

The Pregnant Self

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Pregnancy, a human phenomenon experienced throughout the world and throughout history, has been largely ignored by the philosophical community. A preference for the abnormal and the extraordinary has left this common yet challenging process on the sidelines of philosophical discussion.

Pregnancy stands as a significant challenge to many of our intuitions about the self, particularly those concerning the boundaries, plurality and diachronic identity of the self. Because of this, pregnancy necessitates a theory of the self which does not merely uphold our usual assumptions about the self.

Daniel Dennett presents a theory of the self which meets this criterion. He argues that the self is a centre of narrative gravity: an abstract, theoretical entity which is useful for the explanation and prediction of an individual's behaviour. Dennett's theory, though provocative, lacks a basis in typical human experience. He relies primarily on thought experiments and extraordinary conditions to support his theory. To demonstrate the applicability and generality of this theory, it must be tested against a common, natural human occurrence like pregnancy.

In this paper we explore the application of Daniel Dennett's theory of the narrative self to the experience of pregnancy. This application yields a double result. Dennett's theory is bolstered by a demonstration of its generality and applicability, and the experience of pregnancy is placed into a context in which it can be validated and understood.

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For Mikayla River Epp

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Chapter One: Introduction

Section One: Overview

Context

In philosophy, we aim for a deeper and clearer understanding of the world. In particular, we often focus on the *seemingly* familiar and understood areas of human experience, and aim to reveal misconceptions and absences in our thinking about them. The skin of everyday life is peeled back and underlying assumptions are exposed and reexamined. Things like logic, existence, knowledge, mind, morality and language are tested and challenged. The one thing with which we each seem to be most familiar is our selves, and philosophy does not leave this stone unturned. There is a wide variety of philosophical theories of personal identity and selfhood within the contemporary analytic tradition. Many of these theories strive to illuminate the clear or typical cases of selfhood by looking at extreme cases in order to emphasize or isolate particular factors. Sometimes, too, the strategy is to consider vague borderline cases, in order to show that factors that seem unambiguous or discrete in the typical cases are in fact matters of degree or of interpretation. It is these cases that can challenge our intuitions about selves, highlighting areas where our idealized assumptions do not apply.

The particular theory of identity and the self in which I am interested here is Daniel Dennett's theory of the narrative self. What makes this influential theory particularly interesting in this context is its level of tolerance for vague and indeterminate cases. Dennett considers rare conditions as well as theoretical experiments, and accounts for them *as vague and fuzzy cases* without dogmatically ruling them in or out as examples of genuine selfhood. Also, Dennett's theory stands as a suitable representative

of the analytic tradition in one very important respect, for my purposes: the cases he considers are substantially of the “science fiction” variety, typical of the recent analytic literature on selfhood and identity.

Within the mainstream literature on selfhood, and at the very least, within Dennett’s theory of the self, there is a particular glaring absence: pregnancy, perhaps the single most common intuition-challenging phenomenon in human experience, is almost entirely overlooked. The evidence provided by pregnancy challenges careless assumptions about the self as the traditional cases of borderline selfhood do, but pregnancy is also a lived experience at the heart of many human lives. A coherent theory of the self, of which Dennett’s seems to be an example, cannot afford to overlook this fundamental human experience.

Focus

It’s terribly difficult not to think about babies...when you’re trying to have a conversation about something else and you get a kick. I mean if anybody kicks you it makes you lose your concentration, doesn’t it? The fact that the kicking’s going on inside doesn’t really make that much difference. (Oakley, 1979, 56)

Is this how it will be: me, pulled apart, existing on at least two opposing levels at the same time?...Am I permanently split apart? Me in one room? You in another? No longer One? (Chesler, 1979, 133)

This ostensibly transformed person of the near future might indeed be kinder and more patient than my prematernal self, with whom I was at least familiar, shortcomings and all. But that maternal “I” did not exist yet. I did not yet know if I could successfully transform my current self into her – let alone, given how fatuous descriptions of motherly qualities can sound, if I would even *like* her. (Wolf, 2001, 107)

These three excerpts illustrate the three questions that we will focus on as we consider both the experience of pregnancy and the theory of the self presented by Dennett. First, inside versus outside: what are the boundaries of the self? Second, one or two: can the self be plural? Lastly, before and after: can an individual change from one self to another over time? It is through these three questions that we will see how the application of Dennett's theory of the self to the experience of pregnancy demonstrates the generality and applicability of Dennett's theory, and locates women's experiences of pregnancy within a theory that accounts for them.

Why Pair Dennett and Pregnancy?

The ability of a philosophical theory to connect with ordinary experience contributes significantly to its acceptance. Dennett's preference for ordinary language rather than the vocabulary traditionally adopted by philosophers (Dennett, 1993) indicates an awareness of this fact, and makes his theory more accessible. Although the concepts he is using are unusual and even counter-intuitive, his avoidance of what he sees as problematic terminology makes his theory approachable and connects it with everyday life. This approach does not continue, however, into Dennett's illustrations. This is the first of two problems that motivates the need for the application of Dennett's theory to the pregnant experience. He does at times appeal to common experiences, perhaps talking about my neighbour the "motorist", who prefers to be a car rather than a human being, or that comment I made yesterday that "wasn't the real me talking" (1991, 417). The foundational examples he uses to illustrate his claims, however, are far from typical and often difficult to connect with. The main players in his production are characters like

Multiple Personality Disorder (1981, 479-481; 1986, 111; 1991, 419), Fractional Personality Disorder (1991, 422), Split-brain surgery (1981, 481; 1991, 423-426), brains without bodies, and bodies without brains (1981, 217-229). I will not deny that these types of characters, both real and imaginary, play an important and legitimate role in the landscape of philosophical exploration, cautioning us against hasty, unexamined generalizations. However, they lack characteristics that are easy to identify with; while you will find yourself remarking about the peculiarity and indeed undeniable curiosity of Dennett's examples, you won't often find yourself noticing how these things are just like the things that happen to you or the people you know. They are examples that, for the most part, remain in a category separate from our ordinary experience. Furthermore, they carry a specific danger with them, which we will see when we consider a few examples of well-known thought-experiments on selves and identity throughout the following chapters. Their greatest attraction, the freedom to idealize situations in the pursuit of clarity, can be a seriously misleading flaw, leading us to idealize away the very factors that matter most to a topic.

The second problem that prompts my application of Dennett's theory to pregnancy is the challenge that what I term "pregnant experience" presents to our usual intuitions about the self. Through a close look at the research of several thinkers who have been dedicated to the investigation of their own and other women's experiences of pregnancy, it becomes clear that pregnancy breaks many of the rules that usually remain unchallenged in the context of our daily lives. As we will see in Chapter Three, our usual assumptions about the boundaries, plurality and diachronic identity cannot stand up to a thoughtful consideration of pregnancy. Because of this, a theory of the self that can

account for these experiences is required. Our traditional ideas about the self will not suffice.

As we will see, there is one solution for both of these problems. When we apply Dennett's theory of the self to the pregnant experience, Dennett's theory is substantiated and the challenges of pregnancy are legitimized.

Section Two: An Intuitive Understanding of the Self

There is no generally accepted set of necessary and sufficient conditions for selfhood in the philosophical literature, and I will not attempt to establish such conditions. Instead I will work with a looser set of hallmarks that are at least intuitively indicative of selfhood. For example, selves have a point of view. Selves are autonomous. We typically consider selves to be embodied, though of course people may disagree as to whether embodiment is a necessary or a contingent characteristic of selves. Selves are usually thought to be rational, in at least the basic sense that they are thinking beings. Lastly, and more controversially, each self belongs to one body for life (“belongs to” being neutral between many possible complex relationships that might hold between selves and bodies¹). These are some of the identifying characteristics of selfhood that most of us accept as intuitive, and do not have much reason to seriously question in the context of our day-to-day lives.

Challenging Intuition: Pregnancy

Suppose then, that we work with a notion of selves as perspective-holders, autonomous, embodied, and rational in some degree. These normal characteristics of selves do not, however, determine other facts that we might seek to clarify about them: for example, boundaries, plurality, or diachronic identity. It is these concepts in particular which the experience of pregnancy brings to the forefront and for which pregnancy provides a particularly pointed challenge. First, we might generally assume that, as an embodied entity, the boundary of the self is simply the boundary of the body –

¹ Are the self and the body the same? Does the self live *inside* the body? Again, these questions will not be resolved here.

the skin, in effect. Whether we believe the self to *be* the body itself or some other type of entity merely housed within the body, we generally accept that the self does not go beyond or shrink within the boundaries of the body. Pregnancy challenges this assumption. Second, we tend to assume that there is only ever one self associated with each body. No more, no less. Pregnancy gives us *empirical* grounds, and not merely thought-experimental grounds, to question this as well. Finally, we assume that the same self will remain associated with each body throughout the lifetime of the individual. Again, pregnancy provides evidence that prompts us to doubt this assumption. As we will see, pregnancy drives us to reconsider at least a few of the ideas we hold about the self.

Challenging Intuition: Others

Challenges to some of these assumptions, and exceptions to some of these characterizations, have been raised in the literature from other perspectives. I will briefly summarize a few of these challenges in order to help situate the current project in the philosophical landscape.

Chalmers and Clark: Extending the Self

The idea that the psychological person is not coextensive with the human body is not unique to Dennett. One interesting hypothesis denying the skin-as-boundary intuition can be found in the work of Chalmers' and Clark's "The Extended Mind" (1998). While their work mostly fits in the literature on mind and cognition rather than that on selfhood and personhood, Chalmers and Clark do disagree with the claim that the boundary of the

self lies at the skin. Their primary claim is that our definition of the mind should be expanded to include the “external” tools (that is, outside of the skull/skin) that we use for cognitive processing. Chalmers and Clark argue that the internal cognitive mechanisms that we employ and intuitively consider a part of the mind are no more integral than the external physical tools we use. My cell phone, for example, assuming it is always available and reliable, is no less a part of my mind than my memory. If I want to make a phone call, and access my cell phone, instead of my memory, to find the number, the cell phone is functioning as a part of the cognitive process that takes place. Since I do the very same thing with my cell phone to access a phone number as I would do with my memory, Chalmers and Clark claim that my cell phone is a part of my cognitive processing system, and thus a part of my mind.

As their analysis comes to a close, Chalmers and Clark move beyond the mind to consider the self. Referring to their example of Otto, a man with Alzheimer’s who carries a notebook with him to keep track of information, they wonder:

Does the extended mind imply an extended self? It seems so...The information in Otto's notebook, for example, is a central part of his identity as a cognitive agent. What this comes to is that Otto *himself* is best regarded as an extended system, a coupling of biological organism and external resources. To consistently resist this conclusion, we would have to shrink the self into a mere bundle of occurrent states, severely threatening its deep psychological continuity. Far better to take the broader view, and see agents themselves as spread into the world. (Chalmers and Clark, 1998)

Here we see that Chalmers and Clark have denied our usual assumption that the boundary of the self lies at the skin, questioning the line between self and other. The extended mind hypothesis implies that the boundaries of the self are flexible and can change; one

self can be made up of both biological and human-made components, extending its boundaries to include artifacts outside the body.

This hypothesis certainly gives us reason to question our usual assumptions about selves. Chalmers and Clark challenge us by questioning the exclusion of certain artifacts from our understanding of the mind, and thus the self. Dennett's theory of the narrative self and the pregnant experience also push us to reconsider the distinction between self and other. In "The Reality of Selves" (1991), Dennett discusses the behaviour of certain animals that include outside artifacts within their "biological self" – the beaver has a dam, the spider a web, and the bower-bird a nest full of found objects (1991, 415). Unlike Chalmers and Clark, who draw upon technological extensions of cognitive processes to make their point, Dennett focuses on the genetic and developmental aspect, appealing to the idea of an "extended phenotype" to explain why we should regard external objects or tools (like clothes) as blurring the physical boundaries of the self. I hold that in pregnancy too a blurring of internal and external boundaries presents a challenge. The challenge, however, is an entirely natural other: the fetus.² Here we do not go so far as to include found artifacts, but rather another separate, though not independent member of the species. Its location within the body of the pregnant woman gives us good reason to include it as a part of the self of the woman, while some women's perceptions of it as other force us to reconsider this inclusion. Within Dennett's theory, as well as within the pregnant experience, the boundaries between self and other are challenged, as they are with Chalmers and Clark's extended mind hypothesis. In this

² Throughout this paper, "fetus" will be used as a general term denoting an unborn human being. While a finer-grained terminology could be used, for my purposes the developmental stage of the pregnancy is not central to the arguments being made.

context, however, we will not go so far as to extend the boundaries of the self into the non-biological world.

Strauss: the Body as Other

Erwin Strauss is another thinker who challenges our intuitive assumptions about the self, particularly its boundaries. In his book The Primary World of the Senses (1963), he argues that

There can be no self as such or world as such with fixed borderlines between them delimiting the within and the without. The borderline does not hue precisely to the surface of the organism's body as that which separates that body from its environment. (244-245)

He claims that the boundary between self and other can change, depending on the condition of our body and our connection to it. Just as Dennett identifies times when I may feel that a part of my body is not a part of "me", for example when my arm falls asleep (1991, 108), Strauss agrees, making similar claims about the body as a whole:

The bodily interior is experienced as within only under certain circumstances, particularly in illness, fatigue, or collapse. If, suddenly, I am no longer indifferent to my body, if I suddenly give my attention to its functions and processes, then my body as a whole is objectified, becomes to me an Other, a part of the outside world...something external, something from which I myself am excluded. (245)

Strauss focuses on the status of the body as either self or other, and concludes that it is neither. "The body is the mediator between the self and the world," he claims; "it belongs fully neither to the 'inner', nor to the 'outer' (245)".

The pregnant experience points to a similar conclusion, forcing us to reconsider the boundaries between self and other. As a woman experiences the sometimes extreme physical changes that take place within pregnancy, she distinguishes between her self and

her body, finding her body to be unfamiliar and separate from what she considers to be her self. These physical changes may result in the identification of a new self, a pregnant self, as distinct from the pre- or non-pregnant self. While Strauss focuses on the nature of the body, in our consideration of the pregnant experience we will focus on the self, and consider a few of the effects that the pregnant body can have on our understanding of it.

Parfit: Diachronic Identity

Derek Parfit's view on personal identity is one which directly challenges our assumption that one maintains the same self throughout one's life. Through a variety of thought experiments, Parfit constructs a theory in which the same body at an earlier and a later time need not be connected to the same self. Although the two selves may share memories and personality traits, there is no deeper person which they both are (1971, 25). The relations between what he calls earlier and later selves come in degrees, rather than being all or nothing (1971, 22).

Like Dennett, Parfit allows for indeterminacy and unanswerable questions within his theory. Not every describable case of personal identity must provide an answer to the question "Are these the same person?" (Parfit, 1971, 8). In his exploration of the fission and fusion of persons, gradual replacement of the matter in one's brain, and other interesting thought experimental cases, Parfit demonstrates that seemingly clear concepts of person and self break down when we consider these types of atypical cases.

Kittay: Rationality and Autonomy

One final opponent to our intuitive definition of the self is Eva Kittay. In her paper “At the Margins of Moral Personhood” (2005), Kittay swims “against the philosophical tide” by arguing “against the view that intrinsic psychological capacities such as rationality and autonomy...are the principal qualifications” for personhood (100). She claims that “the traditional requirements for personhood...are not properties that humans maintain throughout life”, and in fact, are properties that some human beings are born without (102). Kittay argues that relational capacities, not psychological capacities, are central to personhood (110). These capacities play a critical role in our moral lives:

...giving care, responding appropriately to care, empathy, and fellow feeling; a sense of what is harmonious and loving; and a capacity for kindness and an appreciation for those who are kind. (122)

Kittay also claims that family membership has the moral significance needed to justify privileged moral status, particularly being deemed a person (124).

“Person” and “self” do not share the same meaning although their characteristics are similar, and they seem to refer to the same group of individuals. It seems reasonable to conclude however, that while all selves may not be persons, all persons are indeed selves. Thus, Kittay’s arguments against the inclusion of rationality and autonomy in a definition of personhood would also apply to our attempts to define selfhood. She too challenges our ordinary intuitive assumptions about selves claiming that rationality and autonomy are not necessary for selfhood.

Kittay on Thought Experiments

In her consideration of personhood, Kittay bases her arguments on her research and experience with the group of human beings we may denote using the abbreviation

CSMR: those who are congenitally severely mentally retarded. In our consideration of pregnancy, we will use the evidence provided by the experiences of pregnancy as a basis for questioning traditional assumptions about the self. Real life experience, Kittay claims, provides us with more reliable intuitions than the hypothetical cases usually employed by philosophers. “Our intuitions are unreliable when we consider cases we have never encountered or which our imaginations grasp only haltingly” she states (2005, 108). The CSMR “are useful, first to test intuitions concerning when a human life is the life of a person and, second, to offer a challenge for a moral theory to meet” (2005, 108). The same is true of pregnancy. As we will see, pregnancy is useful to for testing our intuitions about selves, and also presents a challenge to theories of self. As Kittay argues, I also argue: these real life situations are useful and consideration of them is necessary for a proper philosophical theory in this field.

Section Three: Moving Ahead

Through our consideration of these various thinkers and their criticisms of our loose set of hallmarks of selfhood, we have seen that point of view, rationality, autonomy and embodiment do not stand unchallenged in that role. While the characteristics that I have identified here seem uncontroversial in the context of our usual experiences, as we can see there are reasons to think that they begin to break down when we consider certain thought experiments, and real life situations. Dennett, like most philosophers, uses hypothetical and extraordinary examples to shake our assumptions and bring to light alternative ways of thinking. A thorough consideration of the pregnant experience reveals that it serves the same function, effectively providing a significant challenge to at least a few of our assumptions about the self, but without venturing into the realm of the unreal or atypical. For these reasons, the application of Dennett's theory to the pregnant experience serves a double purpose: first, the pregnant experience serves to highlight the generality and applicability of Dennett's theory, and second, Dennett's theory validates and contextualizes women's experiences of pregnancy, helping to understand and explain them in terms of a theory of the self.

Anecdotal Evidence and Heterophenomenology

Before we begin our exploration of Dennett's theory of the self, I wish to consider the nature of the work that has been done in the area of pregnancy and the self. As we will see in Chapter Three, outside of the abortion discussion, there are a handful of thinkers who have chosen to delve into this area of human experience. These women provide insight into the pregnant experience by collecting the stories of pregnant women

and telling their own. Much of the available evidence is purely anecdotal and presented from a non-philosophical perspective. While this is an unfortunate consequence of the general lack of research done in this area, the collected stories of hundreds of pregnant women provide a significant set of data, which must be accounted for in a coherent theory of the self. For an experience so common and so rich to have been ignored is regrettable.

