INVITED REVIEW ESSAY

Philosophy's Futures: The Reproductive Body's Turn

Foucault's Futures: A Critique of Reproductive Reason. By PENELOPE DEUTSCHER. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

Phenomenology of Pregnancy. Edited by JONNA BORNEMARK and NICHOLAS SMITH. Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2016.

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Feminist philosophers challenged the dominant conversations in philosophy more than five decades ago to ask, where are the women? Since then, feminist philosophers have asked versions of that question: Where is the reproductive body in philosophy? Where are procreative sex, pregnancy, childrearing, abortion, and contraception? The initial feminist discussions about reproductive bodies tended to focus on how reproduction chained reproductive women to subordinate positions, as in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* where motherhood is framed as a form of repression or in Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* that argues that as long as procreation depends on reproductive bodies women will be oppressed (Daly 1990; Beauvoir 2011). Yet, as the editors of *Phenomenology of Pregnancy* and the author of *Foucault's Futures* respectively posit, a theory of phenomenology that focuses on the experiences of pregnancy and an understanding of how biopolitics is linked to reproduction has been missing. It's not that philosophers—even male ones—don't mention reproduction. Jonna Bornemark, Nicholas Smith, and the authors in their edited collection draw on numerous references that philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Immanuel Kant, and Iris Marion Young make to the reproductive body. Similarly, Penelope Deutscher excavates Michel Foucault's writing thoroughly, and one has the sense that she's located every mention he's made to procreative sex, pregnancy, and abortion. It's just that none of these philosophers—from Mills to Husserl to Foucault to the feminist philosophers of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s—have made pregnancy central to the influential theories of phenomenology and biopolitics.

In *Foucault's Futures: A Critique of Reproductive Reason*, Deutscher works with a clearly laid-out methodology, and it's one that threads through all the chapters. In her introduction she calls it "wanting what can't be supplied from a theory

Hypatia vol. 34, no. 1 (Winter 2019) © by Hypatia, Inc.

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12451 Published online by Cambridge University Press

understood as having failed to provide it" (6); elsewhere she calls it looking for the "suspended reserves" or those moments when you think a theorist *just almost* elaborates on a topic but then doesn't. Even though several of the chapters in *Foucault's Futures* were published elsewhere in a somewhat different form, the book coheres beautifully because of its clear methodological underpinnings. Yet, despite the book's coherent structure, I'll discuss the chapters in pairs that aren't contiguous. Because although chapters 1 and 4 work with some of the theorists most known for their new interpretations of biopolitics, both also deeply engage the work of Foucault, whereas chapters 2 and 5 interpret the title of the book in the looser sense, as they work on Foucault's genealogy as it has unfolded in the work of others.

Foucault's Futures' metaphorical heart is located in chapter 3, "Foucault's Children." Unlike the other four chapters, which place Foucault's work in conversation with other theorists, chapter 3 is devoted to a *tour de force* rereading of *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, an especially impressive accomplishment given that such a widely cited book could be made to feel new again. Deutscher, of course, wants to locate what Foucault does and doesn't do with reproduction, but through this mining she also reminds us how *The History of Sexuality* theorized sex as the missing link between the biopolitics of the body and that of the population. She also does more by drawing our attention to moments where Foucault suggests that it's actually *procreative* sex that accomplishes this link so successfully because of its role in building populations. And it's this hinge, as she calls it, that's been missing from most theorists who have picked up biopolitics for their own work. Although "Foucault's Children" sits in the middle of *Foucault's Futures*, it could have easily served as the book's introduction and schematic explanation of its central project.

Chapter 1, "Suspensions of Sex," continues a conversation Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault began during their lifetimes and continued on Derrida's side after Foucault's death. Deutscher engages with Derrida's critique of biopolitics, but she does so to note how *neither* Derrida nor Foucault noted the suspended reserves in each other's work that, once acknowledged, complement each other to create a provocative account of how capital punishment constructs sexual difference in how it's employed. Through a nuanced reading of a wide range of texts authored by both Foucault and Derrida, she points out missed opportunities where their writings converged (masturbation as mortal danger, for example, or the role of women and children in the laws that uphold capital punishment) because they misinterpreted each other's intents (Foucault famously dismissed Derrida for believing that everything is just language, and Derrida dismissed Foucault for constructing linear histories). Deutscher not only points out the missed connections between the two theorists, she also builds up these moments of suspended reserves to show, in the concluding pages of the chapter, how, placed together, Derrida and Foucault's writing can offer an explanation of how "sexual difference intertwines with the biopolitical" (37), or how biopolitical practices, like the death penalty, reinscribe how men and women are defined. Similarly, chapter 4, "Immunity, Bare Life, and the Thanatopolitics of Reproduction," draws on the suspended reserves of Roberto Esposito and Giorgio Agamben, alongside Foucault. She argues that the suspended reserve that all three theorists contain, but

