.

<sup>51</sup> al-Rūm 30/30.

spiritual process. This repositioning may not completely refute the argument of asymmetry. But it aims to give meaning to existence rather than rejecting it altogether in order to prevent harm.

On a socio-ethical level, antinatalism challenges deeply rooted assumptions about family, future, and communal responsibility. This challenge also highlights real concerns about the ecological, psychological and moral risks associated with childbirth. But it also risks devaluing parenthood, family and intergenerational cultural transmission. On the other hand, being a family is not only an ethical choice but also a structure in which ontological continuity and value transmission takes place. The focus of this paradigm is on how birth can be lived morally in concrete and responsible ways.

Therefore, the question that emerges at the end of this inquiry is not simply whether antinatalism is right or wrong, but what ethical and theological vocabulary we need in order to speak meaningfully about existence, responsibility, and the future. The critique of antinatalism, from this perspective, is not merely reactive but potentially generative. It opens space for rethinking foundational theological concepts under the pressure of contemporary moral dilemmas. In this sense, rather than making a final judgment, the theological response proposed here calls for a renewed inquiry into what it means to be responsible not only for what is, but also for what may yet be.

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<b>Peer-Review / Değerlendirme</b>	Double anonymized – At Least Two External / Çift Taraflı Körlük - En Az İki Dış Hakem Bu çalışma, etik kurul izni gerektirmeyen nitelikte olup, kullanılan veriler literatür taraması ve yayımlanmış kaynaklar üzerinden elde edilmiştir. Çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere riayet edildiği ve yararlanılan tüm kaynakların eksiksiz biçimde kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur. / This study does not require ethical committee approval, as the data were obtained through literature review and published sources. It is hereby declared that scientific and ethical principles were adhered to throughout the preparation of the study, and all referenced works have been duly cited in the bibliography.
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