When we consider Dennett's methodology for understanding the self and subjective experience in general, we realize that this sort of anecdotal evidence is perfectly suited to his methodology. As we will see, Dennett's method of heterophenomenology obliges us to begin our efforts to understand the phenomenological world of the subject by transcribing her recorded verbal behaviour. We are then able to interpret the written texts as speech acts and consider the subject an "intentional system". To that intentional system we attribute intentional predicates such as beliefs, desires and goals as we begin to understand her phenomenological world. Dennett emphasizes that in coming this far, from verbal behaviour to interpreted written text and a rational agent, we have not abandoned the objectivity of science.

In taking this approach, we begin to validate the research and evidence that does exist in the area of pregnancy and the self. The women who have written about the phenomenology of pregnancy have chosen primarily to record their own and others' descriptions of what it's like to be pregnant, in many cases not moving far beyond the transcription of verbal behaviour. Although this may have initially seemed like a drawback, according to Dennett, this is the best way for a heterophenomenologist to objectively gain an understanding of an individual's subjective experience. In this small

way, and to a greater extent as we continue, we see how productive and beneficial the application of Dennett's theory to the pregnant experience can be.

Structure

This paper will progress according to the following structure. We will begin in Chapter Two with a discussion of Dennett's theory of the self. In sections One, Two, and Three, we will familiarize ourselves with his presentation of heterophenomenology, the intentional stance, and his analogy with interpreting fictional texts. Finally, in Section Four, we will consider the self as a centre of narrative gravity and the challenges that this presents to our intuitive assumptions about the self. Chapter Three will uncover how the pregnant experience challenges our usual intuitions about the self through a discussion of the boundaries, plurality and diachronic identity of the self. Chapter Four will then explore the application of Dennett's theory to the pregnant experience, arguing that this application is beneficial to both. Finally, in Chapter Five we will review what we have accomplished and discuss what these results suggest for further research in this area.

Chapter Two: Dennett's Theory of the Self

Introduction

In order to properly apply Dennett's theory of the narrative self to the pregnant experience, we must first put a considerable effort into reviewing and understanding his theory itself. This presentation is relatively long, in part because Dennett's view is a bit too counterintuitive to present without its background motivations, and in part because I aim to synthesize a few different treatments of the issues that Dennett has given, since some of them relate more explicitly to pregnancy than does the most thorough and detailed account given in *Consciousness Explained*. We will begin in Section One by understanding why Dennett's theory is necessary – attaining an objective understanding of subjective experiences is a problem hitherto unsolved by science. In Section Two we will present Dennett's solution to this problem: heterophenomenology and the intentional stance. Through these methods, we are able to take a subject's verbal description of her phenomenological world and interpret it objectively as the speech acts of a rational agent without going outside the boundaries of science. It is from this groundwork that we will begin to move upwards towards the self. In Section Three, we will move from Dennett's intentional systems to the full-fledged selves that we encounter in daily life by looking at Dennett's comparison between interpreting the verbal behaviour of a subject and interpreting a fictional text. In Section Four we complete this transition and come to the summation of Dennett's theory of the self. Dennett presents the self as a centre of narrative gravity – an abstract fictional entity, useful for explaining and predicting the behaviour of human beings. This characterization of the self presents many challenges to

our idealized assumptions about the selves, and we will explore a few of those challenges here as well.

Section One: Objectivity and Subjective Experience

The Value of Dennett's Theory

Contemporary Western culture aims to expand the reach of science to include as much of the natural world as possible. More and more of our environment and experience has been scientifically illuminated, settling mysteries and revealing secrets that had been previously explained by folklore and superstition. Dennett points out that although science has explained “many initially mysterious natural phenomena – magnetism, or photosynthesis, digestion, even reproduction,” it has not been able to reach inside the subjective human experience. He explains:

Consciousness seems utterly unlike these. For one thing, particular cases of [these other natural phenomena] are in principle equally accessible to any observer with the right apparatus, but any particular case of consciousness seems to have a favored or privileged observer, whose access to the phenomenon is entirely unlike, and better than, the access of any others – no matter what apparatus they may have.³ (1981, 8)

It seems that subjective experience has yet to give in to the probing fingers of scientific exploration and we have not yet found an objective way to understand the self. The experiencer is the only one who has access to the phenomenology of, or “what it’s like” to be, her.

In the following sections we will explore what it’s like to be a bat, what it’s like to be a human being, and the trap of our own perspective. It will become clear that science has not yet achieved an objective understanding of the self.

³ Dennett mentions reproduction as one of the mysteries that science has solved, but does not explore it any more than this. It is interesting to note that in pregnancy there is also a “privileged observer whose access to the phenomenon is entirely unlike, and better than the access of any others” – the pregnant woman.

Why Consciousness?

We include a discussion of consciousness here as a part of our exploration of Dennett's theory of selfhood because it plays an important role in understanding the context of Dennett's theory. In *Consciousness Explained*, Dennett focuses on his theory of consciousness and adds his discussion of selfhood on at the end. Dennett's presentation of the two theories together in this way makes sense considering the relationship between the two. In Dennett's depiction of consciousness he aims to dispel the notion that it is an objectively unknowable mystery, and presents it as something that can be documented and interpreted scientifically – that is, by Dennett's lights, in a way amenable to intersubjective analysis. In his presentation of selfhood, he takes the same line. He views the self not as a material entity, nor as an immaterial soul housed within the body, but rather as a practical abstract entity which results from the human system as a whole. Our discussion of the problem of “what it's like” is presented here for the purpose of properly situating Dennett's project in order to recognize the motivations of his theories – first of consciousness, then of selves.

What is it Like to be a Bat?

In his paper “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” (1974) Thomas Nagel investigates the phenomenology of a bat. He explains that an outside observer cannot adequately understand even the familiar senses that bats share with humans, such as taste, smell and touch. Nagel claims that though they seem familiar, “these experiences also have in each case a specific subjective character, which it is beyond our ability to conceive (1974, 439)”. The bat's experiences are seen from the bat's perspective, making them subjective

and thus inaccessible to us. While I could imagine what it would be like for me to be a bat, that imagined experience would still fail to map directly onto the experience of the bat itself. A reliable description of what it is like to be a bat seems to be available only from the bat's perspective, and can't be attained through physical, (or even imaginative) scientific examination. As Nagel states, "if the facts of experience – facts about what it is like *for* the experiencing organism – are accessible only from one point of view, then it is a mystery how the true character of experiences could be revealed in the physical operation of that organism (1974, 442)". Physical examination cannot give us an objective understanding of "what it's like" to be a bat.

What is it Like to be a Human Being?

Though the experiences of a bat seem to be completely inaccessible using the tools of physical science, and even the tools of imagination, we might expect to be more successful in the case of other human beings. It seems, however, that even other human beings' experiences are not available for analysis through scientific methods. Though we may assume that the experiences of others are basically like our own, when we look for a scientific understanding of them this assumption breaks down. In science, we aim to give an objective description of the subject we are studying, and thus, in this case, we are aiming to discover the objective nature of subjective experience. We are looking for the facts about an individual's subjective experience. Nagel states his foundational concern about this type of investigation:

Very little work has been done on the basic question...[of] whether any sense can be made of experiences having an objective character at all. Does it make sense, in other words, to ask what my experience are *really* like, as opposed to how they appear to me? We cannot genuinely

understand the hypothesis that their nature is captured in a physical description unless we understand the more fundamental idea that they *have* an objective nature. (1974, 448)

Nagel is questioning the very sense of asking for an objective description of subjective experience. As Dennett points out, Nagel “fears that this notion of ‘having experience’ is beyond the realm of the objective (1981, 409)”.

We are moved to ask, in response to this concern, “what is genuine knowledge of what it is like to be *X*?” (Dennett, 1981, 413) Putting the subjective experiences of bats aside, what we are much more interested in is what it is like to be a human being – someone growing up in South Africa, or British Columbia, or even just across the street. This is a question to which we do not seem to have an answer. For Dennett though, the difficulty continues inward – we can’t stop at our own front door. We must realize that our knowledge, while it clearly fails to extend to the experiences of other species, someone across the globe, and perhaps even to someone in the house next door, also fails to reach into our own lives. “We don’t even quite know what it was like to be ourselves ten years ago,” Dennett claims. “Worse yet, we often don’t even know how we could possibly have done what we did yesterday (1981, 413)”. Finally, Dennett moves the unknown right into our immediate experience. “When you come right down to it,” he claims, “it’s not clear just what it’s like to be me, right now (1981, 413)”.⁴

Trapped Inside Our Own Perspective

⁴ In these passages we can already see one key aspect of Dennett’s complete theory of the self: consciousness is not as mysterious as one might think. This is not because objective description is easy, but rather because there is no sharp delineation between the first-person and third-person perspectives. Describing what it feels like to be a self is difficult *in general*; it’s not impossible when it comes to describing others’ experiences, and it’s not effortless when it comes to describing our own.

One apparent result of the “what’s it like” problem is that attaining a scientific understanding of subjective experience in general is a hopeless pursuit. As an individual who can see only from my own perspective, it is impossible to get an objective grasp on my experiences. Dennett explains that “we can come close to seeing and understanding ourselves objectively, but each of us is trapped inside a powerful system with a unique point of view (1981, 278)”. Objectivity, achieved (if it can be achieved) by giving a description that is true from *any* perspective, can only be approximated if a subject is willing to defer occasionally to evidence that can be evaluated publicly, even if this clashes with her powerful intuitions and judgments about her own experience.

Raymond Smullyan highlights this challenge in his paper “An Epistemological Nightmare” (1982). He tells the story of a man who has invented a mind-reading machine that can tell what’s “really” going on inside your head. Regardless of what you *think* you desire, plan, like, or even think, the machine has the ultimate authority and final answer about the facts of these matters. In Dennett’s analysis of this thought experiment, he explains that for using this machine to confirm the authority you have about what’s really going on in your head,

[T]he price you pay...is the outside chance of being discredited. ‘I know what I like,’ we are all prepared to insist, ‘and I know what it’s like to be me!’ Probably you do, at least about some matters, but that is something to be checked in performance. Maybe, just maybe, you’ll discover that you really don’t know as much as you thought you did about what it is like to be you. (Dennett, 1981, 429)

While there can be no doubt that I have unique access to an understanding of what it is like to be me, there is the chance that I could be wrong even about that. This possibility is something we encounter on a regular basis, although we usually play the role of seeing how mistaken others can be about their own experiences. A woman looks at her brother

and says, “Oh, he likes her – he just doesn’t know it yet!” A mother comments on how her teenage daughter is really a “people-pleaser,” even though her daughter says she doesn’t care what people think. In these cases it’s not that we believe that the subject is trying to deceive us, but only that we know something that they, sincerely, do not.

A more extreme and unusual case of this can be seen in split-brain patients. The work of Michael Gazzinga explores this phenomenon (2008) and Dennett considers it quite extensively in “The Reality of Selves” (1991). After surgery severing the nerve fibers that connect the two sides of a subject’s brain, his or her behaviour is slightly altered. For example, Zachary is shown an apple on the left side of a screen. When he is asked what he saw, he says he saw nothing. However, when he is asked to use his left hand to select an object from a box without looking, he chooses an apple. If Zachary does not look at the object he has chosen, he will still state that he does not know what it is. If he is allowed to see the object, and is asked why he chose the apple, he will fabricate an explanation for his behaviour, stating that he was hungry, for example. Here, although the experimenter knows that Zachary chose the apple because it was what was shown on the screen, Zachary is unaware of what is “really” going on inside his brain. This gives us a clear picture of the possibility of being wrong, not only about what it’s like to be a bat, or someone living on another continent, but also about our own subjective experience. We need to note not only that Zachary, or any of us for that matter, can make mistakes, but also how quickly, how plausibly, and (from the first-person perspective) how *invisibly* Zachary and the rest of us can invent a false story about how things *really* were – a story that presents itself to us not as a best-guess, but as self-knowledge, and thus undeniably reliable.

As we continue into Section Two, we will explore Dennett's response to the problem of objectively understanding subjective experience. Through *heterophenomenology* and *the intentional stance*, Dennett takes us from the recorded verbal behaviour of a subject to an interpretation of the subject as a rational agent while maintaining the objectivity of science.

Section Two: Heterophenomenology and the Intentional Stance

To solve the problem of scientifically understanding subjective experience, Dennett introduces two related technical notions: heterophenomenology and the intentional stance. These approaches give us methods for recording, interpreting and understanding individuals' subjective experiences, including our own, without having to regard those experiences as metaphysically mysterious or epistemically of an entirely different order than the rest of our knowledge of the world.

Dennett explains that heterophenomenology

[I]s the *neutral* path leading from objective physical science and its insistence on the third person point of view, to a method of phenomenological description that can (in principle) do justice to the most private and ineffable subjective experiences, while never abandoning the methodological scruples of science. (Dennett, 1991, 72)

Although subjective experience seems to be inescapably bound to the first person perspective, Dennett claims that we can escape from that perspective to an objective third person point of view.

Heterophenomenology is, at first glance, a simple methodology for understanding the subjective experiences of a human subject. What Dennett does, however, is pull apart our assumptions and uncover what lies behind the interpretation and analysis that comes naturally in our everyday lives.

In an effort to make sense of the subjective experiences of a particular human subject, we might begin by creating audio recordings of his verbal descriptions of them. We then transcribe the recordings into written form. Finally, we interpret the text. Rather than viewing the text as a series of marks and symbols, we would interpret the text as words, and in fact as "speech acts" of the subject. He has not relayed a combination of

meaningless sounds, but instead, things like questions, statements, requests and comments. While this seems like an obvious and natural step to take, Dennett explains that

This sort of interpretation calls for us to adopt what I call the *intentional stance*: we must treat the noise-emitter as an agent, indeed a rational agent, who harbors beliefs and desires and other mental states that exhibit *intentionality* or “aboutness,” and whose actions can be explained (or predicted) on the basis of the content of these states. (1991, 76)

We do this kind of thing all the time. When we have an ordinary conversation with a colleague, we interpret her behaviour as the actions of a rational agent, not just as random noise. In doing this, we have adopted the intentional stance towards her.

We take the intentional stance when the behaviour of a system can be explained or predicted by attributing to it goals, beliefs, desires, and other intentional attributes (Dennett, 1978, 3). “A particular thing is an intentional system only in relation to the strategies of someone who is trying to explain and predict its behaviour (Dennett, 1978, 3-4)”. The decision to treat something as an intentional system “is not intrinsically right or wrong” and says nothing very specific about the physical properties or characteristics of the system, but just that it is useful to explain and predict its behaviour this way (Dennett, 1978, 7). To take the intentional stance towards a microwave is not *useful* at all; there is no benefit to be had from interpreting it as having beliefs or desires or goals, although we might sometimes say it *wanted* to make my food extra hot. It might be more useful to attribute intentional attributes to, for example, a pet. When Laura sees her cat scratching and meowing at the door, she might say that Earl wants to go outside because he thinks he can catch that squirrel. Laura takes the intentional stance towards her cat by

attributing desires and beliefs to him, which could be useful to her if it helps her understand and predict Earl's behaviour.

Deciding to take the intentional stance does not mean it is the only way to explain and predict the subject's behaviour – it just means that it's *one* way that is successful (Dennett, 1978, 271). There are other stances we can take, which are useful for other things (1978, 4). The *design stance* is useful for mechanical objects. We adopt this stance when we predict or explain a thing's behaviour according to how it was designed - what it was made to do. Why did the patio light turn on as I walked by? I could take the intentional stance and conclude that it knew I was there and wanted to light my path. But a more useful and predictive approach would be the design stance: it turned on because that's what motion-sensing lights are designed to do. The *physical stance* is particularly useful for predicting the malfunctioning of things, and approaches a system as a purely mechanical object. We can predict and explain the behaviour of a falling wine glass based purely on its physical make-up and our knowledge of physical laws. We know it will shatter not because it wanted to stain the floor and not because it was designed to break easily, but rather because we know that glass is fragile and that gravity won't let up. A particular stance is chosen on the basis of its effectiveness in explaining and predicting, not on the basis of the intrinsic characteristics of the system. The *intentional stance* is taken, "not because [the system] really and truly has beliefs and desires (whatever that would be), but just because it succumbs to a certain *stance* adopted toward it (Dennett, 1978, 272-273)".

Review

In Section One it became clear that there has been no method with which to understand subjective experience from an objective standpoint. It seems impossible to move beyond the first person perspective since we are each trapped inside our own point of view – I have privileged access to “what it’s like” to be me. As Nagel expresses it, there is serious doubt as to whether it even makes sense to try and talk about subjective experiences in an objective way. Dennett however, gives us two important approaches that allow us to do this. Through heterophenomenology and the intentional stance, we are able to take a subject’s verbal description of her phenomenological world and interpret it objectively as the speech acts of a rational agent without going outside the boundaries of science.

It is from this groundwork that we now begin to move upwards towards the self. While we can agree that it makes sense to view ourselves and other human beings as rational agents who have such intentional states as beliefs, desires, and goals, in our daily interactions we see complexity and messiness that is not fully articulated in this conception of the self. We need to move to a deeper understanding of Dennett’s intentional systems to see the real selves that we consider ourselves and others to be.

Section Three: The Analogy of Fictional Texts

One way to begin to flesh out the objective interpretation of a subject is through Dennett's analogy with fiction. He compares interpreting our and others' behaviour to interpreting a fictional text. Through this comparison we begin to see the complexities of the rational agents of the intentional stance. As we consider the discord that exists between how things seem and how things are, and the indeterminacy and reviseability of facts in the phenomenological world, this complexity becomes evident.

Through the heterophenomenological method we can take the verbal accounts of the subject, and create a written text that is open to interpretation by taking the intentional stance. The interpretation of this written text, Dennett claims, is much like the interpretation of a fictional text. He explains:

We can compare the heterophenomenologist's task of interpreting subjects' behaviour to the reader's task of interpreting a work of fiction...In spite of our knowledge or assumption that the story told is not true, we can, and do, speak of what is *true in the story*...the interpretation of fiction is undeniably do-able, with certain uncontroversial results...one can learn a great deal about a novel, about its text, about the point, about the author, even about the real world, by learning about *the world portrayed* by the novel. (1991, 79)

The Story is Not True

In this passage Dennett makes quite a few claims about fiction, and thus about the interpretation of a subject's behaviour. His first claim is that we assume the story is not true. In the case of the subject's text, we don't assume it to be false because he is intentionally lying, but we are aware that the subject may be mistaken about what is really going on inside him. Dennett claims that because the subjects

[A]re sincere (apparently), we grant [that what they describe] must be what it is like to them, but then it follows that what it is like to them is at best an uncertain guide to what is going on in them. (1991, 94)

The fact that things *seem* a certain way to the subject does not guarantee that things actually are that way. Through understanding this characteristic of a subject's phenomenological world, we begin to add complexity to our understanding of Dennett's theory of the self.