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never fully explore, is abortion. As Heather Latimer has argued elsewhere, "the reproductive body is a blank spot in Agamben's definition of bare life" (Latimer 2011, 53). By filling in what might have been in this blank spot, Deutscher draws on Agamben crossed with Foucault (Esposito seems to disappear by the end of the chapter) to formulate a critique of *Roe v. Wade* as the basis to legalize abortion. A feminist critique of *Roe v. Wade* isn't in itself new, but Deutscher's points feel insightful when she points to how inscribing legalized abortion into law assumes that its practice is always a state of exception.

Chapters 2 and 5 take a somewhat different approach. Chapter 2, "Reproductive Futurism, Lee Edelman, and Reproductive Rights," does exactly what its title suggests through locating the suspended reserves of Edelman's *No Future*. It's a thorough rereading of the book and its central texts to elaborate on a point Edelman makes in passing: the twinning of abortion and homosexuality in their shared refusal of reproductive futurism. Interestingly, however, Foucault appears only in the closing pages of this chapter precisely because, as Deutscher tells us, he's also missing from Edelman's book. Deutscher notes how their work intersects despite this omission, but this point feels more like an afterthought, as though she's asking readers to now fill in her own suspended reserves by placing Foucault and Edelman in conversation in their own work. Similarly, chapter 5, "Judith Butler, Precarious Life, and Reproduction," claims to be creating an encounter between Butler and Foucault, in the model of chapter 1's encounter. In actuality, however, Deutscher provides us with a reading of how and why the fetus is missing from Butler's work on precarious life. The chapter certainly draws on Foucault, and particularly on his concept of *responsibilization*, but instead of staging an encounter between Butler and Foucault, it stages one between Butler and several feminist theorists of reproduction, including Catherine Mills and Dominique Memmi to critique Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, and later Fiona Jenkins to relook at her reading of an acclaimed Romanian film about abortion. Although it's not the encounter Deutscher promises, it's nevertheless productive as she emerges with an argument that complicates *both* the moral framing of abortion *and* those who have turned away from acknowledging that abortion might have a moral component. She uses the term *ontological tact* to argue for "flexible protocols" when it comes to the ways we discuss, offer, and frame abortion in our contemporary culture and in medical settings, but she also asks for a consideration of the contexts of how choices are made (or not made)—what she calls being "moral agents in particular spaces" (189). These are important arguments, and so it's worthwhile to hear them made repeatedly, but in these conclusions Deutscher tends to echo feminist theorists of reproductive justice rather than offer anything refreshingly new. Deutscher's last chapter has only resonances of Foucault's arguments, but it does end the book with a brilliant question that's very much influenced by Foucault. As she asks: Can we calculate the genealogy that a critical ethics requires? Or in other words, a critical ethics that takes into account the myriad questions raised by reproduction depends on us regularly revising the questions and calculations required.

In methodology, *Phenomenology of Pregnancy* is a very different book, and the title already reveals why. Although occasionally there may be a theorist who appears in

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both texts, for the most part this book works within a different philosophical tradition, that of feminist phenomenology. Yet it's a tradition that has also neglected to think about pregnancy in much the same way. And although the contributors to this wide-ranging anthology don't use the terminology of "suspended reserves," many of them are doing precisely that when they turn to the philosophy of Husserl, Kant, Beauvoir, and Young, as they consider what it means, and whether it can even be, to have a phenomenology of pregnancy. In their introduction, Bornemark and Smith clearly lay out the justification for the compilation they have created: they believe that a phenomenology of pregnancy doesn't just have the potential to change philosophical discussions but could contribute to the ways in which we frame pregnancy in contemporary thought. The other question addressed in the introduction is whether there can be such a thing as a phenomenology of pregnancy. I'm not giving anything away when I write that the answer to that question is yes. Nicholas Smith's opening essay, "Phenomenology of Pregnancy: A Cure for Philosophy?," gives the anthology a strong start. Smith takes a sweeping approach to exploring what a phenomenology of pregnancy might mean, and in doing so he provides a thorough overview of how feminist theorists have contributed to, critiqued, and tweaked phenomenology. Smith's chapter focuses on this history by threading how feminist phenomenology (and those critical of it) have written about pregnancy and motherhood in particular, but his essay ultimately serves as an excellent overview of how feminists have responded to some of the key ideas underpinning phenomenology: experience, intentionality, and subjectivity.

