



Expecting Perfection

The natural-birth movement leaves little room for the variability of women's bodies.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Munch discusses how natural-birth advocates argue that "[b]irth pain is natural, so it must be good or beneficial in some way." Can pain be beneficial? If suffering is natural and if some things seem to be designed badly, "is God not the all-powerful, all-loving creator we think he is?" How do you personally rationalize what is natural but also harmful?

2. Munch states that "the problem with the natural-birth movement as it exists today is that it actually ends up keeping information from women," and instead of presenting the "risks and benefits of interventions, it fearmongers about them." Do countercultural movements, such as the natural-birth movement, sometimes end up reinforcing the ideas they are fighting against? Are there examples of this in other movements?

3. Given rapid developments in the medical field, can what is "natural" and "unnatural" truly be determined? If so, how can or should we distinguish between the two? If birth should be made "natural," should this also be applied to other medical conditions?

4. Munch quotes second-wave feminists Ehrenreich and English's observation that "we are sometimes tempted to reject science, rather than to challenge the men who hoard it." In the case of the natural-birth movement, advocates reject medical knowledge that could save women because of its "predominantly male, technocratic" origin. Are there other cases where you've seen this line of reasoning—placing more emphasis on the source or medium of the knowledge rather than the knowledge itself—applied?

5. Natural-birth advocates stress the importance of women trusting their bodies and in turn trusting God or a Creator. Many of these advocates are also anti-vaccine and promote alternative (and sometimes dangerous) health treatments. Often, individuals cite religious reasons for these beliefs. However, is there a way to integrate trusting one's body and Creator and trusting modern medicine?

6. According to Munch, "[t]here is already too much pressure on women to make choices that stake a claim or make a statement." Besides the natural-birth movement, how else do you see this manifesting in women's experiences? Do you agree that there can be too much pressure put on women and marginalized groups to speak on issues that affect them?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Jennifer Banks, "Reckoning with Birth," May 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/natality-mortality-banks-arendt-children-india-feminism>

Anonymous, "My Two Abortions," September 2019: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/my-two-abortions>

Mollie Wilson O'Reilly, "The Womanly Art of Arguing About Breastfeeding," February 29, 2012:
<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/womanly-art-arguing-about-breastfeeding>

Roberto J. De La Noval, "Common Sense Isn't Enough," March 26, 2020: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/common-sense-isnt-enough>