The Way Things Seem and the Way Things Are

This discrepancy between the way things seem and the way things are is exactly what Dennett is talking about when he refers to "the world portrayed by the novel" in contrast to "the real world" (Dennett, 1991, 79). "Subjects are unwitting creators of fiction, but to say that they are unwitting is to grant that what they say is, or can be, an account of *exactly how it seems to them* (Dennett, 1991, 94)". The subject's account of how things seem to her is the world portrayed by the text. According to Dennett, this may or may not have any implications for what is going on in "the real world", that is, inside the subject. For Dennett,

We are all virtuoso novelists, who find ourselves engaged in all sorts of behaviour... We try to make all of our material cohere into a single good story. And that story is our autobiography. (1986, 114)

Like split-brain patients, we each do our best to make sense of the situations in which we find ourselves, and the behaviour in which we find ourselves engaging. "We are all, at times, confabulators, telling and retelling ourselves the story of our own lives, with scant attention to the question of truth (Dennett, 1986, 111)". What is going on in the real world, that is, what is really going on inside us, is either inaccessible to us, or

inconsequential to the shape of the story we tell. Here Dennett uncovers an ambiguity in the notion of subjective experience. There are two types of facts that can be stated about an agent's experience: those facts that are determined by the relationships and causes that act on the agent *and within the agent* to shape her behaviour, and those about how the agent subsequently – even in the immediate future, within a second or less – represents those internal and external facts in the form of memories or utterances or beliefs about what happened and how it seemed. Because these two types of facts are not the same thing, we can meaningfully distinguish between how things really were, subjectively, with an agent, which heterophenomenology might aim to discover, and how it *seemed* to the agent that things really were with her, which is far more fallible than we would like to believe, and thus only partial evidence in heterophenomenological inquiry.

This may seem to be an unbelievable and unacceptable claim – that we do not have a firm grip on our own experiences. It seems obvious that we know what's going on in our own heads. However, as we saw in the case of split-brain patients, this divergence between what is and what seems is possible. If we carefully consider our experiences, we can see that this happens not only in unusual cases like split-brain patients, but also in our ordinary lives. For example, in the case of our own physical well being, we seek out professional help because we are aware of our own ignorance about what is really going on. When a baseball player standing too close to the on-deck circle gets an aluminum bat across the arm, we can see the two different types of facts about his experience. The boy's interpretation of the situation is that his arm is broken. Because of the pain he's feeling, it does *seem* broken to him; this is a fact about his subjective experience. There is no deeper reality about his phenomenological world; no one can say to the boy that it

doesn't seem broken to him. The other fact, whether or not his arm is actually broken, is determined by the external factors affecting it – the speed of the bat, the strength of his bone, and others – and it will be up to the ER doctors to uncover it.

We may think that these two types of fact don't apply, however, to things going on inside the head. The boy may not know exactly what's going on inside his arm because *he* is not inside his arm, we might say. *I am* inside my head (at least mentally and psychologically), and therefore I have a much better idea of what's going on in the area of my mental life, than I do about what's going on inside my arm, or any other part of my body. While this may be the case, we do turn to professionals even in when it's psychological causes and effects that are in question. When things go wrong, we can admit that we don't understand our own experiences, our own phenomenological world. Our mental health, like our physical health, can be something about which we are not adequately knowledgeable and for which we often seek out help from someone who can tell us what's really going on.

In short, Dennett argues that our confidence in the correspondence between seeming and being, between our phenomenological world and reality, must be reduced. Dennett explains it like this:

If you want us to *believe* everything you say about your phenomenology, you are asking not just to be taken seriously but to be granted papal infallibility, and that is asking too much. You are *not* authoritative about what is happening in you, but only about what *seems* to be happening in you, and we are giving you total, dictatorial authority of the account of how it seems to you, about *what it is like to be you*. (Dennett, 1991, 96)

In order to maintain objectivity in the course of understanding subjective experience, we must agree to the fallibility of our own perspective. If we claim that seeming *is* being, then the heterophenomenologist bases her conclusions about reality solely on what the

subject says and abandons objectivity. The fact that we are *not* authoritative about what is happening with us helps us to understand Dennett's theory of the self and begins to move us from the rational agent to the more common complex self.

Indeterminacy

As we have begun to understand Dennett's comparison between interpreting the text of the subject and interpreting the text of a fictional novel, we have seen that in the text – the subject's description of what it's like to be her – the subject is describing her own phenomenological world. Dennett distinguishes this world from the real world by comparing it to “the world portrayed by the novel”. He highlights the fact that, even though we know the novel is not a true story, we still talk about “what is true in the story” (Dennett, 1991, 79). The same applies when interpreting a subject's description of her phenomenological world. We can, based on the text, decide what is true and what is not true in the realm of “what it's like” for the subject.

There are, however, areas where questions of fact are neither true nor false – where there simply is no fact of the matter. Again, we consider fictional writing to see how this could be the case. Dennett explains that although what is true in a story may go beyond what is simply stated in the text, “beyond the limits of such extrapolation fictional worlds are simply *indeterminate*...There is simply no fact of the matter” (1986, 105). Take, for example, the story James and the Giant Peach (1961). We can ask a few different questions about the world created by the text. If we wonder how James' parents died, we can find the answer explicitly stated in the text: “both of them suddenly got eaten up ...by an enormous angry rhinoceros” (Dahl, 1961, 1). To move a bit beyond the

text, we might be curious as to whether or not James' two aunts spoke with a British accent. Although this isn't explicitly stated in the text, we may justifiably assume that they did, since they lived "in the south of England" (Dahl, 1961, 2). Imagine though, that we want to know what kind of a peach the famous giant peach was. Search though we may, to this question, there simply is no answer. We know that the peach tree from which the giant peach grew was an old one, and that the skin of the peach was "a rich buttery yellow with patches of brilliant pink and red" (Dahl, 1961, 23), and that it tasted delicious. But as for the variety of peach that James was dealing with, this fact is simply indeterminate, since nothing in the text gives us an answer to this question. Dennett gives this example: "with regard to any actual man, living or dead, the question of whether or not he has or had a mole on his left shoulder blade has an answer, yes or no...But with regard to a fictional character, that question may have no answer at all (Dennett, 1986, 106)".

On Dennett's view, the same is true in the phenomenological world of an individual. I may wonder where my grandmother and grandfather first met. Although I don't know the answer to this question, it is nonetheless an answerable one. Did my grandmother think my grandfather was handsome when they first met? The answer to this question is indeterminate; or, at least, has no more fine-grained answer than the discoverable record of when she displayed or recorded some judgment on the matter.

Having interpreted the text as the speech acts of a rational agent, therefore taking the intentional stance, we adopt the view that what the subject says (i.e. the behaviour of the intentional system) constitutes his phenomenological world – what it is like to be him – and there are certain facts which remain indeterminate. We don't and can't know about

them; there is nothing *to* know, as in a fictional text. This feature of a subject's phenomenology again adds to the complexity of the subject. Not only are we dealing with a rational agent who has desires and goals, but more than that, the agent is an individual with some mystery and vagueness. Dennett's theory does account for the selves we see in our everyday lives.

That's Not All She Wrote

Dennett's comparison between the task of interpreting a fictional text such as James and the Giant Peach, and interpreting the text given to us by our subject as a description of her phenomenological world, has consisted mostly of similarities. We have already seen that the methodology of heterophenomenology and the intentional stance are integral to interpreting our subjective experiences, and now we can see that this interpretation is usefully similar to interpreting fiction.

The last and perhaps most interesting insight to be taken from Dennett's comparison here is a point of contrast. In a fictional text, once the novel is written and published "it is too late for the novelist to render determinate anything indeterminate that strikes your curiosity (Dennett, 1986, 109)". If you want to know the exact volume of the giant peach, it will be impossible for you to find out. As Roald Dahl is no longer around to write a sequel including this information, the exact dimensions of the giant peach will forever be indeterminate; there is nothing that can be done to make them determinate.

This is not the case with the text created by the subject. We can ask her more questions to clear up indeterminate areas of her story. And although we must still keep in

mind that she is only the authority on how things *seem to her*, we can make determinate facts in her phenomenological world that were indeterminate before. My grandmother cannot change the location of their first meeting, but I can simply ask her how she felt about my grandfather when they first met, and she can make that indeterminate fact a determinate one. Dennett explains that it is possible

[T]o engage in auto-hermeneutics, interpretation of one's self, and in particular to go back and think about one's past, and one's memories, and to rethink them and re-write them. This process does change the "fictional" character, the character that you are. (Dennett, 1986, 110)

One's description of subjective experience can always be revised.

Review

With Dennett, we begin by interpreting the verbal behaviour of an individual subject and in a sense, understanding her world. Although the prospect of scientifically understanding the subject's subjective experiences seemed slim at first, through Dennett's heterophenomenological methods and his introduction of the intentional stance, science and experience have come together. We noted however, that what Dennett had given through these two theories was merely the interpretation of a subject as a rational agent. Although this is helpful in terms of scientific understanding, it is clear that this seems to be a far cry from the complicated individuals that we interact with in our regular lives.

We explored this criticism by taking a look at Dennett's analogy between interpreting the text of the subject and interpreting a fictional text. Here we could identify some key characteristics of the subject's phenomenology. First, we noted that the subject's account of his own experience is only reliable insofar as it applies to how

things seem to him. This account is not reliable when it comes to understanding how things are in the real world. Second, Dennett points out that there are some questions that may not be answerable through interpretation of the subject's text – they are indeterminate. Lastly, while the indeterminate facts within a fictional text are for the most part fixed once the text is published, there is no publishing with the text of the subject. Indeterminate facts about his story can be edited and revised on an ongoing basis throughout his life.

We have slowly been able to build up our understanding of Dennett's theory, moving from the static rational agent that we saw through the intentional stance to a more dynamic sort of agent, through the analogy with fictional texts. As we move into Section Four, we will pull these pieces together through Dennett's theory of the self as a centre of narrative gravity and a consideration of the challenges that this presents.

Section Four: The Self as a Centre of Narrative Gravity

In Our Interpretation We Find the Self

As the complexity of the rational agent becomes more apparent through Dennett's comparison to fictional texts, we begin to see the need for an organizing principle. As we interpret the verbal behaviour of others and of ourselves, we find it useful to organize our interpretation around a central idea: a self (Dennett, 1986, 105). As we interpret the verbal behaviour of the subject as speech acts rather than meaningless noise, we posit a self from which these speech acts are issued. Again this seems like an obvious step, and is something we do naturally. Dennett's understanding of this process, however, is what challenges our intuitions:

The idealization that makes heterophenomenology possible *assumes* that there is someone home doing the talking, an Author of the Record, a Meaner of all the meanings. When we go to interpret a loquacious body's vocal sounds, we don't suppose that they are just random yawps, or words drawn out of a hat by a gaggle of behind-the-scenes partygoers, but the acts of a single agent, the (one and only) *person* whose body is making the sounds. If we choose to interpret at all, we have no choice but to posit a person whose communicative acts we are interpreting. (Dennett, 1991, 228-229)

We do not interpret the sounds as speech acts because we know there is a "meaner of the meanings" inside the body we're interacting with. Rather, because we interpret the sounds as speech acts, we must posit a self. The self is a tool, "an abstraction one uses as part of a theoretical apparatus to understand, and predict, and make sense of, the behaviour of some very complicated things (Dennett, 1986, 114)", namely human beings. We take the interpreted text of the subject as forming a series of narratives about the subject, and the self is the center of narrative gravity – the theoretical point around which the narratives revolve and are focused.

Fiction is Okay

It may seem strange, and in fact perhaps slightly embarrassing, to see the self as an abstract, fictional entity. We may wonder why a scientist, or the theorist interpreting the behaviour of human beings, would want to include in her theory something *fictional*. “Is the suggestion then that *I am my body’s dream?*” you might ask, “Am I just a fictional character in a sort of novel composed by my body in action (Dennett, 1981, 351)?” For Dennett, the answer to this question is yes, with a qualification. You are not *just* a fictional character. Fictional entities are long-time members of the scientific community and have always been treated with respect (Dennett, 1991, 95). As Dennett explains, selves “are not idle fantasies but hardworking theorists’ fictions (Dennett, 1991, 96)”.

The Multiple Drafts Model

If the self is to be seen as a center of narrative gravity, we must first discuss the narrative itself and its creation. According to Dennett, each thought or mental activity taken on by the subject is accomplished by different parts of the brain, which are interpreting sensory inputs all at the same time. Everything that comes in is continuously being interpreted, edited and revised by specialized parts all working together. Mental tasks “are accomplished in the brain by parallel, multitrack processes of interpretation and elaboration of sensory inputs. Information entering the nervous system is under continuous ‘editorial revision’ (1991, 111)”.

The contents of these interpretations and revisions are fixed throughout the brain. Over time, the accumulation of these “content-discriminations” becomes “something *rather like* a narrative stream or sequence, which can be thought of as subject to continual editing by many processes distributed around in the brain, and continuing indefinitely into the future (Dennett, 1991, 113)”. The revisions are necessary because the brain has to deal not only with incoming data, but also with doubts about and reinterpretations of that data (Dennett, 1981, 343). Dennett explains that “at any point in time there are multiple ‘drafts’ of narrative fragments at various stages of editing in various places in the brain (1991, 113)”. When you ask the subject a question (or the world prompts a response from the subject in some way) she may give you a different story than she did on another occasion, depending on the place or time at which the stream was “probed” (Dennett, 1991, 113). As the subject continues to experience the world, editing of the various narratives is ongoing, and can occur in almost any order. Things can be incorporated or overwritten or emended as time goes by (Dennett, 1991, 135). Dennett calls this part of his theory the Multiple Drafts Model. It is through this model that we understand the continuous re-creation of the self through the constant editing and revising of incoming stimuli by the brain.

Circularity

Before we go on to discuss further characteristics of the self in Dennett’s theory we must pause to make a certain distinction. We don’t typically think of other people, or ourselves, as narratives, and it may seem odd to think that way. How can *I* be a story? Even statements that Dennett makes, such as “we are all, at times, confabulators, telling

and retelling ourselves the story of our own lives (Dennett, 1986, 111)”, don’t seem to line up with our own experiences of ourselves. How can I be telling the story of my life to myself? It can certainly be confusing and seem circular at times.

To resolve this, we have to consider the distinction between the *narrative* itself, and the *content* of the narrative. For Dennett, a self is a centre of narrative gravity. It might be useful to see one’s life as a collection of narratives, and one’s self as a character in the narratives – in fact, the main character – the entity around which everything else revolves. Within these narratives, things like our homes and cars aren’t usually considered a part of our selves – neither according to Dennett’s theory nor according to our own experiences. To say that we tell the story of ourselves to ourselves, (as it may seem that Dennett is saying) is just to say that our behaviour, our family and friends, our bodies and even our stuff, work together to create the story of us.

Challenging Intuitions

Now that we have a basic understanding of Dennett’s theory of the self, we will move on to discuss the specific characteristics of the self that follow from it. Viewing the self as a centre of narrative gravity brings certain assumptions that we usually make about the self under scrutiny. Our intuitions about boundaries of the self, its relationship to the body, and its unity are all challenged by Dennett’s theory.

Boundaries

Despite having clarified the nature of the self as a centre of narrative gravity rather than simply a narrative, the question of boundaries remains. Once you have a self,

you have something that is trying to preserve itself, and in doing so must distinguish between itself and the world, drawing boundaries between the two. Dennett explains:

As soon as something gets into the business of self-preservation, boundaries become important, for if you are setting out to preserve yourself, you don't want to squander effort trying to preserve the whole world: you draw the line. You become, in a word, *selfish*... 'Me against the world' – this distinction between everything on the inside of a closed boundary and everything in the external world – is at the heart of all biological processes. (1991, 174)

It is the delineation of this closed boundary that presents the difficulty. Within the narrative, it is not clear what counts as a part of the self and what doesn't – what counts as the rest of the world. There are extremes at both ends of this graduated spectrum, which can be quite obviously counted in or out. I am quite sure that my brain is a part of my self, and quite sure that the tree in my front yard is not. As we move through the continuum towards the place where inside and outside meet, we get to the grey area. Is my arm a part of my self? If I were to lose it for some reason would I have lost a part of my self or "just" a part of my body? These questions are not easy.

It is important to note that the task of drawing this boundary between self and other takes place *within* the narrative. It is not a question of where the *narrative* begins and ends; it is a question of our instantiated selves within the narrative. The narrative can include it all – everything from my heart to my neighbour's cat. The questions come when we begin to draw a line between everything else, and us.

If we accept Dennett's theory of the self as a centre of narrative gravity, our usual answer to the question of boundaries may no longer suffice. Typically, we view the boundaries of the self as the skin. When something is inside, it's me, and when it's outside, it's not. Dennett demonstrates this effectively with an experiment of sorts. The

first step of the experiment is to swallow the saliva in your mouth right now. The second step is to spit into a clean glass and then swallow that. While the first step isn't objectionable, the second is

Disgusting! But why? It seems to have to do with our perception that once something is outside of our bodies it is no longer quite part of us anymore – it becomes alien and suspicious – it has renounced its citizenship and becomes something to be rejected. (1991, 414)

Indeed, the skin is a widely accepted boundary between the self and the rest of the world.

According to Dennett however, the self is not merely a physical entity, and thus the skin may not be an appropriate place to draw the line between self and other.

Clothes, Dennett claims, belong on human beings the way feathers belong on a bird, or a shell on a turtle. “An illustrated encyclopaedia of zoology should no more picture *Homo sapiens* naked than it should picture *Ursus arctus* – the black bear – wearing a clown suit and riding a bicycle (Dennett, 1991, 416)”.

Pregnancy

An important case study within an investigation of the boundaries of the self is the area of human reproduction. By drawing the line at the skin of the pregnant woman, the fetus is unaccounted for; because it is inside the skin, it should automatically be considered a part of the self. This is not an automatic conclusion however, and not all women see the fetus in this way. Dennett's theory of the self, and his understanding of these boundaries, is sure to have implications not only for philosophical understanding, but also what we take to be an appropriate response to these questions. It is because of this important and interesting application of Dennett's theory that I will delve much

deeper into the question of the boundaries of the self, particularly in the case of pregnancy, as we continue.

The Body and the Self

We have referred repeatedly to our usual assumption that the boundaries of the self are simply the boundaries of the body: the skin. To begin to understand the problems that exist within this assumption, we must consider the relationship between the body and the self. While the self seems to reside in the body, and the body undeniably plays an enormous role in the creation of the center of narrative gravity that is the self (Dennett, 1991, 452-453), it is not clear that the body simply is the self (Dennett, 1981, 5, 6, 48).

Dennett illustrates this idea in a few ways. He says that although our usual experiences impress upon us “the distinction between ‘in here’ and ‘out there’”, something as simple as having our arm fall asleep begins to erode this impression.

The naïve boundary between “me” and “the outside world” is my skin (and the lenses of my eyes) but, as we learn more and more about the way events in our own bodies can be inaccessible “to us”, the great outside encroaches. “In here” I can try to raise my arm, but “out there,” if it has “fallen asleep” or is paralyzed, it won’t budge; my lines of communication from wherever *I* am to the neural machinery controlling my arm have been tampered with. (1991, 8)

Perhaps the skin is not a reliable line on which to draw this boundary.

