



The Potential of Prenatal Psychology

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In recent decades, research into the experiential and behavioral significance of prenatal and birth experiences has deepened and broadened considerably. On several methodological levels, such as stress research, brain research, epidemiology, epigenetics, observations in psycho-therapy and so on, the life-historical relevance of prenatal and birth conditions has been proven. However, because the experiences from this time are pre-linguistic, they are not directly accessible to the linguistically oriented consciousness, but they can be inferred indirectly from physical sensations, feelings and behavioral dispositions. For example, an umbilical cord loop, can lead to sensitivity in the neck region and an aversion to tight collars up to to feelings of panic. And being unwanted and an abortion attempt can result in severe dissocial behavioral disorders up to spoliation.

Furthermore, a systematic problem in the constitution of Homo sapiens is that human infants are born in a very immature state, which results in great vulnerability and dependence on good emotional support. Only under favorable conditions can the infant achieve coherence in its experience and behavior. Unfavorable conditions result in a basic insecurity and mistrust, which burden further development. Later neurotic, psychosomatic and dissocial disorders have their origins here. This is why the findings of prenatal and perinatal psychology are of fundamental importance for health policy. At the same time, these correlations provide fundamental opportunities for prevention.

Furthermore, an understanding of the peculiarities of early human development,

with birth in a state of immaturity, results in an understanding of the peculiarities of Homo sapiens in comparison to other primates. From this situation of immaturity and thus unadaptedness to the world results the elementary human desire to change the world in such a way that it feels like a mother's womb by satisfying needs on all sides. At the level of tribal cultures, this took place in a magical relationship to an animistically animated world, and at the level of early advanced civilizations in the imagination of a heaven of divine protective powers that ensure well-being on earth. This created an emotional security in a in reality uncertain and dangerous world. This in turn made it possible to transform the world to a certain extent into a world of satisfaction of needs through the invention of agriculture and animal husbandry and the diverse techniques of civilization. At the same time man developed completely new possibilities of behavior and understanding, so that with the turnaround of the Enlightenment, he was able to take his life and the shaping of societies into his own hands. The diverse problems associated with this therefore require an understanding of these connections in order to develop new possibilities for action. Two English-language publications are now available that provide an overview:

Evertz K, Janus L, Linder R (2021) Handbook of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology. Springer, New York; and Janus L (2024) Enduring Effects of Prenatal Experiences - Echoes of the Womb. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne.

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