

silent capitulation to analytic creep. Analytic philosophy thrives in that space because it labours under the assumption ‘that a training in logic makes people better able to think in other domains’, which Schuringa describes as ‘a plausible sounding idea for which there nevertheless appears to be no evidence.’ The realisation is a powerful one which we should wield in the university planning meeting instead of dusting off platitudes about the power of critical thinking.

Perhaps many of us carve out our institutional niche while touting this form of dogmatism and placating ourselves into thinking that we create spaces for dif-

ferent forms of thinking within the classroom. Schuringa provides a clear diagnosis of that tendency: ‘It is not difficult to see that reliance on intuitions is a symptom of philosophical degeneracy. It is a form of dogmatism, and thus the antithesis of philosophy.’ Schuringa’s conclusion is a bleak one: if philosophy survives in institutions at all it is as the antithesis of philosophy. Should we be dedicated to promoting the survival of this moribund assemblage? Is Schuringa’s book ultimately a critique of analytic philosophy, or of the institutions that sustain it?

Adam Knowles

Full-spectrum philosophy

Victoria Browne, *Pregnancy Without Birth: A Feminist Philosophy of Miscarriage* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022). 232pp., £21.99 pb., 978 1 35027 969 8

For some people, to disclose a pregnancy is to be assigned a place in the future almost immediately. It might start innocuously enough. If you are pregnant in Britain, a health professional might call you ‘mum’ when you least expect it. If you’re in London, you might order one of Transport for London’s ‘Baby on Board’ badges to let other passengers know you need a seat. One of the many issues with this badge is its rhetorical erasure: if the baby is already on board, the pregnant person might as well not be. For those with a lower tolerance for cutesy alliteration, or anyone unsure about disclosing their pregnancy to a carriage of strangers, TfL offers another option: the ‘Please offer me a seat’ badge. This is pitched at commuters with ‘invisible’ disabilities or health conditions, but it also caters to anyone not ready or willing to reveal their pregnancy. They might be considering termination. They might be worried about work. They might want to protect a pregnancy someone else wants them to terminate. They might not know how they feel about it. For wanted pregnancies, the standard account of the ‘first trimester silence’ hinges on the statistical likelihood of miscarriage in the first trimester. Nobody wants to have to ‘un-announce’ a pregnancy, the thinking goes. Personally, I’m not sure the process is always as rational as all that. I ordered the ‘Please offer

me a seat’ badge in my first trimester because I was sick and clinging instinctually to the care I needed *now*, in the present tense.

Since reading Victoria Browne’s *Pregnancy Without Birth: A Feminist Philosophy of Miscarriage*, I have a new term for what I was dodging with my niche taste in TfL badges: ‘proleptic pregnancy’, the normative pregnancy culture where, as Browne puts it, ‘two imagined figures of the future – the mother and baby – are superimposed on to the present, such that they come to stand in for pregnant embodiment as such’. The culture of proleptic pregnancy ‘leaves us ill-equipped to deal with the conceptual complexities and messy materialities of miscarriage’, says Browne. Of course, the problems with proleptic pregnancy don’t start and end with miscarriage. As the book notes, the superimposition of the mother-baby dyad onto the pregnant subject is one of the favoured rhetorical contortions of anti-abortion discourse. Even beyond abortion and miscarriage, Browne makes a powerful argument that the subsumption of pregnancy into the maternal future does a disservice to all pregnant people, however their pregnancies end. She writes:

[R]eflection on the nonchosen nature of miscarriage brings into view the fundamental contingency of *all* pregnancies, whatever choices have been possible, even when

the choices made align with the eventual outcome. After all, aborted pregnancies, just like child-producing pregnancies, could always have ended otherwise.

This expansive approach initially made me wonder whether the subtitle of *Pregnancy Without Birth* might be too reticent. 'A philosophy of miscarriage' seemed too particular a term for Browne's exciting and radical intervention here, which takes miscarriage as a starting point for a new approach to the philosophy of pregnancy itself. Towards the end of the book, the language becomes bolder as Browne writes that the 'ultimate aim of this book has been to make a philosophical contribution to the full-spectrum model of pregnancy'. This model, inspired by the full-spectrum doula movement in the US, addresses experiences of birth, abortion, miscarriage and stillbirth on a level plain, breaking down the conceptual oppositions that divide them. From this perspective, the title *Pregnancy Without Birth* refers not primarily to the empirical fact of such pregnancies, but to the book's methods, which involve a 'conceptual suspension or "bracketing" of the presumption of birth and postnatal relations' in the theorisation of pregnancy.