Dennett again illustrates the distinction between a self and a body in an amusing thought experiment. In his fictional story, “Where Am I” (Dennett, 1978), he illuminates the idea that our sense of “I” does not disappear when, for example, our brain and our body are separated. Through this story, it becomes clear that it is more reasonable to

view the self as an organizing principle through which we make sense of our ideas and experiences than as something physical.

In “Where Am I”, Dennett constructs the story of his involvement in a top-secret mission. In order to participate, Dennett is to have his brain removed from his head and put into a large vat where it will be safely stored. By remote radio communication, his body (which he later names Hamlet) is to remain connected with his brain (named Yorick) and thus still controlled by it. Dennett is then to perform a highly secretive mission involving tunneling to the centre of the earth.

Dennett agrees to undergo the surgery and perform the mission and in the course of the mission, Dennett’s body, Hamlet, is destroyed. Yorick, his brain, is nevertheless safely stored in the vat, and fully functioning. Yorick is, however, without a body through which to interact with the world. After a painful period of isolation, Yorick is connected to a new body (named Fortinbras) and a computer duplicate of Yorick is created and also connected to Fortinbras. Dennett can easily switch back and forth between being controlled by Yorick and the computer duplicate of Yorick, Hubert, without distinguishable difference. The master switch between the two is given only to Dennett so that no one else can tamper with it. At the very end of the story, Dennett flips the switch to illustrate to his audience the seamless transition between Yorick and Hubert, and it is discovered that the two “brains” had mysteriously gotten out of sync, causing a different individual to arise from each. The story ends here, leaving many interesting questions unanswered.

Throughout this thought experiment, Dennett asks many questions himself, the most obvious of which is ‘where am I?’ When Dennett’s brainless body is tunneling to the center of the earth, and his bodiless brain, which is nonetheless controlling his body, is safely in Houston, where is *he*? When his body is destroyed and his brain is floating without sensation in the vat, where is he? When Dennett switches between Yorick and Hubert, his real and computer duplicate brains, where is he? In constructing these perplexing situations, Dennett’s thought experiment emphasizes our intuition that the self is not identical to the body. “A person is not just a body; a person *has* a body (Dennett, 1991, 452-453)”. It may seem that the self is the brain in Dennett’s story, but his experience implies otherwise, since he has real difficulty locating himself in the vat. This amusing internal conversation illustrates this point quite well:

I thought to myself: ‘Well, here I am, sitting on a folding chair, staring though a piece of plate glass at my own brain....But wait,’ I said to myself, ‘shouldn’t I have thought “Here I am, suspended in a bubbling fluid, being stared at by my own eyes”?’ I tried to think this latter thought, I tried to project it into the tank, offering it hopefully to my brain, but I failed to carry off the exercise with any conviction...No, it just didn’t work...I believed unswervingly that the tokening of my thoughts was occurring somewhere in my brain: yet, when I thought ‘Here I am,’ where the thought occurred to me was *here*, outside the vat, where I, Dennett, was standing staring at my brain. (Dennett, 1978, 312)

Thus, we begin to question the dependence of our understanding of self on the physical constitution of our bodies. The boundaries of the self are not simply the boundaries of the body.

Two further examples that Dennett uses also imply a distinction between the body and the self: Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), and Fractional Personality Disorder (FPD). In these cases, our usual assumption that selves are assigned “One to a

Customer” (Dennett, 1991, 422) is challenged. In the case of MPD, “a single human body *seems* to be shared by several selves, each, typically with a proper name and an autobiography (Dennett, 1991, 419)”. FPD presents a challenge in the other direction, where two bodies share a single self (Dennett, 1991, 422). The Chaplin twins of York, England seemed to be a case of this extraordinary disorder.

These identical twins...seem to act *as one*; they collaborate on the speaking of single speech acts...[They are] as inseparable as two twins who are not Siamese twins could arrange. Some who have dealt with them suggest that the natural and effective tactic that suggested itself was to consider *them* more of a *her* (Dennett, 1991, 422)”.

In this bizarre case, the identity of the self and the body is certainly questioned as the self of these twins seems to be shared between the two.

Dennett claims that the self is not identical with the body and in doing so supports the claim that the boundaries of the self do not, as we usually assume, lie at the skin. Ranging from something as mundane as an arm that has fallen asleep, to a brain in a vat, to Siamese selves, Dennett uses a variety of examples to illustrate this point.

The Apparent Unity of the Self

Dennett further challenges our intuitions about the self by questioning its unity. According to the Multiple Drafts Model, there exists within the brain a framework of ongoing revision and editing that processes incoming stimuli to produce narratives or drafts. One might assume that in order for this process to work, there must be a boss, or supervisor that approves the different drafts of the narrative as they are composed. It would seem that when a stimulus is encountered, the appropriate part of the brain interprets it and sends the results to the central location where they are made evident to

the unified self (Dennett, 1991, 113). This final viewer, you could say, must be the *real* self – the “boss” inside the body (Dennett, 1991, 431).

Dennett claims that indeed, there does seem to be an overseer of the activities within the brain. It is for this reason that we attribute selves to the complex systems that we encounter, including ourselves. It is practical and reasonable to posit a self for each individual and to organize our interpretation of that system’s behaviour around that self. Because of the appearance of unity, we take the intentional stance and are able to effectively explain and predict the system’s behaviour.

Dennett claims, however, that this unity, this internal commander, is in fact an illusion. We are unreliable sources when it comes to knowing what is going on inside of our brains, and even less knowledgeable about what is going on in the brains of others. Thus, although it may seem to us that within each system there is a singular chief of command dictating the words to be spoken and actions taken, this is not the case. When incoming stimuli is interpreted and revised, it is not *then* sent to head-quarters for approval.

Once a particular “observation” of some feature has been made, by a specialized, localized portion of the brain, the information content thus fixed does not have to be sent somewhere else to be *rediscriminated* by some “master” discriminator. (Dennett, 1991, 113)

There is no internal, unified “master discriminator”.

In considering this claim, one might ask, “Who is in control here? Is there some overall being who can dictate what will happen? Or is there just anarchy, with neurons firing helter-skelter, and come what may (Dennett, 1981, 342)?” Dennett answers this question by explaining the “miracle” that happens when the different specialists in the brain work together:

By yoking these independently evolved specialist organs together in common cause, and thereby giving their union vastly enhanced powers, this virtual machine, this software of the brain, performs a sort of internal political miracle: It creates a *virtual captain* of the crew without elevating any of them to long-term dictatorial power. Who's in charge? First one coalition and then another, shifting in ways that are not chaotic. (1991, 228)

Rather than an internal boss, there is the fictional self, the center of narrative gravity around which the multiple drafts revolve and are centred (Dennett, 1991, 128). This self is not a part of the system – not even a very important and critical part. “We are *not* the captains of our ships” Dennett claims; “there is no conscious self that is unproblematically in command of the mind's resources. Rather, we are somewhat disunified (Dennett, 1986, 113)”. The narrative self is the *result* of the system itself, the product of the combined efforts of the different parts of the brain, the body and the rest of our environment.

Communication Reinforces the Illusion

One of the reasons we are so convinced that there must be an internal observer checking over the work that is produced by the brain is communication. By taking the intentional stance and a heterophenomenological approach, we have already assumed that “that there is someone home doing the talking, an Author of the Record, a Meaner of all the meanings” (Dennett, 1991, 228). But Dennett claims that assuming this “is not quite equivalent to positing an *inner* system that is Boss of the body, the Puppeteer controlling the puppet (1991, 228-229)”. Rather than viewing the verbal behaviour of a subject as the expression of an internal commander's wishes, Dennett sees a “global” commander,

“of which the language-producing system is itself a proper part” (Dennett, 1991, 251) along with the rest of the body and parts of the subject’s environment.

Review

Here in Section Four we have at last reached the final statement of Dennett’s theory of the self. The self is an abstract entity, which functions as the centre of narrative gravity for a system. This theoretical tool is useful for organizing, understanding and predicting the behaviour of the system. “When a portion of the world comes in this way to compose a skein of narratives, that portion of the world is an observer. That is what it is for there to be an observer in the world, a something it is like something to be (Dennett, 1991, 137)”. As we have explored this conception of the self, we have seen that Dennett’s theory provides several challenges to our ordinary intuitions. First of all, while we ordinarily assume the boundaries of the self to be the skin, Dennett’s theory opens up the self to a more flexible and fuzzy outer limit. Second, Dennett challenges our understanding of the relationship between the body and the self, claiming that the self is not simply the body, but rather the system as a whole including the body. Finally, and along the same lines, Dennett disassembles the unity of the self, arguing that there is no internal master and commander, but rather a global self that results from the various parts of the system working together.

Conclusion

As we began our investigation of the nature of the self, and our exposition of Dennett's theory in particular, we realized that such a subjective issue is difficult to access using the tools and methodology of science. In Section One we explored this problem, looking at Nagel's "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?", asking what it is like to be another human being, and considering the trap of our own perspective. Dennett's solution to the problem of objectively answering a subjective question is heterophenomenology. Through this, and the intentional stance, we are able to work with a subject's reports of her own experiences and understand her phenomenological world without leaving the realm of science. In Section Two we explored this approach and saw that it allows us to interpret the subject as a rational agent. In Section Three we aimed to move beyond the rational agent to a self that is more like those we encounter in our regular lives. Through Dennett's comparison between analyzing the text of the subject and analyzing a fictional text, we began to see the added complexity that this brings to Dennett's theory. By considering the reviseability, indeterminacy and discord between what seems and what is, within the phenomenological world of the subject, we gained a deeper understanding of Dennett's theory of the self. This understanding went even deeper in Section Four as we moved on to consider Dennett's claim that the self is a centre of narrative gravity – an abstract theoretical entity around which everything in the life of the subject revolves. We considered his Multiple Drafts Model, where the different parts of the brain are continually editing and revising their interpretations of incoming stimuli, thereby producing multiple simultaneous narratives within the brain.

This conception of the self clearly challenges many of the intuitions that we commonly have about the self, and we explored these in Section Four as well. First, the narrative self challenges our assumption that the boundaries of the self lie at the skin. As an abstract, rather than physical, or immaterial entity, the narrative self has boundaries that are fuzzy and flexible. Second, the relationship between the body and the self is put into question. Dennett argues that although the body plays a significant role in the creation of the self, the two are not identical. Finally, Dennett challenges the unity of the self, claiming that the brain is in fact composed of a variety of specialized parts, which work together with the body and the environment to construct the self. This contrasts our ordinary intuition that the self is an internal “boss” whose wishes are executed through the body.

Implications

Through this exploration of Dennett's theory, we have come across several unique and interesting conditions, real and imaginary, which have served to exemplify the unintuitive claims that Dennett makes. We have encountered MPD, FPD, split-brain patients, a brain in a vat, a digital brain, and a body with no brain. Each of these has played its part in helping Dennett to construct and defend his theory of the narrative self. These examples are intriguing and persuasive, undoubtedly causing us to reconsider our assumptions about the self. While in much of science it is possible to test a hypothesis through experiments where there are controls and changing variables, in examining the human self this is not possible. Rather, scientists and philosophers are forced either to construct them through imagination and idealization, or to wait and watch for these types of extraordinary cases of dysfunction or exceptionality. Through these cases the potential for learning is significant. Without a doubt, unusual cases such as these have played, and will continue to play a significant role in our understanding of human experience.

Although these types of exceptional situations have been explored extensively, what both Dennett and the analytic philosophical community as a whole have failed to consider is an experience that stands alone in simultaneous commonality and uniqueness: pregnancy. Throughout the history of science, and indeed academic investigation as a whole, the female perspective has been severely underrepresented, if not entirely ignored. It does not come as a surprise then that pregnancy, a distinctly female process, has remained largely unexplored despite its enormous informative potential as a unique and counter-intuitive phenomenon. In particular, the evidence provided by the experience of pregnancy is effective for dismantling some of our ordinary assumptions about the self.

In pregnancy we see the boundaries of the self confused – the fetus seems to be an other within the confines of the skin. The unity of the self is also challenged as there seem to be two selves within one self and the pregnant woman becomes two-and-one. Lastly, the pregnant woman feels as though she has become a new self, questioning the necessary diachronic identity of the self.

As we move on to Chapter Three, we will explore these issues within the pregnant experience and I will argue that pregnancy challenges our ordinary assumptions about the self. As we have seen in this chapter, Dennett’s theory of the self does the same.

Because of this, pregnancy stands as an ideal example to be used for the support of Dennett’s theory of the narrative self. Furthermore, Dennett’s theory provides an ideal context in which to validate and clarify the experiences of pregnant woman. To this end, in Chapter Four, after exploring the conceptual issues of selfhood within the pregnant experience, we will consider the application of Dennett’s theory to the pregnant experience.

Chapter Three: Pregnancy and the Self

Introduction

We tend to make at least few assumptions about the self that, as we have seen, do not hold in every case. We assume that a human being maintains the same self over time. This is a convenient assumption to make, as it simplifies tasks such as the ascription of praise and blame; if we can assume that the person who was seen committing the crime in the past is the same person whom we see before us now, we can rightly blame the person before us for that crime and punish accordingly. The assumption of diachronic identity has been influentially challenged by Derek Parfit's account of personal identity (1971), which we considered briefly in Chapter One. Dennett's theory dovetails nicely with Parfit's, but has implications reaching beyond diachronic identity. His theory also questions our assumptions about synchronic identity – that at any one time, there is only one self per body. This assumption simplifies interpersonal behaviour significantly, and it is hard to imagine how we would behave without this as our default. A further assumption that we have considered extensively is our belief that the boundaries of the self lie at the skin.

While our usual experience gives us no reason to question them, pregnancy provides evidence that erodes these background assumptions. Through a brief review of the literature, as well as a detailed consideration of each of these issues – boundaries, plurality and diachronic identity – we will see that pregnancy provides a significant challenge to these assumptions about the self.

The Pregnant Experience: Beginning

A brief look through a selection of the literature that exists on the pregnant experience will begin to demonstrate how pregnancy can substantially challenge our assumptions about selves. We will start to understand the questions and realizations that arise as women discover and explore the pivotal experience of pregnancy. Carol Poston points out that, as a process encountered throughout time and throughout the world, birth, accompanied only by death, is an essential human experience – it is something that every human being experiences. But “unlike death”, she states,

birth has an involved witness who lives to tell the story, a birthing woman. Her experience is of universal importance, because it is she who is caught up in that elemental activity, childbirth, with hurricane intensity. (Carol H. Poston, 1978, as quoted by Klassen, 2001, 1)

Pregnancy has remained relatively unexplored in the philosophical domain despite its simultaneous commonality and uniqueness. It is common in the sense that it is experienced by many, and yet unique in the challenges it presents for some of our usual ideas about the self. As a distinctly gendered issue, the neglect that pregnancy has faced in the philosophical domain is not entirely surprising:

I can find a hundred quotations from well-known writers that will clarify and inspire my own hazy impressions of these aspects of life, but for motherhood there is only the over-sentimentality of the women’s magazine articles, or the chilly approach of the medical popularizers. Perhaps it is because most of the great writers cannot have had any direct experience of motherhood, and of the great writers who were also women, most were rebelling against womanhood and would not touch such a female subject. (Lewis, 1931, 203)

Although it is a universal and shared experience throughout humanity (pregnancy has played a more or less meaningful role in the life of every human being), it has

nonetheless been ignored. There has been little to no serious philosophical research done to understand this fundamental human experience. Many of the resources used here are of an anecdotal nature, focussing on relaying the stories of pregnant women. As we have discussed in Chapter One, we are often mistaken in our reports about what it is like to be us. It is with some caution, therefore, that we consider and take into account these depictions of the pregnant experience. In Chapter Four we will consider more extensively the value of the anecdotal nature of the existing literature in this area.

In her paper “Pregnant Embodiment” (1984) Iris Young creates a vivid picture of the questions and confusions that arise through the experience of pregnancy. Although I take it for granted, as a non-pregnant individual I experience a clear distinction between the experiences that are mine, and the experiences that aren’t. I have special rights to what goes on in my body, in my own phenomenological world. I experience the world subjectively – in a way that no one else does. The things I experience are things that are happening to *me*. These ideas seem obvious, but Young gives a very different picture of subjective experience from the perspective of pregnancy:

I feel a little tickle, a gurgle in my belly. It is my feeling, my insides, and it feels somewhat like a gas bubble, but it is not; it is different, in another place, belonging to another, another that is nevertheless my body...the fetus’s movements are wholly mine, completely within me, conditioning my experience and space. Only I have access to these movements from their origin, as it were. For months only I can witness this life within me, and it is only under my direction of where to put their hands that others can feel these movements. I have a privileged relation to this other life, not unlike that which I have to my dreams and thoughts, which I can tell someone but which cannot be an object for both of us in the same way...[I have] this sense of the movements within me as mine, even though they are another’s...In pregnancy I literally do not have a firm sense of where my body ends and the world begins. (276-277)

Here, Young faces the question of boundaries. She depicts her own experience of how the traditional boundaries between self and other can be erased within pregnancy.

Naomi Wolf, in her book Misconceptions (2001), studies the experiences of many women as they encounter pregnancy and the major changes that accompany it. She also delves deeply into her own experiences during pregnancy, facing many of the questions and, as she aptly names the book, misconceptions that surround it. She remembers thinking that perhaps,

a pregnant woman was an implicit challenge to the idea of the autonomous “individual” upon which basic Western notions of law, of rights, and even of selfhood were based. There are two people inside me now...
Pregnancy, it seemed, requires a different kind of philosophy. (32)

Here, Wolf begins to question the issue of the plurality of the self. Pregnancy seems to imply that there can be two selves, the fetus and the woman, included within one self, the pregnant woman.

Finally, Joan Raphael-Leff, in her book Pregnancy: The Inside Story (1993), considers the experiences of many pregnant women, and again, speaks from her own experience as well. She highlights the major shift in perspective that often takes place through pregnancy:

[The pregnant woman] is literally possessed by another: she throbs with the other’s heartbeat, excretes his/her waste, is jolted into fitful waking and stung to the quick with each lively quiver of the baby’s being. Day and night there is no respite...Craving the time when she will be herself, she wonders whether she can ever again feel as unself-consciously singular as she did. Integrity takes on a different meaning now that she has become divisible. (16-17)

Questions that do not ordinarily arise for a non-pregnant individual are natural in the process of pregnancy. Raphael-Leff identifies a divide between the pre-pregnant and the pregnant self, noting that the pre-pregnant woman is typically unaware of the singularity

and unity of her self. Pregnancy, however, brings these subconscious assumptions to the fore, necessitating a response that goes beyond our usual experience.

