

Introduction

Jonna Bornemark and Nicholas Smith

This anthology takes its starting point in the conviction that a phenomenology of pregnancy could play an important role in contemporary thought. Stating this is also an acknowledgment that it doesn't play such a role—yet. The aim of this anthology is to contribute to making philosophical reflection on pregnancy a greater part of the discussions to come.

The phenomenon of pregnancy can be explored not just as a biological process but also as a problem of lived bodily meaning from within the living stream of experiences. The experiences of pregnancy, of the foetus, of the infant, and of the parents here stand at the centre. These experiences touch upon the very limits of human life and therefore contribute important insights that philosophers should consider when reflecting on many of their central questions, especially about understanding subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and ethics, but also those relating to transcendental phenomenology and empirical research. In the experience of pregnancy the relation between oneself and the other achieves a maximum of intensity, as the body is at once the mother's and the child's in different senses. In the attempt to clarify the structure of this specific, foundational experience, basic philosophical concepts are put to the test, such as the relation between selfhood and otherness, activity and passivity, autonomy and dependency, inside and outside, and so forth. One important result, central to many of the contributions to this volume, is a criticism of a conception of subjectivity as a self-contained, autonomous and rational structure, in relation to which feelings, drives, and embodiment obtain an even more crucial significance.

There has been surprisingly little written about pregnancy from a philosophical and phenomenological angle. Yet the fundamental and irreducible experience of carrying a child and bringing forth new life, subjectivity, and

experience from one's own body deserves careful analysis. In such a task, specifically but not exclusively female experiences need to be given voice.

The issue of pregnancy situates the theme of sexual difference, which Luce Irigaray famously said was "one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age," right at the heart of phenomenology.¹ Why? Because of the duplicity of the experience: on the one hand, pregnancy can only be experienced first hand by women, whereas on the other hand being a foetus and being born are common to all human beings. This makes the experience of pregnancy hover between being the concern of a limited group of subjects (women), and being a general condition of being for all subjects. Or, to put it differently, pregnancy stands between being a phenomenon to be investigated as belonging to only a regional ontology (say the constitution of "animal nature," as described in Edmund Husserl's *Ideas II*), and being a "transcendentally constitutive" phenomenon partaking in the very constitution of the rational world. The experience of the mother to be is that of an adult and already constituted subjectivity having a unique experience of the beginning of life. In this way pregnancy is clearly not just one experience among many. The experience of pregnancy activates the most basic problems of transcendental phenomenology: the structure of the self, its relation to otherness, and the genesis of intentional life as such.

Although "phenomenology" of pregnancy here implies a focus on lived experience in a quite broad methodological approach, the attempt to understand this evasive phenomenon excludes neither other philosophical approaches nor related disciplines such as psychoanalysis, cognitive science, literature and art, neurobiology and developmental psychology; to the contrary, all of these contribute decisive perspectives for the uncovering of the enigma of pregnancy and are put into dialogue with each other in this volume. In a similar manner, pregnancy needs to be discussed within a larger philosophical context. Accordingly the articles in this volume do not only discuss Julia Kristeva's and Iris Marion Young's philosophies of pregnancy (to mention two of the most influential), but also the philosophies of Immanuel Kant, Edmund Husserl, Georges Bataille, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Paul Sartre, Stanley Cavell, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and others. Philosophy is by tradition a male discipline. Thematizing a uniquely female experience such as pregnancy, however, allows for different ways in which to combine a feminist critique of this tradition with,

¹ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Burke & Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.

and as a means to, its continuation, thereby adding necessary complexity to its further development.

In the first article, Nicholas Smith provides an introduction to the field. To begin with, he explores the historical roots of a phenomenology of pregnancy in the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Hannah Arendt, Adrienne Rich, and Iris Marion Young. But the “father of phenomenology,” Edmund Husserl, also wrote on pregnancy, infancy and motherhood, in surprisingly rich ways. Smith claims that the potential consequences of these writings have not been properly acknowledged in the broader reception of Husserl’s thinking, although important work in this direction has been initiated by feminist scholars. On the basis of this, Smith wants to question the undeniable androcentrism that has characterized phenomenology from the start. Smith wants to pursue a double mode of critique: from feminist perspectives but also from within Husserl’s own thinking, which he claims is crucial, not just for the sake of correct interpretations of Husserl but also for the future of phenomenology. A key question addressed by Smith, here taking up analyses that others have started but pushing the boundary further, is whether pregnancy (and not just birth) as a phenomenological topic affects the methodological core of phenomenology, or whether it can be handled without the core being transformed, as merely one topic amongst many.