Still, I came to understand why the foregrounding of miscarriage is crucial to Browne's project. It is partly because miscarriage has been so neglected in philosophies of pregnancy, even feminist ones. The book's engagements with canonical feminist philosophical treatments of pregnancy, from Simone de Beauvoir and Iris Marion Young to Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, are no less generous for pointing out that many of these thinkers tend to assume that pregnancy ends in childbirth. Challenging this tendency, Browne argues that 'miscarriage should not be treated as a sub-category in the philosophy of pregnancy'. Rather, it should be the necessary starting point for any theory of pregnancy, which must reckon first of all with its contingency.

Time plays an important role in Browne's argument. She reveals how, even in a medical system that professes to have moved beyond the Aristotelean concept of biological telos, a notion of 'womb teleology' endures in causal-mechanistic accounts of the uterus as being 'for' birth. Alongside these 'womb teleologies' and cultures of proleptic pregnancy, Browne identifies another powerful temporal trope: the linear model of pregnancy as a liminal state that mediates the passage to maternity. The book suggests that the time of pregnancy might altern-

atively be framed as a 'multi-layered, multi-directional, polytemporal lived present, rather than a transitional stage of "middle passage" on the way towards something else'. This approach means that 'if pregnant time is not represented in exclusively future-oriented terms as being-towards-birth, or a means to an end, then miscarriage need not be understood as pregnancy's undoing'.

This conceptual reframing of pregnancy has significant implications for common ways of narrating and understanding miscarriage. The book engages throughout with what Browne terms 'miscarriage stories', largely from the US and the UK, which take diverse forms including memoirs, blog posts and interviews conducted through social research. The book takes its chapter titles from five themes that arise continually in these narratives: failure, control, ambiguity, suspension and solidarity. Organised around these themes, the narratives are explicitly not positioned as transparent lenses on experience; rather, they provide conceptually rich material that clarifies the stakes of the full-spectrum approach to pregnancy. Miscarriage, as these stories show, is often trivialised as 'normal' and 'natural'. While it is perhaps intended as a comforting reminder of the statistical frequency of miscarriage, Browne notes that the insistence on the normality of miscarriage is hard to disentangle from normative notions of the 'successful' or 'failed' pregnancy. In one of the narratives, the idea that miscarriage is 'natural' makes its medical management seem like a failure ('I couldn't even get miscarriage right'). Meanwhile, the flip-side of the insistence on the naturalness of miscarriage is a prescriptive culture of grief that, while meaningful for some, fails to register the full diversity of needs and experiences.

This terrain is fraught and entangled with both ideological weight and histories of trauma. The book devotes a fair amount of space to anticipating possible misunderstandings and sensitively framing its conceptual interventions so their affordances are not compromised. In the second chapter, 'Control', Browne takes up feminist theories of intercorporeality developed by Lisa Guenther, Rosalyn Diprose and Ann Cahill. The intercorporeal model posits that our individuality is constituted through our openness to others; as such, Browne argues, it can help forge common ground across divergent pregnant experiences and trajectories. There is a delicate balancing act at work here: Browne acknowledges that the language

of ‘corporeal generosity’ is likely to be jarring to many feminists, and that the proposed de-individualisation of pregnancy is risky in contexts of oppressive state control. But she reminds us that these terms can be adapted: in place of ‘corporeal generosity’, we can emphasise ‘interdependence, co-constitution, and affectivity’.



Politically, as well as in the realms of philosophy and daily life, miscarriage has occupied a marginal position. The predominance of ‘choice’ as an organising concept for feminist reproductive politics is difficult to reconcile with the un-chosen nature of the miscarriage. The structure of the political demand often presumes a choosing subject whose freedom is curtailed by external forces. How to craft a political demand around miscarriage? *Pregnancy Without Birth* inherits its critical approach to pro-choice models of reproductive freedom from the reproductive justice movement and the theoretical work of thinkers including Loretta J. Ross, Dorothy E. Roberts and Jennifer Nelson, as well as Shellee Colen’s concept of stratified reproduction. The reproductive justice perspective is alert to the fact that the anecdotal passages with which I opened this review – of being addressed as ‘mum’ by healthcare professionals and invited to hail one’s foetus

as a ‘baby on board’ – are not shared by everyone, and the texture of these experiences will vary across different forms of raced, gendered and classed oppression. Underpinning *Pregnancy Without Birth* is a conviction that solidarity can be forged across radically different encounters with reproductive oppression.