These three authors have given us a brief glimpse into the three issues we wish to consider in depth as we explore the pregnant experience. Boundaries, plurality and diachronic identity are three concepts concerning the self that pregnancy causes us to question. Some common assumptions about these aspects of selfhood are simple and intuitive: the boundaries of the self lie at the skin, there is only one self connected to each body at a time, and each individual remains the same self over time. These idealizations are convenient and help to simplify our interactions with others. However, through an exploration of the pregnant experience we encounter evidence that indicates that these assumptions are too idealized and that the simplicity they provide comes at the cost of ignoring a central human experience. As we explore the boundaries, plurality and diachronic identity of the self, we will discover that indeed, the pregnant experience drives us to reconsider the intuitive assumptions we have about the nature of the self.

Section One: Boundaries

The relationship between the fetus and the woman bearing it may be experienced in a number of different ways. One perspective is to view the fetus as being fully separate from the pregnant woman. Here the fetus is seen as another, indeed an *other* – something that is not a part of the self of the pregnant woman. The existence of the fetus within the boundaries of the pregnant woman's skin challenges our usual assumptions about the boundaries of the self. If we assume that whatever is inside the skin is a part of the self, to experience the fetus as other is nonsense. As Philipa Rothfield explains,

One of the unique features of pregnancy is its incorporation of another within. In philosophy, the external world is all that which is not the self. Interiority is taken to include the self and only the self. If I move, then, I am moving my body, my self. Such a demarcation between the inside and the outside cannot be sustained throughout pregnancy. (1996, 5)

Raphael-Leff concurs:

From the pregnant woman's point of view, another being has in actuality come to reside inside her as her body becomes physically occupied by another. The embryo is separate yet part of the woman's interior. (1993, 9)

Although the fetus undeniably resides within the "interior" of the woman's body, inside the skin, from this perspective it is nevertheless a separate entity, an other, and thus the skin fails as the boundary of the pregnant self.

There are two ways in which the skin can fail as the boundaries of the self. The boundaries of the skin can be crossed from both directions: elements that are considered other can move within them, and elements that are considered self can move outside them. In the case where the pregnant woman sees the fetus as other, the skin fails as the boundary of the self since something other has crossed that boundary into self. It is not

clear whether the fetus must be considered a self in some way in order for this boundary crossing to be significant. Our intuitions on this question seem to be inconsistent. On the one hand, should we not consider the fetus to be a self of any kind, we could view it simply as a trespasser on the same level as a pacemaker or a replacement hip. These uncontroversial additions are routinely made to the body without any question as to a compromise or failure of the skin-as-boundary assumption. It seems that the other must be another *self*, not *just* something other, in order for the boundaries of the skin to come into question. Someone who has a screw in his knee does not consider this significant in any way.⁵ In these types of border crossings (cases of screws, hips, pacemakers and so on) we do unquestioningly accept these self-less artifacts as parts of our selves.

On the other hand, there do seem to be cases where we feel that we have been invaded in some unacceptable way by something that is not a self. In the cases of tumours, tapeworms or even viruses, we *feel* the invasion – we are distressed by the border-crossing that has taken place, despite the fact that the invader is not another self.⁶ In these cases we do not willingly incorporate the other into our selves, and in fact we may even come to define ourselves by our ability to withstand it (for example, an individual who has had cancer and lived through it, may identify herself as a cancer-survivor).

Perhaps the body itself plays a role in determining our intuitive responses to these different types of trespassers. In the first case, where I intuitively accept the invader as a part of my self, I hope that my body too will accept the implanted object and not reject it. In the case of a tumour or worm, however, the body is depended upon to reject the alien

⁵ My thanks to Tim Kenyon for bringing this concern to my attention.

⁶ My thanks to Shannon Dea for highlighting this point.

put its defence systems to good use. It is in these cases that our intuitions lean towards rejecting the invader, even though it is not a self in any sense.

It seems then that the status of the invader as self or non-self is not crucial to one's intuitive acceptance or rejection of it as a part of one's self. Our intuitions may have more to do with the purpose of the invader – be it for our harm, or for our good, as is often demonstrated by the body's physical response to it. The fetus then, stands as a challenge to the skin-as-boundary assumption regardless of its status as a self. It is pertinent, nonetheless, to briefly consider the selfhood of the fetus before we continue on to explore the pregnant woman's interpretation of it as other.

The Fetus as a Sort of Self

The fetus does not seem to warrant consideration as a full-fledged self. It clearly lacks some of the hallmarks that we typically associate with selves, such as having a point of view, and being (some version of) a thinking being. Furthermore, looking at Dennett's understanding of selves, it does not seem to have a complete or complex narrative to speak of⁷. There are several reasons, however, to consider it at least an incomplete or dependent self. As we have started to see in this chapter, women often describe their experiences of pregnancy as sharing their body with *someone else*:

Queer, to sit in a roomful of people and feel that alien life moving restlessly inside you, unseen and unasked guest! '...Request the pleasure of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis at their party...' No, not just Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, but another presence, the unseen guest, the hidden number, getting in free at movies, necessitating no extra seat on trains, needing no social security card, never needing new clothes or a roof over its head. (Lewis, 1931, 61)

⁷ See Chapter Five for a consideration of the fetus in light of Dennett's theory of narrative selves.

The “living separateness” of the fetus makes carrying it very unlike carrying a mere object, or even gaining weight (Lewis, 1931, 127). Pregnant woman often experience some degree of social relationship with her fetus, which does not typically occur with non-selves. The fetus is commonly an active participant in the lived experience of the pregnant woman, and particularly in the experience that she has of herself. Nearing the end of the pregnancy, the fetus has developed a variety of responses to external stimuli as well as wants and needs. For these reasons, while the fetus may not be a complete or independent self, it doesn't seem to belong in the same category as a pin in a broken wrist or a kidney stone. Rather the fetus should be considered at least a dependent self, or an incomplete self. In Section Two of this chapter we will discuss this implicit taxonomy of selves in more detail.

The Fetus as Other

The pregnant woman who sees the fetus as other may have a variety of responses to it; she may see it positively as a being with which she is happy to share her body and its resources, or she may see it as an intrusive being that is leaching from her from within. The ultrasound plays an interesting role in the development of a pregnant woman's relationship with her fetus. In researching the development of the ultrasound, Ann Oakley discovered the following perspective:

When a mother undergoes ultrasound scanning of the fetus, this seems a great opportunity for her to meet her child socially and in this way one hopes to view him...as a companion aboard rather than as a parasite... a great opportunity to enable mothers to form an early affectionate bond to their child by demonstrating the child to the mother. (Dewsbury, 1980)

It seems that through the ultrasound, the social relationship between the woman and the fetus she carries is extended. The letter quoted above implies that women who do not have access to ultrasound scanning may have a different and perhaps more limited relationship with the fetus. Somewhat tongue in cheek, Oakley responds to this proposition stating that through the ultrasound, “antenatal care has finally discovered mother love” (185). While it is not at all clear that a woman requires an introduction to the fetus in order to form a bond with it, the ultrasound does seem to have some effect on the attitude of the pregnant woman towards her fetus, in some cases resulting in a decrease in harmful behaviour such as smoking and drinking alcohol (Oakley, 185).

On the other hand, however, the ultrasound may contribute to the perception of what Vangie Bergum calls “the baby in the machine” (1989, 144). Technological devices such as the ultrasound and fetal heart monitor can relocate the focus of those involved with the pregnancy from the pregnant woman, where the fetus is actually located, to the machines, which monitor and depict the fetus through visual and auditory means. It seems that this may in fact have the opposite effect on the attitude of the pregnant woman towards the fetus, resulting in a sense of alienation from her own lived experience and stretching the connection she feels to the fetus.

In any case, the ultrasound does serve to illustrate the otherness of the fetus to the pregnant woman, even though it resides within the boundaries of her skin. The skin is not a sufficient boundary for the self, as it is possible to have something other enter into it.

Abigail Lewis illustrates this well when she explains her experience of the transition of the fetus from self to other:

The baby has taken shape very suddenly; what were formless lumps and gentle motions two weeks ago have now become a hard, definite arrangement of shapes, evidently backed up with bone, of which I am becoming increasingly aware as something separate from myself that wants to be let out. (1931, 121)

Another woman echoes this feeling, when she comments, “It’s peculiar, I look the same but there’s a baby growing contentedly inside me. There are two of us not one of me (Raphael-Leff, 1993, 78)”.

For the pregnant woman what is growing within her is not *just* a part of her body, as extra weight would be. Lewis contrasts pregnancy to weight gain and claims that others “cannot really know what it is to have some fourteen extra pounds of weight oppressing one’s very centre of gravity; it is not at all like being fat; the living separateness of that weight makes it far heavier (1931, 127)”. Men, and women who have not been pregnant, will be hard pressed to make sense of these experiences. Here, the pregnant woman experiences a being that is fully other and yet nevertheless inside her body, within the boundaries of her skin.

As we begin to understand these experiences, we see that pregnancy highlights questions that are often left unasked in the core analytic literature on selfhood. Statements like, “I’m beginning to feel there really isn’t room for both of us inside my rib cage (Lewis, 1931, 82)”, or, “it is still an awkward thing to sleep with (Lewis, 1931, 149)” express the uniqueness of the pregnant experience. Lewis explains that after her baby was born, she “began to remember how it feels to have a waist, how it feels to be empty of all but yourself inside (1931, 122)”. To the person who has never been pregnant, this seems like a strange thing to say; it may be tempting to dismiss it as something like poetry or metaphor, rather than an attempt at direct and literal expression.

I don't typically think of the interior of my body as being "empty". I don't find it a novelty to have only my own singular self inside of me. Our usual experiences leave hidden the questions that pregnancy brings to light.

Having considered the perspective of pregnant women where the fetus is viewed as an other, it becomes clear that the boundaries of the self cannot be drawn simply at the skin. If it is possible, and indeed not uncommon, to have an other within the boundaries of the skin, then the skin cannot be the boundary of the self.

The Pregnant Woman and the Fetus as Connected

Although a pregnant woman may view the fetus as other, a being that is distinct and separate from her self, there is no doubt that the fetus and the pregnant woman are connected in some way. This too prompts important and urgent questions about the self.

Studies have shown that "the condition and viability of the fetus [is] profoundly influenced by the mother's mental and emotional state" (Oakley, 1984, 23) and that "maternal psychological variables" can affect the development of the fetus (Wolf, 2001, 109, 111). Raphael-Leff explains that, "as mothers have suspected throughout time, in ways mild and intense, properties of each woman's emotional and material world infiltrate the womb (1993, 40-41)". When she becomes pregnant, a woman's emotions and mental behaviour are no longer just her own. Her own ability to cope and adjust to stressful or potentially harmful situations becomes her ability to protect the well being of the fetus. In no other relationship does the well being of one human so strongly affect the well being of the other. A pregnant woman is no longer an independent, self-centred individual. Because of her connection to the fetus, a connection that goes beyond the

ordinary relationship between two individuals, it becomes difficult to draw a line between the pregnant woman and the fetus.

This difficulty continues even after the birth, where the mother and the newborn are connected in a way that might be more metaphysically significant than a simple social, familial or emotional relationship. The language used here illustrates this:

infant and mother, immediately after partition, [should not] be treated as two separate creatures, to be cared for in separate parts of a building by separate nursing staffs. They are still a continuum, and sensitive treatment of the one is incomplete without closeness to the other. (Rich, 1976, 180)

On the birthing table we seem to have more than one, but less than two, selves. Pre-natal experience highlights the connection between the fetus and the woman and implies that the pregnant woman has become more than a single self. For the post-natal pair, though there are now two distinct bodies, the connection between them implies that the mother and newborn are less than two individual selves⁸. During and after pregnancy, delineating the boundaries of the self is complicated.

As we have considered the self it has become clear that the boundary separating self from other must be understood as fuzzy and flexible to account for the experiences of pregnancy. Consideration of the fetus as other and the connection between the fetus and the pregnant woman demonstrate that pregnant women do not see inside and outside, self and other, as two clearly defined categories. Pregnancy causes us to reconsider assumptions about the self that we usually take for granted, in particular our default intuition that the boundary of the self is the skin.

⁸ Nothing said here, or elsewhere, should imply that the pregnant woman or new mother is, as an individual, less than a full self. Rather the fetus/newborn is not a complete self, leaving the pair somewhere between one and two selves.

Section Two: Plurality

The Pregnant Woman as Two-and-one

As we continue to explore the relationship between the pregnant woman and the fetus, we encounter the possibility of a plural self. In Section One we considered the pregnant experience from the perspective of the fetus as other, a being separate from the pregnant woman. There is, however, an overwhelming sense that this is a somewhat simplified view of the situation. As Rich states, “I do not perceive myself as a walled city into which certain emissaries are received and from which others are excluded. The question is much more various and complicated (1976, 63)”. It seems more true to the experiences of pregnant women to conclude that the pregnant woman and the fetus are *both* separate *and* the same. “One can become two, or even, a sort of in-between one and two inside of oneself, a relation between bodies within a body. At once one body and more than one body (Rothfield, 1996, 1)”. As Young points out, the “inner movements” of the pregnant woman’s body “belong to another being, yet they are not other, because her body boundaries shift (1984, 274)”. The fetus is other at least in the sense that it has come, in part, from other (the father) and will become other once it is an independent child. But during pregnancy the self-other distinction is blurred. Vangie Bergum illuminates this phenomenon:

The being ‘with’ child is not the ‘with’ that means ‘as a companion,’ or ‘next-to’, or ‘in the charge of.’...being ‘with child’ is a primordial relationship, peculiar to women who carry within their own bodies the body of another...Being ‘with child’ is a commingling, an entangling, an interlacing that goes beyond companionship. It is a mysterious union, unlike any other. Not only is the fetus bound to the woman through the nourishing pathways running through the umbilical cord, but child and woman are truly one body...What affects the woman affects the fetus, and as the child evolves so does the mother. The mother and fetus are

one, an indissoluble whole, yet two, a mother and a child. There is no closer union. (1989, 53)

Bergum claims that the mother and the fetus are both two and one at the same time. It is this idea, the idea of two-and-one, that we hear repeated in many forms as we explore women's experiences of pregnancy. Through this idea we begin to explore the possibility of a plural self. Can the self be expanded to include that which may also be considered other? Can there be two selves within one self?

These questions are highlighted when we look at Raphael-Leff's provocative description of pregnancy:

Conception is the beginning of a bizarre story. In pregnancy, there are two bodies, one inside the other. Two people live under one skin... When so much of life is dedicated to maintaining our integrity as distinct beings, this bodily tandem is an uncanny fact. Two-in-one-body also constitutes a biological enigma, as for reasons we do not quite understand, the mother-to-be's body suppresses her immunological defences to allow the partly foreign body to reside within her. (1993, 8)

Raphael-Leff highlights the fact that pregnancy brings up issues that our other ordinary experiences do not. Whereas in the rest of society individuality and independence are the norm, pregnancy presents the exception.

...the pregnant woman must reverse all she has striven to establish since her childhood:...people are separate, each inhabits his or her own body, and each is either male or female. Not only is there another being inside her, but it has about a fifty-two percent chance of being male. (Raphael-Leff, 1993, 19)

Socially, biologically, and even logically, pregnancy seems to break the rules. It would seem that even the Law of Non-Contradiction is overturned. "To 'remember' that this enormous lump is both me and not-me is to be able to move as myself, to incorporate the other as both self and non-self. (Rothfield, 1996, 7)". The woman is both herself and not herself at the same time:

It becomes especially clear in pregnancy that...the metaphysical dichotomous categories of subject and object, and self and other, fail to describe our incarnate situation, for the subject is blurred and diffused in pregnancy. A woman is inhabited by a growing sentience that is not truly other to herself (Bigwood, 1993, 58-59).

“Pregnancy throws into question body boundaries which since babyhood have defined the separateness of her own self within her own skin (Raphael-Leff, 1993, 16)”.

Assumptions about boundaries, unity and plurality that are typically taken for granted are questioned from within pregnancy. Until pregnancy, a woman’s independence as a “distinct being,” her status as an individual, and her logical categorization of the world into self and other, all remain largely unchallenged as simple unconscious assumptions. Until pregnancy, she has lived, as many men do for the duration of their lives, as an independent self, contained within one body, separate from other selves. Through pregnancy, these assumptions are exposed and reconsidered.

The confusion of two-and-one continues to grow as other people in the pregnant woman’s life become involved. For example, others will often ask to “feel the baby” by putting their hand on the woman’s belly. One woman contemplates this: “I don’t think they were patting my stomach, even though it was my stomach they were patting” she says. In other words, the “touching of a woman’s body, as baby, again shows the remarkable and unique experience of pregnancy – being another while being oneself (Bergum, 1989, 58-59)”. Young explains how even when she touches her own belly the confusion exists: “I feel myself being touched and touching simultaneously...the belly is other, since I did not expect it there, but since I feel the touch upon it, it is me (1990, 277)”.

Again we see that our assumptions have been shaken by the pregnant experience. For the pregnant woman, “her oneness is replaced with two, forcing a new kind of confrontation between self and other, fusion and separateness (Raphael-Leff, 1993, 31)”. Beginning to understand the pregnant woman’s experience of being two-and-one brings up many questions about the possible plurality of the self and challenges us to look beyond our usual experiences and assumptions.

Two Types of Plurality: Compound or Complex

The concept of a plural self is a complicated one and can be expanded in a variety of ways. We will consider a Hilary Putnam-inspired interpretation in Section Two of the following chapter; however, another helpful perspective presents itself here, using categories borrowed from grammar.⁹ A sentence can fall into three basic categories on the basis of its grammatical structure: simple, compound and complex. A simple sentence is atomic; it contains a single independent clause, and cannot be divided into any smaller sentences. A compound sentence comprises two or more simple sentences joined together using a word like “and” or “but”. And a complex sentence is created when a simple sentence and at least one dependent clause are combined. In this case, although the simple sentence could stand on its own, the dependent clause could not.

Perhaps we can understand selves in a similar way. Assuming that there are cases of simple, unitary selves, we could imagine either a compound self or a complex self within one body. A psychologically compound self would consist of two distinct selves, whereas a psychologically complex self would be made up of the elements of more than one self, but would in fact be fewer than two distinct and independent selves.

⁹ My thanks go to Tim Kenyon for suggesting this analogy and the corresponding terminology.

One of the selves would be complete, but the other would be incomplete, or dependent in some way. We can also imagine a compound self and a complex self in the case of multiple bodies. A bodily compound self would consist of two distinct bodies, whereas a bodily complex self would be realized in the combination of a human body with some other physical addition(s). The added part could be from another human body, such as a brain, or could perhaps be a technological extension of the initial human body such as a remote sensing device or even something like a cell phone (as suggested by Chalmers and Clark (1998), as we discussed in Chapter One).

We have then a taxonomy of six different types of plurality outlined here for selfhood. A self can be simple, compound or complex, both bodily and psychologically. There are then nine different combinations of these different possibilities. Listed bodily then psychologically with possible examples in brackets: simple-simple (a typical individual), simple-compound (MPD), simple-complex (early stage pregnant woman), compound-simple (FPD), compound-compound (two typical individuals in relationship), compound-complex (mother and newborn), complex-simple (typical individual with technological extension), complex-compound (MPD individual with technological extension), complex-complex (pregnant woman with technological extension). I do not, however, claim that each of these possibilities is sometimes realized.