In the following text Stella Sandford continues the discussion on methodological issues, starting out from the question of how a feminist phenomenology is possible. The problem arises since classical phenomenology, according to Sandford, has its starting point in a pure transcendental ego (as an isolated, disembodied subject), whereas feminist philosophy presents a critique against just such an image and wants to emphasize sexed aspects of experience. This problem is increased in a phenomenology of pregnancy that discusses a split self. Sandford points out that there is a risk that the “split I” only can be discussed from the perspective of a reflecting “one.” Phenomenology of pregnancy also highlights the discussion between transcendental phenomenology and phenomenology as a method for empirical research: Sandford establishes that philosophical phenomenology has to stick to transcendental philosophy and transcendental subjectivity—but interpret them in a different way. Generation is a central metaphor in thinking transcendental subjectivity, and Sandford encourages us to critically examine this. Phenomenologies of pregnancy thus have to take up the discussion with, for example, Kantian transcendentalism where intelligibility is understood as a homo-production with male characteristics.

The critical discussion of the self as held together and as governed by rational self-control is continued in Alice Pugliese's article. Rational self-control has often been understood as a measure of subjectivity, while a loss of control has been understood as a threat to the self. Pugliese discusses how control and loss of control is experienced in pregnancy as the ordinary understanding of "mine" is put in question. This experience calls for a phenomenology of drives, which can open up towards a different concept of consciousness. Phenomenology is in this way used as a resource to make layers within subjectivity visible. Through such an analysis an inherent "strangeness" as something other to will and control can be understood as being central to consciousness. Pugliese finds resources for such an analysis in Edmund Husserl's analysis of the person, i.e. the concrete subject. Her analysis shows a profound continuity between instinctive pre-predicative levels of consciousness and rational and intellectual levels. The phenomenon of pregnancy shows intersubjective interaction on a pre-predicative level, and reveals drives as the roots of sociality and not as a private matter. Through our drives we also acknowledge others as familiar.

In the following article, Sarah LaChance Adams discusses Georges Bataille's philosophy as being a resource for a phenomenology of pregnancy that is in the end far too insufficient. Bataille discusses eroticism as the alliance between life and death, pleasure and violence, continuity and discontinuity, but fails to discuss the most obvious examples of such eroticism: pregnancy, childbirth, and female heterosexual sex. These experiences elevate life to the point where death becomes a genuine risk. The penetrability of the body here more than ever becomes both a danger and a pleasure. But these female experiences also prove Bataille wrong in understanding subjectivity as discontinuity and as closed up within its own borders. The maternal experience of shared embodiment in pregnancy instead shows a simultaneous continuity and discontinuity as the body is a point of contact *and* separation, and the two beings overlap and interpenetrate, but do not coincide.

April Flakne analyzes a common experience of early pregnancy: nausea. She builds upon Jean-Paul Sartre and Emmanuel Levinas's analysis of nausea, but just as with Bataille they remain stuck within a male framework: they do not bring up pregnancy nausea—which, as Flakne shows, would strengthen their main points. Nausea, in the analysis of Levinas and Sartre, demonstrates the sheer contingency of embodied beings. It is an experience where subject and object become mixed because one cannot say if it comes from the inside or outside. Flakne shows that pregnancy nausea has a specific structure that

adds to these analyses: it has a different temporality as it comes and goes, it has less of a reduction in appetite, and includes a dominance of the sense of smell. Because of this, Flakne argues, pregnancy nausea does not differentiate between past and future, but is instead characterized by waiting and a knowledge that something has happened. In its hunger it also actively wills a future. It changes the world from the inside and habitual *gestalts* are disrupted. The sometimes overwhelming smells include an intrusion of the world, but also serve to dissolve the world in order for it to find new forms. Flakne uses Levinas's concept of *ex-cendence*—a passively characterized form of transcendence—which is here developed as a going out of oneself from within oneself.

Nausea in Flakne's description has the function of preparing the way for the child to come, a making room. This theme of making room is central also in Erik Jansson Boström's contribution, which explores the role of the father. But here it is not connected to a physical condition, but to a cultural and social process. Jansson Boström investigates this theme through reflections on his own experiences and in dialogue with Stanley Cavell. He discusses how the corporeal differences in the body of the mother affect the social relationship between father (or second parent) and child to be, and argues that the lack of corporeal closeness to the foetus does not limit the father's ability to create a strong bond to the unborn child. He shows how this bond grows through interaction during pregnancy—and even before conception—and how it is a way of making room for the Other. He builds upon Cavell's analysis of how we act toward the child, as if it were already part of behavioural patterns and already understood language. Acting as if the child is a competent actor makes it possible for the child to become such. Jansson Boström argues that it is not the case that we only acknowledge the other if we already know them to exist, but rather through acknowledging the existence of the child-to-be, we treat them as existing. No such foundation is needed in intersubjective relations. Whoever we acknowledge shows us who we are prepared to include in our moral community; in this way, the analysis of making room for the baby also has wider ethical implications.