Some of the essays in this collection take a more specific approach: Gráinne Lucey writes about motherhood in Julia Kristeva's work, and Sarah Lachance Adams writes about Bataille. Erik Jansson Boström makes an argument for a phenomenology of the expectant father as this experience both reconfigures his own subjectivity and the relations he'll have with the child-yet-to-be-born. Not surprisingly, several of the contributors focus on pregnancy's unusual phenomenon, what Joan Raphael-Leff calls the "two-in-one-body," and how that pushes our understanding of intersubjectivity. However, the most unexpected essay in the anthology is April Flakne's "Nausea as Interoceptive Annunciation" because of its interest in how nausea in pregnancy destabilizes and ultimately transforms bodies. As Flakne points out, although philosophers like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre have written about the disruptive effects of nausea, none have looked at the pregnancy-specific experience of nausea. Therefore, Flakne's contribution shows how pregnancy-induced nausea alters the pregnant body[1] from within to confront the other that inhabits it—and thereby transforms that body and its sense of self.

Stella Sandford's essay, "Feminist Phenomenology, Pregnancy, and Transcendental Subjectivity," is another important contribution, and like Smith's chapter, asks big questions about whether phenomenology is still phenomenology as Husserl defined it once feminists hacked away at it to challenge some of its individualist, normative, and ahistorical foundations. Sandford thinks there are things worth saving, and ultimately, she makes an argument for the usefulness of theorizing transcendental subjectivity. She suggests that the phenomenology of pregnancy and birth—because of its

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intersubjective nature—might actually be the ideal grounds to salvage phenomenology from its feminist critiques. The strength of the collection, however, lies in Jonna Bornemark's culminating essay. Some of the preceding essays skirt around the contradictions of a phenomenology of pregnancy, or end with more questions than answers (the impossibility of assessing a fetus's subjectivity; the singularity of the pregnant body's experiences), but Bornemark's chapter tackles them head-on. Using a methodology that combines phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and Deleuze's radical materialism, Bornemark asserts that if phenomenology concerned itself only with "an already constituted human subject" (252) it would be a pale shade of philosophy. Here, Bornemark reaches for the help of psychoanalysis to draw on its assertion that subjectivity is never fully knowable and thus, in an axiom already acknowledged by contemporary phenomenologists, any understanding of subjectivity is always partial. This intervention gives Bornemark an opening to examine the intersubjectivity of the fetus and pregnant body without the distraction that she's assuming accessibility to some imagined full subjectivity. Drawing on both scientific research and Husserl's concept of intentionality, Bornemark theorizes a fetal subjectivity that experiences life in its own kinaesthetic way. She expands on this understanding with the help of Bracha Ettinger's psychoanalytic descriptions of fetal life that argue that this presubjective moment in our development deeply informs a subjectivity that is yet to come. There's compelling work here, and yet it also resonates with anti-abortion rhetoric that demands that fetuses experience emotions and individuality. Bornemark doesn't acknowledge this consequence, and she doesn't say whether Ettinger does, but a return to Deutscher's work and her plea for understanding all experiences in context—as creating meaning dependent on time, place, and the specific conditions of materiality—might help readers who feel affronted by Bornemark's depiction of the fetus: just because a fetus might feel doesn't mean that abortion isn't justified. Bornemark turns to less controversial ground when she extends her analysis to the pregnant body and its "a-subjectivity." Although Bornemark takes issue with Margrit Shildrick's resistance to assigning the maternal body a subjectivity, she finds it useful to think about pregnancy as a *becoming* that points to subjectivity as a fluid, ever-changing, material process that can at times even encompass a-subjectivity. For Bornemark, this is the hallmark of the intersubjectivity pregnancy creates.

Despite their complexity and density, *Foucault's Futures* and *Phenomenology of Pregnancy* are teachable texts. Both books are also similar in that it would be difficult to read them without having the texts they draw on close at hand. Deutscher's summaries of Esposito, Derrida, and Butler (to name just a few) had me turning to my bookcase to refresh my memory of their arguments. For a student unfamiliar with their work, sections of her book might feel incomprehensible. Similarly, *Phenomenology of Pregnancy* feels like an important feminist critique of phenomenology if one is already familiar with Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and the feminist criticism of their work. Still, these are crucial books in the genealogical construction of feminist critiques focused on reproduction and assessing it as a critical component of this world we inhabit.

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12451 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Note

1. I've intentionally tried not to assign the pregnant body a sex, or assume that pregnancy always refers to a ciswoman's body. The contributions in *Phenomenology of Pregnancy* more often than not assume that the experiences of pregnancy always belong to ciswomen.

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https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12451 Published online by Cambridge University Press