A few of these cases are of particular interest to us here. Depending on the stage of the pregnancy, the pregnant woman seems to be an example of a psychologically complex self with a body somewhere between simple, complex and compound. There are more than one, but less than two selves present, both psychologically, and bodily. The mother and her infant seem to be an example of a bodily compound, but

psychologically complex self. There are two distinct bodies, but again, the number of selves falls somewhere between one and two. We can see the similarities between these cases and the case of a complex sentence. In the cases of pregnancy and motherhood, the woman (pregnant or mother), is made up of an independent self and the infant (born or unborn), who seems to be the dependent or incomplete self which is nonetheless a part of the self of the woman. Using the structure provided by the categorization of sentences is helpful in that it gives us a reference point for understanding different types of selves and the complex web of relationships that can exist between selves and bodies. However, these categories (like most categories) are not simple or clear-cut. The definitive placement of a particular case into one category or another is often made possible only through the idealization or artificial simplification of that case.

A “Simple” Self?

To begin our exploration of this analogy, we assumed that there does exist a simple, unitary self. Having considered the other options, however, it seems quite possible that all modern human beings are at least bodily complex selves. The presentation of the extended mind hypothesis by Chalmers and Clark (which we considered in Chapter One) pushes us to consider an extended self, which takes external tools to be a part of the self. There seems to be some evidence that the brain has become rather adept at incorporating things that are outside of our bodily boundaries into the self, as Chalmers and Clark suggest.

The so-called “phantom Blackberry” phenomenon is an interesting example of this. Through a variety of news articles it has become clear that the experience of feeling

a vibrating Blackberry (or other personal device) when it is not actually there, is not uncommon. According to Stanford University psychologist and technology specialist B. J. Fogg, “anecdotal evidence suggests ‘people feel the phone is part of them’ and ‘they’re not whole’ without their phones (Simon, 2007)”. In these cases then, and even in less dramatic ones, it seems that technology has driven the self away from simplicity and towards complexity. We don’t need to suppose that this is ultimately the correct interpretation in order to recognize that our theory of selves should rule out the possibility merely on the basis of idealizing assumptions.

Section Three: Diachronic Identity

As we have considered the boundaries of the self and its possible plurality, we have seen that pregnancy provides substantial evidence to support the reconsideration of our intuitive assumptions about the self. A further issue that pushes us in this direction is diachronic identity. Given the intense, often traumatic, character of the experience, the pregnant woman seems particularly justified in asking a classic philosophical question about personal identity: “Am I the same woman I was before?” The changes that pregnant women encounter physically, behaviourally and socially push us to rethink our understanding of the self, and particularly its continued identity over time.

The Pregnant Self as a New Self

While she was “being delivered of her baby,” one woman explains, “I did not understand that I was delivered of my identity at the same time (Oakley, 1979, 3)”. This sentiment rings true for many women who have experienced pregnancy and childbirth. As they encounter the extreme changes that accompany pregnancy, many women find that they are creating both a self within their wombs, and also a new self of their own. Naomi Wolf, through listening to their stories, discovered that many women expressed a sense of regret after their pregnancies: “I wish someone could have let me know I would lose my self in the process of becoming a mother (2001, 2)”. She depicts the struggle that many women experience:

Indeed, the greatest loss for many new mothers is a kind of loss of self. ...the death of the old identity – the independent, youthful self – and its rebirth into that hard-won, messier, more interdependent new maternal self. (2001, 7-8)

Wolf explains that while the anticipation and excitement is undeniable in most pregnant women, there is an underlying sadness in their experience as well; “underneath their joy in their babies, [they were] quietly in mourning for some part of their earlier selves (2001, 7)”. Chesler portrays this vividly as she talks to her baby on his first birthday:

Last year I died. My life without you ended. Our life together – only nine months! – ended too: abruptly and forever when you gave birth to me. Being born into motherhood is the sharpest pain I’ve ever known. I’m a newborn mother: your age exactly, one year old today. (1979, 281)

The transitions that pregnant women may face are endless: independent to interdependent, “I” to “us”, professional to stay-at-home. Through this process, many feel that the former self is dying and a new self is being born.

Although few women in the West actually die in childbirth today, we deny the many symbolic deaths a contemporary pregnant woman undergoes: from the end of her solitary selfhood, to the loss of her prematernal shape, to the eclipse of her psychologically carefree identity, to the transformation of her marriage, to the decline in her status as a professional or worker. (Wolf, 2001, 7)

Through understanding this experience and the changes that take place for a woman physically, behaviourally and socially, we question the temporal continuity of the self. Can one individual be made up of several different selves over time? Can one self “die” and another be “born” to replace it? These interesting and worthwhile questions arise out of the experiences of pregnant women and particularly, their experience of a loss of self.

The Unfamiliar Body

The transition from pre-pregnant self to pregnant self is made most obvious by the physical changes that take place in the body of the pregnant woman. As the fetus develops and the woman’s body changes, she begins to discover that the person she is

now is very different than the person she was before she was pregnant – the self she is familiar with. Although the cyclical nature of the female life includes ongoing change and development, pregnancy is unlike any other time in a woman’s life. “Pregnancy dissolves familiar connections between the woman and her body which have hitherto been taken for granted. She is no longer in sole possession of her own body (Raphael-Leff, 1993, 16)”. Again we see that our ordinary experiences pass by the questions that pregnancy reveals. One woman describes her experience:

I have been infiltrated...I have to lean back on the chair to write over my belly, legs apart, giving my belly as much room as possible. *My belly?* All of the sudden it seems my belly has become too big too fast for me to adjust to it as mine. (Bigwood, 1993, 49)

Pregnant women undergo changes in their physical body that are gradual, and yet at times, seem sudden and unexpected. “I look in the mirror and don’t know who I’m looking at. The baby takes so much. Having another person there leaves little room for myself (Raphael-Leff, 1993, 10)”. Phyllis Chesler exclaims, “‘I’ am not here anymore! I don’t inhabit my body any longer. My consciousness merely hovers nearby... ‘I’ am not my rising stomach, my weight gain, my swelling feet. ‘I’ remain unchanged (1979, 65)”. Even after the birth, it seems that the pre-pregnant body is not fully recovered. At home with her baby, Chesler expresses her frustration: “my body won’t obey my will. My body is not-me. I have no body to use to get things done (1979, 132)”.

As we can see, women often find that pregnancy includes the development of a body that is unfamiliar. Through this experience, questions about the self arise. We may consider the extent to which the body plays a role in the creation and formation of the self. Is the pregnant self a new self? When the body is changed so drastically, it seems that a new self emerges, in response to this forced change in physical self-image.

Furthermore, in considering the perceived separation and distance between self and body that these women experience, we can begin to question the importance of the body to the self, and whether or not the body should be included, necessarily, as a part of the self.

Through our investigation of pregnant women's experiences, we have seen that the unfamiliarity of the body during pregnancy causes us to question our assumptions about the self – in particular the diachronic identity of the self.

Unfamiliar Behaviour

In addition to the unfamiliar body that a pregnant woman encounters, she often finds herself acting and feeling in ways that are strange and unusual to her. Adrienne Rich uncovers this experience in the diary of a European woman:

My face in the mirror looked alien to me. My character blurred. Childish violent desires, unknown to me, came over me, and childish violent dislikes. I am a coldly logical thinker, but at that time, my reasoning blurred and dissolved, impotent, into tears, another helpless, childish creature's tears, not mine. I was one and the other at once. It stirred inside of me. Could I control its movements with my will? Sometimes I thought I could, at other times I realized it was beyond my control. I couldn't control anything. I was not myself. And not for a brief, passing moment of rapture, which men, too, experience, but for nine watchful quiet months...Then it was born. I heard it scream with a voice that was no longer mine. (1976, 167)

Vangie Bergum describes a similar feeling during labour: "never in my life had I wailed like that before. It was as if the cries didn't belong to me (Bergum, 1989, 71)". Through these stories of unfamiliar actions and emotions, we understand the strangeness of the pregnant self to the pregnant woman. In pregnancy there is an undeniable challenge to our common ideas about the diachronic identity of the self. The development of

behaviour that is foreign and unfamiliar can result in the perception of a new and different self.

The extreme changes in a woman's hormonal make-up during pregnancy (Wolf, 2001, 115-120) may provide a logical explanation for the seemingly extreme changes that take place both physically and behaviourally. Nonetheless, these changes are significant enough to bring up questions of identity and selfhood. When a woman feels that she has lost control, not only over her body, but over her emotions and behaviour as well, she may begin to question the connection between what she sees as her self (that which *used* to have control) and the behaviour and body with which she lives. Who is the "I" that says "I am no longer myself"? How is that "I" connected to the individual that appears in the mirror, or cries out with an unfamiliar voice? These questions come to the fore within the pregnant experience. Chesler vividly depicts her experiences in the following way:

After so many years of disciplined energy, a stranger emerges from within: a lazy old woman! A cranky baby! A hopeless invalid! ...Mysteriously I pull myself together. I feel an impostor. *I am not myself.* (1979, 133)

Unfamiliar Treatment

The visible and hormonal changes that a pregnant woman experiences are complimented by social changes that become increasingly noticeable as she becomes more obviously pregnant. People close to a pregnant woman may offer to do things for her, or give her advice about decisions she would normally make on her own. Her spouse may begin to speak to her swelling abdomen as if there were another person there listening. Strangers stop to hold the door, offer predictions of the baby's gender, and

even go so far as to touch her pregnant belly. The “personal space” of the pregnant woman is significantly altered as people feel at liberty to touch the pregnant woman’s body in ways that would be intrusive, and even overtly sexual, on the abdomen of a non-pregnant woman. While these different forms of unsolicited attention would be questionable and perhaps even unacceptable in other circumstances, for pregnant women the rules of social interaction seem to change.

Naomi Wolf took particular note of the social changes surrounding her own pregnancy. As she went to lectures and other speaking engagements, she noticed an increasing preoccupation with her belly among her audience members. “A pregnant woman might feel like the same person,” she explains, “– but she sees others’ perceptions of herself shift and change (Wolf, 2001, 64)”. Not only does she note the distraction of the physical changes taking place, she also remarks on the transitions taking place in her professional life:

I could sense the social space given to my personality shifting and certain rooms – some of my favorite rooms – being quietly, indeed lovingly, but nonetheless very firmly, closed. It was a loss of my former self that I felt very keenly. (Wolf, 2001, 65)

On top of the unspoken social rules that are altered when a woman is pregnant, the official rules change as well. Pregnant women are treated differently than other persons within the legal system. The Geneva Convention prescribes special treatment for pregnant women who are arrested or detained, and they are exempt from punishment by death (Chapter 2, Article 76). In countries like the United States and Australia, individuals can be punished for the death or injury of a fetus in addition to the punishment for harm to the pregnant woman (Seymour, 2000, 19). Furthermore, a pregnant woman is held responsible for behaviour that is not normally covered under the

law. Pregnant women have been punished for things like declining medical care and neglecting to maintain an adequate diet (Seymour, 2000, 7). It should be noted that this topic remains controversial in Canada, where, for example, Bill C-484, the “Unborn Victims of Crime Act” was heavily debated at its presentation in November, 2007 (Lewis, 2008). Nonetheless, the legal treatment of the pregnant woman implies that she is in a category of her own when it comes to legal obligation and responsibility.

These relational aspects of pregnancy are significant in their own right, but also serve to illustrate that a theory of the self that aims to accommodate or explain those facets should have a social or relational component. Dennett’s account of the narrative self satisfies this need quite well.

As a pregnant woman finds the body, behaviour and treatment of her pregnant self to be unfamiliar and in many cases, drastically different than that of her non-pregnant self, questions that have not been addressed in other contexts arise and demand response. Who is the pregnant woman? Are her emotions or her behaviour included within the boundaries of what she considers to be her self? How does the behaviour of others contribute to the formation of her self? Truly, the pregnant experience forces us to question the diachronic identity of the self in a way that our usual experience does not.

Conclusion

Throughout our consideration of the pregnant experience, we have encountered three main issues. We have broached in varying degrees of detail the boundaries of the self, the possibility of a plural (be it compound or complex) self, and the diachronic identity of the self. Through investigating these issues it has become clear that pregnancy throws into question many of the intuitive assumptions we typically make about the self. The questions that pregnancy poses are worth-while and legitimate and must be accounted for within a coherent theory of the self. If we make assumptions about the self without considering the questions raised by the experience of pregnancy, we will have ignored a central and universal aspect of human experience that contributes significantly to this discussion. Pregnancy demands a theory of the self that goes beyond our common experiences and intuitions.

Chapter Four: The Application of Dennett to Pregnancy

Introduction

What Dennett Does

As we saw in Chapter Two, Dennett claims that the self is a “centre of narrative gravity,” the main character of the story created through the team effort of a brain and the world. Dennett explains:

We...do not consciously and deliberately figure out what narratives to tell and how to tell them. Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source... this psychological or narrative self is yet another abstraction, not a thing in the brain. (1991, 418)

As human beings we each construct a self, an abstract organizing principal around which everything else in our phenomenological world revolves. The self is not a physical “thing in the brain,” or some other kind of material entity. Nor is it a defined psychological entity made up of immaterial “soul-stuff.” Because of this, there is no deeper truth about a particular self than how things seem to the subject. “Selves,” Dennett says, “are not independently existing soul-pearls, but artifacts of the social processes that create us (1991, 423)”.

In coming to this conclusion, Dennett has undermined some common intuitions about the self. He does this through a variety of tactics, supplementing argumentation with appeals to imagination. He repeatedly considers the “philosophers’ favourites” like MPD, FPD, brain transplants and split-brain (1991, 420 – 424). In considering these “much-discussed” conditions, we begin to question the relationship between the self and the body, the boundaries of the self and the continuity of the self. If one individual can

have two personalities or points of view, it may be reasonable to conclude that he has two selves, or at least a psychologically complex or even compound self. If two people seem to be so closely linked that they seem to share a single self, Dennett claims that it may be easiest to treat them as such. If my brain is in one place and my body in another, it may be most practical to see my self as independent from both. Our usual assumptions about selves are undermined. Because of the challenges they present to our intuitions, Dennett makes great use of these unique situations in reinforcing his often counter-intuitive claims.

What Dennett Does not Do

As we've already seen, pregnancy provides us with a different, though equally provocative, window into the nature of the self, this time from the perspective of ordinary life. While Dennett cites many highly unusual and atypical cases where the circumstances surrounding selfhood are strange and out of the ordinary, he fails to take into account the experience of pregnancy – a typical, gendered and little-discussed issue in this literature. Because of this, his theory misses an opportunity for generality and applicability. Rothfield pinpoints the relevance of pregnancy:

Its horizon of otherness within yields a movement beyond the self such that it is possible to experience a questioning: What is self and non-self? What are the boundaries of the self? What is inside and what is outside the self? It is one thing to formulate these questions from a theoretical perspective, another to experience their complexity. (1996, 1)

For the mainstream literature in analytic philosophy of mind to ignore this essential human experience when it offers so much in the way of understanding the self is a serious oversight. Although cases like MPD, FPD and split-brain do exist, they are clearly

atypical. Because Dennett considers these extraordinary disorders and not pregnancy, he runs the risk of presenting a theory of atypical cases, rather than a theory that applies generally to human experience. Furthermore, his theory remains untested against pregnancy – an extremely common, intuition-challenging, human phenomenon.

As we revisit the three main issues presented by pregnancy – boundaries, plurality and diachronic identity – we'll see that the application of Dennett's theory to pregnancy is mutually beneficial. First, the evidence provided by the experiences of pregnant women reveals significant generality and applicability in Dennett's theory of the self. Second, Dennett's theory provides a structured context in which to understand and clarify women's experiences of pregnancy.

Ignoring Pregnancy: Hilary Putnam and J. J. Thomson

While abnormal case studies have, and will continue to play a central role in our philosophical exploration of the self, pregnancy has remained unexplored. In an effort to stretch and develop the outer limits of our philosophical theories and ideas, creativity has taken on an important role in the analytic tradition where philosophers rely on science-fiction type thought experiments to test their hypotheses. While thought experiments are valuable, the philosophical community has tended to focus on these extraordinary simulations, rather than a typical, common case like pregnancy. This tendency is dangerous not only because we may be ignoring important data, but also because the idealized situations philosophers construct run the risk of *idealizing away* the very aspects of the situation that are relevant to our intuitions.

Hilary Putnam, in his paper “The Nature of Mental States” (1967), deliberately tries to avoid the problems associated with thought experiments by explicitly stating that his theory does not include a certain sci-fi character: the hive mind. In his defence of the claim that pain is a functional state, Putnam states that an organism that is made up of pain-feeling beings cannot itself be a pain-feeling being (227). The purpose of this stipulation is to rule out, for example, “swarms of bees as single pain-feelers” (227). While paying attention to the potential pitfalls of thought experiments is important, their predominance as a focal point within the philosophical community is problematic – even if the focus is on their dangers. In Ned Block’s response to Putnam, in his paper “Troubles with Functionalism” (1980), he points out that this restriction on plural pain-feelers eliminates pregnant women as pain-feeling organisms (279). In an effort to accommodate his worries about imaginary sci-fi examples, Putnam rules out a reasonable theoretical description of the psychological aspects of pregnancy. This is one example of a situation where too much attention has been paid to science-fiction hypothetical situations and not enough to the pregnant experience.

One place where pregnancy has been a focus of philosophical discussion is in the context of abortion. Judith Jarvis Thomson contributes significantly to this debate in her paper “A Defense of Abortion” (1971). Whatever its philosophical virtues, for my purposes this widely-read and enormously influential paper is remarkable mainly for its complete failure to engage the universality and commonality of the pregnant experience. In a philosophical literature with a tendency to favour outlandish thought experiments over the common and familiar example of pregnancy, it is ironic that the most influential paper dealing with issues of pregnancy (specifically abortion) ends up approaching the

problem by depicting pregnancy itself in terms of bizarre and abnormal thought experiments.

Thomson argues that even if “we grant that the fetus is a person from the moment of conception,” we will still “feel inclined to reject” the impermissibility of abortion (1971, 48). She bases her argument primarily on a series of analogies, describing several imaginary situations intended to help us understand the moral significance of pregnancy. In her central, most well-known illustration, she asks you to imagine that “you wake up in the morning and find yourself back to back in bed with...a famous unconscious violinist...[whose] circulatory system was plugged into yours, so that your kidneys can be used to extract poisons from his blood (1971, 48-49)”. Later, however, Thomson also invites the reader to imagine “yourself trapped in a tiny house with a ...rapidly growing child – you are already up against the wall of the house and in a few minutes you’ll be crushed to death (1971, 52)”. In both of these scenarios, your feelings as you imagine them (or recall childhood memories of Adventures in Wonderland (1865)), are meant to approximate the feelings of pregnancy.