The role of imagination is important in the process of "making room," and psychoanalysis has shown that imagination plays an immense role in the psychic life at large, as well as in pregnancy, not least due to the very specific lack of knowledge that characterizes intra-uterine life. The following three contributions investigate different psychoanalytical perspectives. In addition, the theme of intersubjectivity and ethics also is continued

in Joan Raphael-Leff's contribution, and placed within a contemporary context of medicalization, reproductive technics and societies in transformation. This situation, she argues, focuses on autonomous individuality, and generates a locus where the radical form of co-existence of Self and Other in pregnancy is complicated to deal with. This has also led to myths of pregnancy that either romanticize the condition or tell horror stories about it. These tendencies, as well as the lack of theoretical reflection concerning pregnancy, are also clearly legible within psychoanalytical literature, which started out as highly phallogocentric but later on shifted to include also analyses of the maternal and relational. She puts these theories into discussion with contemporary research in cognitive science and biological knowledge about life in the womb, for example how the foetus is affected by hormonal derivatives of the mother's feelings. This knowledge of the life of the foetus on one side is connected to empirical research (not least her own) on pregnancy, showing the wide range of variations in how mothers-to-be relate to the foetus. In this way she discusses how the biology and psychology of pregnancy are closely interconnected, and also argues for a panhuman capacity for hospitality that stems from our beginning within another person.

The psychoanalytical discussion is deepened in Gráinne Lucey's article by means of a detailed discussion of Julia Kristeva's analysis of the maternal. Kristeva understands the position of the woman in maternity as being cyclical, as she moves from a maternal intimacy with her own mother to a maternal intimacy with her own child. Lucey instead suggests that we must understand the maternal as a development of the individual. She understands maternity not as a regression into an imaginary maternal, but as a "growing up." Lucey questions the notion of maternity as being narcissistic since the child is also another and not necessarily identified with oneself—but even so is understood as part of the mother's psychical sphere. But in the transformation of the woman in pregnancy it is not only the foetus that is other to the woman, but also herself in becoming m/other. Lucey's analysis shows maternity as a concrete experience that one at first has no means to articulate. Instead it demands a transformation of the ego and its symbolic realm.

Erik Bryngelsson's contribution continues the discussion of the psychoanalytical tradition. He focuses on the development of the foetus into a child, and investigates how the early psychoanalytical tradition conceptualized life in the womb and the event of birth and the meaning these processes had for the development of the psyche of the child. The question

is paradoxical since birth is a pre-psychological or anonymous experience, before an “I” is established: how can such an experience be said to belong to an “I”? Bryngelsson contrasts the discussions of Sigmund Freud and Otto Rank with that of Jacques Lacan on this theme. Freud claims that the biological birth has no real significance for the mental development of the individual: The psyche can only come into being through the Oedipus complex and its connections to male genitals. Freud understands life in the womb as a harmonious existence of oceanic feelings without any otherness. In agreement with Freud, Rank also considers life in the womb as a harmonious existence, but in contrast to Freud he understands birth as a major event and as the separation through which the psyche comes into being. Lacan shifts position several times on this question, but ends up suggesting that a weaning complex is the beginning of the psyche. He is critical of regarding the origin as harmonious and claims that there is no true unity; instead there is an originary division where the subject is born together with the object from which she separates.

In the last essay of the anthology Jonna Bornemark continues the discussion on anonymous experience, here called a-subjective life, not only from the perspective of the foetus, but also from the perspective of the mother. In an attempt to show the relations between a-subjectivity, subjectivity and intersubjectivity she draws on many sources: Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Bracha Ettinger, Margrit Schildrick and Myra Hird – the last three all inspired by Gilles Deleuze. Investigating these related themes focuses on the question of methodology again, and Bornemark discusses the limits of a first-person phenomenology and relates it to Ettinger’s feminist psycho-analysis and a Deleuzian philosophy of the organism and of life. She wants to show how an a-subjective movement of life constantly transforms itself and gives birth to individuality and specificity. In the very first stream of experience what is later separated is still intertwined: hearing and motion, feeling and knowing, sensing and the sensed. But through an immediate capacity to respond, a first intersubjectivity is already in place. “Experiencing” is thereby formulated as a phenomenon that comes before subjectivity and as a consequence the formation of subjectivity needs to be understood from intersubjectivity, rather than the other way around. In pregnancy the mother is in touch with this very first experience that is otherwise lost to subjectivity. Bornemark formulates the experience of pregnancy—and thus of the movement of life—by means of the concept of “pactivity,” a simultaneous passivity and activity in which an a-subjective life-force becomes conscious subjectivity.

The essays gathered in this volume stem mainly from a three-day symposium held in April 2011 at Södertörn University, Stockholm, entitled “Phenomenology of Pregnancy and Drives: Erotic Intersubjectivity,” that was organized by the editors. We are greatly indebted to the participants of this symposium in several ways: for participating, for rewriting their presentations for this book, and for sharing their ideas and experiences so freely and generously. The symposium was jointly organized by the Department of Philosophy and the Centre for Practical Knowledge at Södertörn University.