Miscarriage might seem a counter-intuitive place to start – after all, as Browne observes, the treatment of miscarriage as a politicised issue often involves disturbing overlaps with anti-abortion politics and ideologies of foetal personhood. On the other hand, the criminalisation of miscarriage makes vivid the common ground shared by all pregnant people, and the necessity of solidarity across pregnancy’s many possible ends. *Pregnancy Without Birth* was completed as the US Supreme Court heard arguments in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organisation* case. Since the book’s completion, the Court concluded the case by overturning constitutional protections for abortion. In the wake of the 2022 *Dobbs* decision, nineteen states have imposed either outright abortion bans or highly restrictive time limits that can function as *de facto* bans. While the post-*Dobbs* landscape is readily framed as a criminalisation of abortion, it increasingly makes sense to understand it as a criminalisation of pregnancy altogether. In West Virginia, which has imposed a total abortion ban, prosecutor Tom Truman advises that anyone experiencing a miscarriage should get in touch with law enforcement. A CNN report quotes a response from the legal academic Kim Mutcherson who makes the point that ‘it’s always a mistake to invite law enforcement into your reproductive life’. This defence of the freedom of reproductive life, considered in all its variability, seems in tune with Browne’s intervention here.

Britain is not immune from these currents. As I write this review, MPs have recently voted to decriminalise abortion in England and Wales for those who terminate pregnancies; others, including medical professionals, still face prosecution for assisting abortions outside the 24-week time limit. An expert review group is considering whether to review the law in Scotland and will report to the Scottish Government next year. The decision follows highly publicised cases of women who were arrested and even jailed after being accused of illegally ending a pregnancy, and new guidance that suggests police in England and Wales are entitled to examine men-

strual tracking apps following stillbirths for signs that the pregnancy was aborted. One possible approach to these developments would be to decry the criminalisation of miscarriage and stillbirth as cases apart from the criminalisation of abortion. *Pregnancy Without Birth* demonstrates what we miss with this kind of approach. Browne never underplays the difference between experiences of abortion, childbirth, miscarriage and stillbirth, but insists that difference can be the grounds for solidarity. If contingency is a starting point for the philosophy of preg-

nancy, as Browne suggests it should be, then it becomes a lot easier to address the control, criminalisation and surveillance of pregnancy, which particularly impact the pregnancies of low-income and racialised people. This full-spectrum model of pregnancy reminds us that, in Browne's words, 'when we pay attention to miscarriage, we are not just learning things about miscarriage – we are learning things about pregnancy, and the imaginaries, temporalities, and power structures that shape it as symbol and as lived experience.'

Sophie A. Jones

Educational crisis

Walter Benjamin, *On Goethe*, ed. and trans. by Susan Bernstein, Peter Fenves and Kevin McLaughlin (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2025). 382pp., £103.00 hb., £23.99 pb., 978 1 50363 096 3 hb., 978 1 50364 222 5 pb.

'Goethe saw it coming: the crisis in bourgeois education', remarks Walter Benjamin in *Convolute N*, the most famous section of the mass of material gathered together as the *Arcades Project*. Although this comment is not reproduced in *On Goethe*, a new selection of Benjamin's writings about the German writer he engaged with more than any other, the crisis it alludes to casts a shadow over this relatively compact stand-alone volume, edited and translated by Susan Bernstein, Peter Fenves and Kevin McLaughlin, with additional translations by Jan Cao and Jonas Rosenbrück.

Benjamin was well acquainted with educational and academic crisis. His hopes of a conventional academic career were forestalled by the rejection of his *Habilitationschrift*, the second dissertation needed to secure a German university position, in the context of scholarly closedmindedness, eventual plagiarism and an institutional antisemitism whose intensifications in the later 1920s and 1930s reverberate throughout the material here. *On Goethe* catalogues what Fenves – the author of the book's introduction – calls an equally 'dismal affair'. The event, or nonevent, in question is the rejection by the Insel-Verlag publishing house of a proposed monograph whose publication would have coincided with the 1932 celebrations marking the centenary of Goethe's death, and on which Benjamin had apparently pinned many hopes. News of the rejection seemingly inspired a journal

with the morbid title: 'Diary of the Seventeenth of August, Nineteen-Thirty, until the Day of My Death'.

For the most part, the entries comprising the second part of *On Goethe* document Benjamin's critical responses, eventually under pseudonyms, to what was published, by other authors, for the 1932 *Goethe-Jahr*. Goethe's presence in German literary life in the early 1930s was so overbearing that one review is titled 'Books on Goethe – but Welcome Ones'. (First sentence: 'Every word not spent on speaking about Goethe this year is a blessing, and so nothing is more welcome than laconic anniversary books.') What Benjamin appears to welcome about the two books under discussion, besides their 'laconic' natures, is their factual rather than interpretive modes. One is a picture book that yields 'more solid instruction' for general readers than do most literary histories; the other a chronicle whose austerity (offering nothing but names and dates) is, not unlike the *Arcades Project* itself, paradoxically capable of inspiring 'fantasy', even among those readers most knowledgeable about Goethe.

There are two things about this review that – in terms of both Benjaminian content and editorial form – typify what is going on in the volume as a whole. Regarding content, the cheery review of 'welcome' books stands out in the context of Benjamin's lifelong, often quarrelsome relation to the Goethe literature. His early