As redolent of science-fiction or fairytale as these situations may seem, the most alarming is her comparison of pregnancy to the following scenario:

People-seeds drift about in the air like pollen, and if you open your windows, one may drift in and take root in your carpets or upholstery. You don’t want children, so you fix up your windows with fine mesh screens, the very best you can buy. As can happen, however, and on very, very rare occasions does happen, one of the screens is defective; and a seed drifts in and takes root. (1971, 59)

She goes on to ask whether or not, if this were to happen to you, the “person-plant” growing in your carpet or couch would have a right to the use of your house.

Regardless of whether one agrees with Thomson's conclusions about abortion, and whatever one's interpretation of the pregnant experience, it should be clear that Thomson's depiction of pregnancy is far from realistic in at least one significant way. It is hard to imagine a more *unnatural* and indeed creepy way for babies to come into the world than as floating "people-seeds" who grow up as plants from your living room carpet (as demonstrated in Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956)). Even the legendary stork seems appealing by comparison.

One might reasonably respond to Thomson that the thought experiment ends up not really being about fetuses – not even counterfactually or thought-experimentally. In her construction of these extraordinary situations, she eliminates the very aspects of our intuitions which might be relevant to a meaningful response to the issue at hand. Human fetuses and human babies come from humans, after all; creepy plant-babies are only the creepier for being so similar to actual babies. It is not my aim to argue that Thomson's position is mistaken overall, nor even that her argument fails. Rather I aim to underscore the need not only for a greater focus on pregnancy in the moral and metaphysical analytic literature on persons, but for a more realistic focus on it as well. We do not avoid the pitfalls of preferring thought experiments to critical human lived experiences if we treat those experiences in terms of sci-fi thought experiments when we do consider them. Thomson's consideration of pregnancy does nothing to illuminate pregnancy as a central human experience that needs to be accounted for by the philosophical world.

Review and Preview

We have considered three main questions about the self that are highlighted in the context of pregnancy. First, and most notably, pregnancy causes us to reconsider the boundaries of the self. Whereas the skin is traditionally seen as the outer limit of “me” and everything outside of that is “not me,” through investigating the pregnant experience we have come to understand that drawing the boundary at the skin is unsatisfactory. Second, we have considered the possibility of a plural self. Our traditional assumption that a self is a singular, unified entity is challenged by the presence of the fetus. Lastly, we have explored the diachronic identity of the self. The significant changes that take place during pregnancy cause us to question our assumption that we necessarily remain the same self throughout our lives. The pre-pregnant self and the pregnant self seem in some cases to be two different selves.

As we return to each of these three issues, we will move the discussion forward by applying Dennett’s theory of the self to the pregnant experience. In doing so, we will demonstrate two things. First, that the experiences of pregnant women substantiate and highlight the generality and applicability of Dennett’s theory of the self. Second, Dennett’s theory of the self provides a valid and coherent context in which to understand the pregnant experience.

Section One: Boundaries

Dennett

In Chapter Two, we explored how Dennett's theory of the self leads to an understanding of the boundaries between self and other as fuzzy and flexible. Through his discussion of the experience of your arm "falling asleep", his story "Where Am I?" MPD and FPD, Dennett demonstrates that the self is not identical with the body. Rather than viewing the self as a purely physical entity or a pearl of "soul-stuff," Dennett concludes that the self is a centre of narrative gravity. As we distinguished earlier, it is not the narrative that constitutes the self, but rather the content of the narrative, the main character. It is not clear however, what is and is not to be included within the centre of narrative gravity. If we were to take the self to be a physical entity, the skin *would* be a natural boundary line, and feelings of confusion and uncertainty in this area would be unfounded. It is from within Dennett's theory of the narrative self that concerns about the boundaries of the self, and thus the pregnant experience, find validation and justification.

Dennett also considers the boundaries of the self in "The Reality of Selves" (1991). Here he states that the distinction between the self and the other is crucial and yet nevertheless unclear. There are certain things whose category we are sure about, such as brains, hearts, telephone poles and planets. However, there are other things which are far less obvious: a wedding ring or a Blackberry for example. When, without this object, we consciously notice its absence, we may begin to wonder whether or not we have expanded the boundaries of our self to include it. Dennett accounts for this, stating that "the boundaries of a biological self are porous and indefinite (414)". He discusses the

habits of creatures like spiders, beavers, crabs, and bowerbirds, highlighting how they all build up and extend the boundaries of their biological selves. It isn't just the skin, fur or feathers that draw the line. There are objects, created and found, that play a role in the creation of the self and there is no clear way to delineate the end of the biological self and the beginning of the world.

Pregnancy

In pregnancy, the boundaries of the self are changing and unclear. Rothfield highlights the ambiguity of the self-other distinction within pregnancy:

Any approach, which takes the skin to be the outer limits of a unitary, interior self, may not be able to incorporate the differences implied by pregnancy. Is the growing fetus an element of another body or is it simply part of one's own body? Perhaps pregnancy involves a *mixing* of selves, creating a hybrid and changing identity. (1996, 2)

As we saw, many women consider the fetus to be other than themselves – a being separate from their being. To have another individual within your own body crosses the traditional line between self and other. There is now self and other within one body, and the boundaries of the woman's self must shrink smaller than her skin. On the other hand, a woman may not consider the fetus to be other. Rather, because of the intimate closeness between her and the fetus, she may see the fetus as a part of her self. In this case, the pregnant woman is seen as two-and-one, self and other. This too confuses traditional boundaries, as there are two bodies included within the boundaries of one self. Pregnancy rules out theories of the self that demand rigid and static boundaries, thus opening the door for something new.

Dennett's Theory Works for the Pregnant Experience

When we see the self as a centre of narrative gravity, an abstract organizing principal, we see that its boundaries are fuzzy and flexible. From this perspective we begin to understand the challenges that pregnancy presents. Because the self is not seen as identical with the body, it is possible to adjust its boundaries and view the fetus as self, other, or both. Statements like, "I don't know where I end and you begin," which seem confused when we insist that there must be a definitive line, become, though no less complex, coherent and legitimate. Dennett's theory of the narrative self provides a fitting context in which to understand the challenges of the pregnant experience.

The Pregnant Experience Works for Dennett's Theory

In Dennett's discussion of the boundaries of the self, he gives a wide range of examples. Common experiences such as your arm falling asleep or feeling like something you said yesterday wasn't *really* you, do help us get a glimpse of the shifting boundaries of the self. His main emphasis, though, is on his story, "Where Am I?", examples like the Chaplin twins, and individuals with MPD. None of these examples are typical, or in some cases, even realistic. Pregnancy is an intuition-challenging phenomenon that is common and consistent and which fits well within Dennett's theory. Because of this, it substantiates Dennett's claims to a degree that his other examples do not. Although not all women's experiences of pregnancy are the same, and there is a wide range of perspectives taken on the self within these experiences, the common themes that run through them push us away from our usual assumptions about the self, and towards a better understanding of Dennett's theory.

The application of Dennett's theory to the pregnant experience works to the benefit of both, refining the former and providing a theoretical framework to accommodate the latter. Dennett's theory is bolstered by the generality and applicability that pregnancy reveals, and women's experiences of pregnancy find coherence and validity in the context of the narrative self.

Section Two: Plurality

A further aspect of the self that is challenged both by pregnancy and by Dennett is the possibility of its plurality. Can there be multiple selves contained within one self? From a conventional perspective there is always one self per body, and that self is a unified, singular entity. To claim that the self can be plural would be nonsense.

Putnam and Block

As we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Hilary Putnam expresses this perspective in his paper “The Nature of Mental States” (1967). In an effort to avoid the problems associated with “swarms of bees as single pain-feelers,” he states that pain-feelers cannot be made up of other pain-feelers (227). While Putnam is not specifically referring to selves here, we can extend the application of his theory to selves, assuming that this restriction on pain-feelers would rule out plural selves as well. Block’s recognition of the fact that this restriction rules out pregnant women as pain-feeling organisms (279) is encouraging, and highlights the dangers of the widespread tendency to focus on thought experiments rather than pregnancy.

We see here that pregnancy stands as a legitimate example to be used in the defence of a plural self. Block could substantiate his criticism of Putnam’s restriction by expanding on the idea that pregnant women contain two sentient beings and the ramifications of that fact. He does not, however, go beyond a cursory glance at the pregnant experience. Like J. J. Thomson, he raises the issue of pregnancy but does not seriously consider the details and nuances involved. Rather, he goes on to elaborate on a thought experiment. Imagine a world, he proposes, where electron-sized creatures

recreate our natural environment by flying around miniscule ships that act as elementary particles. After living in this world for a few years, it comes to be that you are constituted of these microscopic creatures and their ships. “Would you be any less capable of feeling pain...just because the matter of which you are composed contains...beings who themselves have a functional organization characteristic of sentient creatures?” Block asks; “I think not” (280). While his reference to pregnancy is hopeful, Block focuses on an abstract thought experiment to make his point. Pregnancy is left on the sidelines.

Three Types of Plurality: Total, Proper and Improper

As Block outlines his contention with Putnam’s statement against plural minds, he outlines three different types of plurality (279). We will translate his language of pain-feelers into the language of selves to suit our purposes, creating three categories of selfhood. As we saw with our analogy between selves and sentences, the categorization of selves can be helpful despite its limitations – most notably, the fact that most particular cases of selves will not fall neatly into any one category.

Using the structure of Putnam’s categories for minds, the first type of plural self consists of a single self that is divisible into parts where all of the parts are also selves. We’ll call this Total Plurality. A single self that is divisible into parts where only non-essential parts are selves, we’ll call Improper Plurality. The third type is the case of a single self, which is divisible into parts where essential parts are also selves. This we’ll call Proper Plurality.

As an example of Total Plurality, consider again MPD. MPD can be understood as a case where there are two selves within one body.¹⁰ There is a single agent, with multiple associated selves, each with functional control at different times. The various selves share a body, and seem to share psychological access and some properties, but also have independent characteristics and even memories. This seems to be a case where the single self is divided into two or more parts, all of which are selves.

For an example of Proper Plurality, consider Block's example of the nation of China (1980, 276-277). He proposes we imagine that the governing officials in China have been convinced to set up a system that will functionally replicate a mind. Individuals in the country are given a two-way radio, which connects them to each other as well as to an artificial body. Instructions are broadcasted from satellites that everyone can see. Block proposes that, even if only for one hour, the nation of China could replicate a human mind. Moving again from the mind to the self, in this case, the single self would be divisible into parts, and some of those parts that are proper to it, are selves. The Chinese people are constitutive of the greater self; they each play an important role in the existence of the overall self.

As an example of Improper Plurality, Block references pregnancy. The fetus, he implies, is not a proper part of the pregnant woman, but rather a physical part of her, which also happens to be a self of some kind. This does seem to be an intuitive interpretation of pregnancy. The woman was a self before she became pregnant and will continue to be so after the baby is born. However, our consideration of the effects of pregnancy on the self of the woman implies that the fetus may not be a completely

¹⁰ In the language of our first categorization of plurality, this is an example of a bodily simple and psychologically compound self.

inessential part of the pregnant woman. The fetus can play a significant role in the re-creation of the woman's self as a pregnant self.

These three categories of plurality, the Total, the Proper and the Improper, are helpful for understanding this aspect of the self, although the pregnant experience does not seem to fall neatly into any one of them.

Pregnancy

In pregnancy, the acceptance of some form of pluralism is necessary. Here, we encounter more than one, but less than two selves, as parts of one self. As we discussed, the status is not a full-fledged self, although it warrants consideration as a self in some sense, be it incomplete or dependent. For the pregnant woman, Rothfield explains, “the need to incorporate the fetus' mass as one's own exists alongside the potential awareness of the fetus as an emergent and differentiated being (1996, 7)”. The fetus is both self and other, where overlap and intersection replace boundaries and separation. Pregnancy, Rothfield claims, disregards the Law of the Excluded Middle and is “an embodiment of the Law of the *Included* Middle” (1996, 8). The pregnant woman is two-and-one. She does not merely think of the fetus as a separate being within her body, but also as something that is a part of *her*.

The Illusion of Unity

Although Dennett does not consider the question of plurality directly, as we saw in Chapter Two he does consider the apparent unity of the self, and argue against it. For Dennett, our brain is a collection of specialized parts which all work together to create “a

virtual captain of the crew.” These parts work together and “appear *as if* they were the executed intentions of a Conceptualizer,” Dennett explains, “– and indeed they are, but not of an *inner* Conceptualizer,” something inside the brain that tells the different specialists what to do, but rather the intentions of a “global Conceptualizer, the person” (1991, 251). The person is made up of the specialists, the brain, and the body – the system as a whole. The self arises from “an ultimately mechanical fabric of semi-independent semi-intelligences acting in concert (Dennett, 1991, 251)”. Here we see the beginnings of an acceptance of a plural self.

In Dennett’s discussion of the illusion of a unified self, he considers the Chinese Room argument. Presented by John Searle (1980), this thought experiment, designed to demonstrate that a machine which simply follows a set of rules is not intelligent, rests on, among other things, the intuition that minds are singular and not plural. Searle asks us to imagine a room in which all of the rules of the Chinese language are available. In one window of the room come sets of meaningless symbols, in response to which a person in the room is to send out the corresponding meaningless symbols. Imagining that this process of inputs and outputs could take place at the rate of normal conversation, Searle asks whether or not the person in the room could be said to understand Chinese. For Searle, the obvious response is no. Dennett, however, argues that “Searle, laboring in the Chinese Room, does not understand Chinese, but he is not alone in the room. There is also the System, CR [Chinese Room], and it is to *that* self that we should attribute any understanding (1991, 439)”. Again, the self is not the system manager, overseeing its activities, but rather, it is a result of the system as a whole. This too lends itself to the acceptance of a plural, complex, self, rejecting the idea that the self must be bounded by

the skin. On Dennett's view, the Chinese Room contains one self bounded by skin – but another bounded by the walls.

Social Creations

Dennett's discussion of the social factors that contribute to the creation of a self continues to lead us in the direction of a plural self. In his discussion of the biological selves of animals he states that they may “extend beyond the ‘natural’ boundary of the individuals” to include other individuals of the same species (1991, 415). His characterization of human selves as “artifacts of the social processes that create us” presents us with reason to believe that the creation of the self is significantly affected by other selves – the other characters in the narrative (1991, 423). In a discussion of how we treat the bodies of the deceased, Dennett comments on the important role that individuals play in the creation of others' selves: “that corpse is the body of dear old Jones, a Center of Narrative Gravity that owes its reality as much to our collaborative efforts of mutual heterophenomenological interpretation as to the body that is now lifeless (1991, 452)”.

It is at least consistent, therefore, within Dennett's theory, to assume that the self could be plural - divisible into parts which are also selves. It does not seem unreasonable to move from a disunified conglomeration of “semi-intelligences” to a plural self. And thus, we see again how Dennett's theory helps to make sense of the pregnant experience. For the pregnant woman who sees her fetus as a part of her, the narrative self makes sense. If other human beings can play a role in the creation of her self, that role can be extended to the fetus as well. The connection between the fetus and the woman is stronger and closer than any other human relationship, and thus the potential for the fetus

to play a significant role within the self of the pregnant woman is enormous. The fetus is not only a contributor to the self of the pregnant woman, like other human beings in her life, but in fact a part of it.

The social aspect of the self in Dennett's theory fits with pregnant experience in another way as well. As we considered the new and different self that pregnant women experience because of their unfamiliar bodies and behaviour, we noted that the treatment of the pregnant woman by others also contributes significantly to the creation of the pregnant self. The unwritten rules of social interaction are altered when a woman is pregnant as is her consideration under the law. Dennett's theory makes sense of this transformation through his understanding of the role that social interaction plays in the creation of the self.

As we did in our consideration of the boundaries of the self, we have seen here that the application of Dennett's theory to pregnancy has been fruitful in its resulting clarification and validation of the pregnant experience. Similarly, we see again that, despite its hitherto unrecognized value, pregnancy does provide legitimate grounds for questioning the necessary unity of the self. Because of this, and its universal nature, the pregnant experience substantiates Dennett's theory, and particularly his claim that the self is the product of the human system as a whole, including other human beings.

Section Three: Diachronic Identity

Differentiating Between One Self and Another

A final issue that is highlighted by both pregnancy and Dennett is the diachronic identity of the self. Dennett considers this possibility when he asks a classic question: “Are the adventures of that child, whose trajectory through space and time has apparently been continuous with the trajectory of your body, your very own adventures? (1991, 423)”. He discusses Parfit’s comparison of a person to a club “which might go out of existence one year, and come to be reconstituted...some years later” (1991, 423). He goes on to explore the criteria for distinguishing one self from another by considering the synchronic identity of the self in the case of split-brain patients. He discusses how the split-brain subject seems to have been split into two different selves – one for each side of the brain. Dennett discounts this idea however, claiming that the two sides of the brain are not two different selves because their stories are not sufficiently distinct. “The conditions for accumulating the sort of narrative richness (and independence) that constitutes a ‘fully fledged’ self are not present”, he argues (1991, 426). He states, therefore, “the distinctness of different narratives is the life-blood of different selves (1991, 425)”. Unless two narratives are sufficiently different, they should be considered the same self. This consideration of synchronic identity helps us to understand Dennett’s views on diachronic identity as well. The same criterion that Dennett uses for differentiating between selves at a single point in time can be applied to selves across time as well.

Dennett illustrates this criterion again with his consideration of the Chaplin twins. The behaviour of these two women was almost identical. They spoke in near unity, and

were never apart. There seemed to be one self shared between two bodies (1991, 422). In this case Dennett asks, “what if each of these women had become so selfless (as we do say) in her devotion to the cause, that she more or less lost herself (as we also say) in the project (1991, 423)”. Having been together almost constantly throughout their lives, these women seem to lack two distinct narratives, and thus, he claims, it may be reasonable to assign them one self. We can see how easily Dennett’s theory maps on to the experiences of pregnancy in this excerpt about being “selfless” and “losing” one’s self. In many cases it seems we could say the same thing as Dennett has said here about the Chaplin twins, about a pregnant woman or a mother.

Different Narratives, Different Selves

Dennett’s claim that it may be “reasonable” to assign one or two selves in a given situation can be understood as “practical”. A self is no more than an abstract organizing principal; it is a theoretical entity that we use to make sense of the behaviour of complex systems such as other human beings, and ourselves. Thus, in determining whether or not to assign one self or two, the decision is based on simplifying explanations and predictions about the system. For example,

When a human being’s behavioural control system becomes seriously impaired, it can turn out that the best hermeneutical story we can tell about that individual says that there is more than one character “inhabiting” that body...all that has to be the case is that the story doesn’t cohere around one self, one imaginary point, but coheres (coheres much better, in any case) around two different imaginary points (1986, 114).

In the case of the Chaplin twins, they seem to share a life so completely that their narratives are nearly identical, and so it is easier to consider them one self than two (1991, 422).

Pregnancy Stimulates the Creation of a Different Narrative

In our exploration of the dramatic changes that take place for a pregnant woman we have seen that the continuation of the self through time is not an assumption that can be taken for granted. As a woman processes the extreme changes may be taking place during her pregnancy, she may see her pre-pregnant self as being replaced by a new and different self. Her body may change and become unfamiliar in its appearance and phenomenology. Her behaviour may change as she is affected by shifting hormones and shifting social roles, moving from professional to stay-at home, independent to interdependent, couple to family. The way she is treated both formally and informally may be altered. The story of her life changes; everything around her indicates that she is a different person with a different occupation, appearance, personality, and character – a different self.

Pregnancy Works for Dennett

In his discussion of the distinctness of different selves, Dennett considers the cases of split-brain patients and the Chaplin twins. While they do achieve Dennett's goal of causing his readers to rethink their assumptions about the self, these cases are atypical and difficult to relate to. Pregnancy, on the other hand, is common and familiar. It substantiates Dennett's claims to a degree that singular (and sometimes questionable)

case studies cannot. The application of Dennett's theory to pregnancy illustrates that this essential human experience serves to effectively anchor his claims in everyday reality, adding generality and applicability that was previously lacking.

Dennett Works for the Pregnant Experience

Not only does the application of Dennett's theory to pregnancy work for the benefit of Dennett's theory, but again, it is for the advantage of the pregnant experience as well. When we use Dennett's theory to structure women's experiences of an unfamiliar body, behaviour, treatment and ultimately, self, these phenomena find a place within a context that is coherent and rational.

If we assume that there is only one self per body per lifetime, experiences of transformation from an old self to a new self seem ridiculous and unreasonable. As Dennett considers the process of re-thinking and reinterpreting one's past, he comments, "this process does change the 'fictional' character, the character that you are... This would be an utterly mysterious and magical prospect (and hence something no one should take seriously) *if the self were anything but an abstractum* (1986, 110)". When we view the self as a centre of narrative gravity, the possibility of becoming a different self over time becomes a real possibility, and the pregnant experience is seen as something we *should* take seriously. When we apply the criterion that Dennett uses to distinguish between two selves synchronically in the case of the diachronic identity of the pre-pregnant, and the pregnant self, we can see that the narrative of the pregnant woman's life can change to such a degree that the interpretation of a new self is warranted.

The new self of the pregnant woman is also clarified when we consider Dennett's Multiple Drafts Model. Through this we see the self as being continuously recreated. As the different parts of the brain work together to create the narratives that revolve around the self, they are constantly editing and revising incoming stimuli. A major change in sensory input, as in pregnancy, could stimulate the creation of a distinct set of narratives and thus, a different self. In addition to there being another being inside her, changes in the shape and size of her body, as well as massive hormonal shifts could all contribute the creation of a different self. Raphael-Leff illuminates the extreme changes that take place:

While gestating her baby, a woman's freedom of choice is curtailed. For the duration of the pregnancy she must share her body with another who is always there, even in her most private moments; who interrupts her thoughts and disturbs her sleep, forces her to change her eating, working and toilet habits, and alters activity patterns of a lifetime. (Raphael-Leff, 1993, 15)

Clearly these significant changes, both internal and external, all contribute to major alterations in the narrative and its main character. The diachronic identity of the self can be broken during pregnancy.

For a woman to experience a different self during pregnancy makes sense in the context of a narrative self. Dennett's theory brings clarity and validity to the experience of pregnancy, helping to make sense of the challenges it presents to our traditional assumptions about the self. Indeed, by applying Dennett's theory to pregnancy within the context of the diachronic identity of the self we see that each one works well to support and give clarity to the other.

Conclusion

Throughout Chapters Two and Three we have highlighted two main problems: First, Dennett lacks the evidence from typical life necessary to arrive at a general and applicable theory. Second, because the experience of pregnancy challenges our traditional assumptions about the self, it demands a theory of the self that can effectively account for it by moving beyond our ordinary intuitions. When we apply Dennett's theory to the pregnant experience, both of these needs are met: the pregnant experience is accounted for by a coherent theory of the self – a fitting context in which it can be understood and validated – and Dennett is able to take advantage of the intuition-challenging data that pregnancy provides, thus substantiating his theory significantly. Through our consideration of the boundaries, plurality and diachronic identity of the self, we have seen that the application of Dennett's theory of the self to the pregnant experience is mutually beneficial.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Section One: Where We've Been

The application of Dennett's theory of the self to pregnancy yielded a double result. We saw that Dennett's theory was supported by pregnancy, a typical, gendered, little discussed phenomenon, which served to add generality and applicability to his theory. At the same time, pregnancy was placed within a context where it could be better understood and validated. Before we were able to come to these conclusions, we spent some time investigating both Dennett's theory of the self, and the pregnant experience.

In Chapter One we were able to get a more general understanding of the two problems that prompted the application of Dennett's theory to pregnancy. First, Dennett's theory does not demonstrate generality and applicability, as his examples are highly unusual and extraordinary. Second, women's experiences of pregnancy present a significant challenge our common intuitions about the self. They necessitate a theory of the self that does not merely uphold our usual assumptions.

Four approaches that work against our usual assumptions are those of Chalmers and Clark, Strauss, Parfit and Kittay. These thinkers challenge our assumptions about the self, demonstrating that with some work, our foundational ideas can be reconstructed. Dennett's theory of the self demonstrates this as well; we considered it in Chapter Two.

To begin, we considered the problem of objectivity and subjective experience. As Dennett explains, we are trapped within our own perspective and thus, to gain an objective perspective on any subjective experience is difficult, since there will always be a privileged observer – the individual which we are trying to understand.

In response to this problem, Dennett presents heterophenomenology and the Intentional Stance. Through these two approaches, we can understand an individual's subjective experience objectively and view her as a rational agent. To add a level of complexity to this understanding, Dennett compares interpreting the text of the subject to interpreting a fictional text.

In the final section of Chapter Two we finally encountered a full statement of Dennett's theory of the self. For Dennett, the self is a centre of narrative gravity. It is a theoretical, abstract object, which is useful for predicting and explaining the behaviour of human beings – others and ourselves. The self, though fictional, is that around which everything in the life of the subject revolves. This understanding of the self as a centre of narrative gravity challenges many of our intuitions about the self. Assumptions about the boundaries of the self, the relationship between the body and the self as well as the unity of the self are all disputed by Dennett's theory.

Dennett's theory makes use primarily of hypothetical situations and examples drawn from the extraordinary circumstances that nature presents. He fails to take into account the central human experience of pregnancy, which, though common, challenges our intuitions as well. We explored this further in Chapter Three.

We saw in Chapter Three how pregnancy causes us to question many of the assumptions we hold about the self. We considered the boundaries, plurality and diachronic identity of the self, illustrating how the exploration of the pregnant experience pushes us to reconsider our intuitions about these issues.

During pregnancy the boundaries between the two are unclear. The boundary of the self is typically assumed to be the skin, however, this does not stand during

pregnancy. This was demonstrated through our consideration of the view of the fetus as other, as well as the connection between the fetus and the pregnant woman.

The second issue we considered was plurality. Some pregnant women see the fetus as a part of the self, and in this way she becomes two-and-one. Our comparison between the self and the sentence yielded three categories of plural selves: the simple, the compound and the complex, resulting in nine possible cases when we applied these categories to selves both bodily and psychologically.

The break between pre-pregnant and pregnant experience was the emphasis of our final section considering the diachronic identity of the self. In pregnancy, many women encounter a self that is new and unfamiliar. The body, behaviour and treatment of the pregnant woman seem unfamiliar to her, pushing her towards the identification of a new self.

In Chapter Four we tackled the main task of this project: the application of Dennett's theory of the narrative self to the pregnant experience. We considered this throughout the three main areas of our discussion: boundaries, plurality and diachronic identity. In each we looked at the application of Dennett's narrative self to pregnancy, noting that it is beneficial in two ways. The evidence provided by the pregnant experience is accounted for by a coherent theory of the self where it is validated and contextualized. Also, Dennett's theory is substantiated and generalized by applying it to the experience of pregnancy.

In our consideration of a plural self, we highlighted three possible types of plural selves. We called them Proper, Improper and Total Plurality. Although MPD and the

nation of China were clear examples of Total and Proper Plurality, it is not clear that pregnancy fits neatly into any one category.

Section Two: Where We're Going

As I have emphasized repeatedly throughout this paper, pregnancy is a largely unexplored area within philosophy. There is thus much work to be done in continuing the research and exploration that I have started here. I will briefly discuss four topics of consideration, though many more still remain to be engaged by philosophers. I propose that the medicalization of pregnancy, the relationship between the body and the self within pregnancy, the connected self, and finally, the fetus as a dependent self are all worthwhile subjects for further exploration and development.

The Medicalization of Pregnancy

The pregnant experience pushes us to look for the extraordinary within the ordinary. A process that has been encountered throughout human history and beyond, pregnancy is a central part of the life of every mammal on earth. As such, it may be easy to brush it aside – it is so common that we may assume the research as been done and the books have been written. As is often the case however, this common occurrence in fact remains mysterious and relatively untouched by scholarly study. One explanation for this philosophical neglect might be found in the medicalization of pregnancy. This is the process through which pregnancy has come to be seen as a medical situation in need of hospitalization and professional care, rather than as a normal human experience. The benefits of this transition are obvious, as the safety and predictability of the process continue to increase. The disadvantages are not as easy to see, but are nevertheless significant and worth serious consideration. Using Dennett's heterophenomenological method, women's perspectives can be more clearly identified, and in the context of the

narrative self, their experiences within the medical system can be more effectively understood.

As medical institutions have assumed the care of pregnant women and the birthing process, the professional has come to be seen as the ultimate authority; most others are left to watch from the sidelines – including the pregnant woman. “The ‘iron curtain’ of the mother has been swept aside revealing the womb and its contents in their full glory; it has become no longer necessary to consult mothers about their attitudes (Oakley, 1984, 183)”. Technological tools enable medical professionals to treat patients as bodies rather than as whole persons, regardless of their condition. The fact that normally all pregnant patients are women compounds this problem.

Vangie Bergum depicts the neglect of the pregnant woman through her understanding of “the baby in the machine,” constructed by the devices that monitor the well being of the fetus. “While dramatic, and reassuring of the baby’s liveliness, the *baby in the machine* changes the focus of everyone, even the mother (1989, 144)”. The lived experience of the pregnant or birthing woman is no longer an important component of understanding her pregnancy as the machines depict the behaviour of the woman’s interior as well as the fetus. Wolf describes her experience with her OB-GYN during a pelvic exam, noting, “His focus on me (or should I say, ‘me’, since his attention seemed focused on an interchangeable ‘it’) was entirely waist-down (2001, 16)”.

Although scientific advances in this area have undoubtedly made birth and pregnancy both safer and more predictable, the role of the pregnant woman has become secondary. “As the risks encountered by women in childbearing became less in the 1950s, mothers gradually began to acquire within the medical perspective a new guise as

containers of fetuses (Oakley, 1984, 253)”. The pregnant woman’s experiences are not seen as a reliable source for understanding the progress and state of her pregnancy.

Technology and professionals have taken her place, rather than augmented her accounts.

By the end of her pregnancy, “it almost feels that a woman no longer owns her body...the woman merely goes along ‘unneeded by Nature’s work’ (Chesler, 1979, 65)”. Bergum depicts this phenomenon, specifically during the birth:

...she would have nothing to say because there would no longer be any words to describe her sensation of painful contractions. In such a situation others could direct and control her labor, telling her when her contractions are starting and finishing. She would not experience her baby inside but rather as a separate being who is delivered through the coordinated efforts of others. She would just be the vehicle of the child’s passage into the world where he or she will be kept warm, measured, and tested. It would be hard to tell the difference between the woman and the machine because they would all act machine-like with wires and electrodes attaching themselves together. (1989, 147)

The medicalization of pregnancy has created an atmosphere where the pregnant woman is not an authoritative source for understanding her own experience. Although Dennett’s approach to subjective experience confirms this, that the individual is *not* the authority on what’s really happening, the heterophenomenological method validates the reports of the subject as a reliable description of her phenomenological world. Although technological advances connect the doctor to the interior of the womb, the closest connection to the fetus is through the pregnant woman herself, and her experiences provide valuable information about the pregnancy. A clear understanding of “what it’s like” for the pregnant woman can be achieved and should be considered. With our consideration here of the pregnant self as another step in the right direction, I hope we can continue to add depth and clarity to our understanding of the pregnant experience.

The Body and the Self

Pregnancy seems to point to a major rift between the body and the self. Many women feel that the pregnant body is foreign and unfamiliar and may consider it other, rather than self. The complexity of the relationship reveals itself through the significant role that the body does play in the formation of the pregnant self. Its internal hormonal shifts and changes in external appearance cause changes in the pregnant woman's behaviour and treatment, moving her towards the formation of a new self. Using Dennett's theory of the narrative self as a lens through which to view women's experiences, it would be a productive investigation to look into the nature of the relationship between the body and the self during pregnancy.

Pregnant women's experiences of self and body push us to reconsider, for example, Dennett's thought experiment "Where Am I?" When Dennett's body is destroyed and his brain is attached to a new body, he comments,

When I looked into the mirror, though, I was a bit startled to see an unfamiliar face...As many philosophers unfamiliar with my ordeal have more recently speculated, the acquisition of a new body leaves one's *person* intact. And after a period of adjustment...one's *personality* is by and large also preserved...the view in the mirror soon became utterly familiar. (Dennett, 1981, 225)

Although Dennett admits that the new face in the mirror was startling, he claims that it "soon" lost its novelty and he was able to accommodate it quickly. While Dennett imagines that this would be the case, should one find oneself suddenly in a new body, pregnancy suggests that it would not. Women's experiences of pregnancy indicate that the discovery of a new and unfamiliar body may not leave the person intact as Dennett claims.

Dennett's thought experiment does differ from pregnancy in interesting ways. In the thought experiment the transition to a new body was sudden and complete, whereas the pregnant woman experiences more of a wave of change; the shift from old to new begins slowly with conception, peaks just before the baby is born. This transformation may dissipate gradually after the baby is born, but the post-pregnant woman may never return to her pre-pregnant self. As the pregnant woman begins to accommodate herself to her new body, it continues to change, leaving her without an opportunity to completely adapt and view it as familiar. Nevertheless, our intuitions about the adaptability of the self may need consideration in light of this experience. Perhaps the self would not stay the same should it be relocated to a new body. Differences in appearance, ability, appetite, preferences and more would all accompany a new body, affecting the self that belongs to it. These and other questions regarding the role of the body in the formation of the self should be explored in light of the pregnant experience.

The Connected Self

A further exploration that may fall out of this project is a more detailed reconsideration of women's experiences in general from the perspective of the narrative self. Having found a conceptualization of the self that makes sense of the pregnant experience, perhaps other types of women's experiences can be contextualized here as well. One area in particular that would seem suited to this purpose is the relational aspect of many women's experiences. The narrative self allows for an understanding of the self as connected and interdependent – characteristics with which women may struggle in a system focused on individuality and autonomy. In particular, many women find that their

children play a significant role in the definition of the self. When her children leave the house, a mother may feel that she must rebuild her self:

The housewife in her mid-forties may jokingly say “I feel like someone out of a job.” But in the eyes of society, once having been mothers, what are we, if not always mothers? ...it is not enough to let our children go; we need selves of our own to return to. (Rich, 1976, 37)

As Carol Gilligan explains, a woman’s sense of self may become

[V]ery much organized around being able to make, and then to maintain, affiliations and relationships...for many women, the threat of disruption of an affiliation is perceived not just as a loss of a relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self. (Gilligan, 1982, 169).

From within a traditional conception of the self as an independent, internal “boss”, these experiences do not make sense. To take a perspective in which one “conceptualizes the self as basically connected to others” requires an alternate understanding of the self (Belenky et al., 1986, 178). This perspective makes more sense from within the theory of the narrative self. Understanding selves in this way allows not only for the pregnant woman to see the fetus as a part of her self, but also for other women to see those they are connected to in a similar way.

We may find that the experiences of women, not only when pregnant, but also in other situations are better understood and validated when considered from the perspective of the narrative self. Further investigation into the application of Dennett’s theory of the self to the experiences of women would be a fruitful project.

The Fetus as a Dependent Self

A final direction in which to take this application of Dennett to pregnancy would be towards understanding the status of the fetus as some form of a self. In Section Two

of Chapter Four we briefly mentioned Dennett's view that selves owe their existence "as much to our collaborative efforts of mutual heterophenomenological interpretation as to the body that is now lifeless" (1991, 452), a view that emphasizes the nature of the self as a social creation. Dennett also talks about the immortality of selves, claiming that "your existence depends on the persistence of that narrative," which means "*theoretically*" that you could "survive the death of your body as intact as a program can survive the destruction of the computer on which it was created and first run" (1991, 430).

These comments about the role that a community plays in the construction of the self, and especially about the persistence of some form of self after the disappearance of the thinking, speaking, interacting self, suggest extending the self in the other direction. Perhaps some form of self can exist before the appearance of the thinking, speaking, interacting self, just as a computer program may exist before the computer on which it is first run is constructed. It is difficult to see the fetus as a self because it lacks so many of the hallmarks that we typically associate with selves. However, through Dennett's theory of the narrative self it may be reasonable to assign the fetus (and perhaps even the infant/baby/non-lingual child) a self that is constructed primarily by those that interact with it, and for whom the fetus is a significant being. When we think of it this way, the depiction that we have used of the fetus as a dependent self makes even more sense, as the incomplete self of the fetus does in fact literally depend, for its existence, to a large degree on the pregnant woman (as she plays a significant role in the determination of its narrative), and to a lesser degree on the other individuals that contribute to it. Further thought and investigation in this direction would certainly be productive. A further extension of this idea could consider the possibility even of animals maintaining a

dependent self, as a pet, for example, may play a significant role in the life of a family, thus developing a potentially unique and complex narrative of its own.

In philosophy we take the beaten path and, rather than rushing carelessly over its bridges, tunnels and turns, we examine it slowly and carefully, leaving no stone unturned, regardless of how familiar and well-used it may seem to be. Pregnancy, a well-beaten path taken by women throughout the world and throughout history, has remained unexplored. As we have seen here, it warrants thorough and significant consideration within the philosophical literature as it challenges many of our common intuitions, particularly about the nature of the self. One approach through which these challenges can be met is the application of Daniel Dennett's theory of the narrative self to the pregnant experience. This application yields a double result where the pregnant experience is illuminated and validated within a coherent and fitting context and where Dennett's theory of the self is bolstered by a demonstration of its generality and applicability. In this final chapter we have seen that this application has potential benefits that go even beyond the pregnant experience, including a greater understanding of the relationship between the body and the self, of the connected self and of the fetus as a dependent self. Through continued research in these areas, the beaten paths of the mind can be cleared and illuminated and the familiar obstacles along them can be revealed and understood, and eventually cleared away.

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