

Four Perspectives on Being Born Cesarean¹

Author: English, Jane

Publication info: Journal of Prenatal & Perinatal Psychology & Health 14. 3/4 (Spring 2000): 299-308.

[ProQuest document link](#)

Abstract: None available.

Full Text: The four perspectives of thesis, antithesis, synthesis and metathesis or transcendence are applied here to my work on cesarean birth. They can equally well be applied in many other areas. Jane English

INTRODUCTION As conception and birth become increasingly technological with invitro conception, surrogate motherhood, cesarean birth and neonatal intensive care, it becomes important to listen to the people whose entry into human form was technologically assisted. Cesarean birth was one of the earliest forms of modern birth technology so cesarean born people have had time to attain maturity and have begun to speak of their experiences. Listening to them is important not only for understanding cesarean birth, but also as a first step toward understanding the experience and worldview of all who had technological assistance in coming to Earth. Trained as a physicist, my scientific training led me initially to pose the question, "What are the effects of having been born cesarean?" This traditional cause-and-effect, mechanistic perspective was helpful in gathering knowledge of what the experience of cesarean birth is like from the child's point of view and how this experience could be an imprint that influenced later personality development. The limitation of this perspective was that it tended to support feelings of irresponsibility and not having control of life. Further inner exploration and reading led to apparent past-life experiences and to the possibility that not only is cesarean birth a cause of personality traits but is itself an effect of them. Widening my view of being human beyond the limits of physical embodiment led to the consideration that the most congruent method of incarnating specific soul intentions and/or karmic patterns might in some cases be a cesarean birth. The limitation of this perspective is a sense of being not only responsible for but to blame for everything experienced in this life.

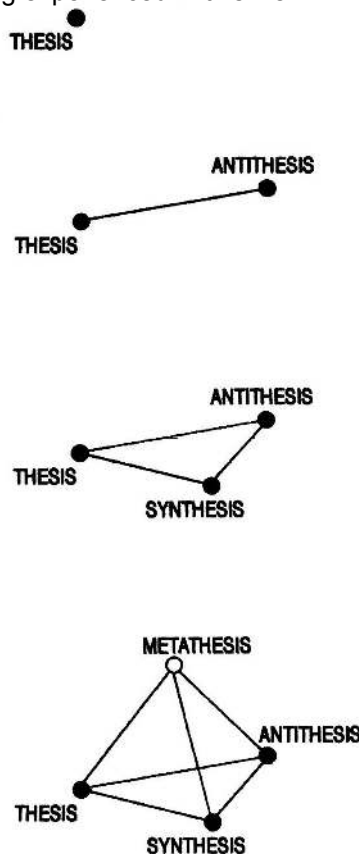


Figure 1

Moving beyond cause-and-effect and a sense of linear time, and inspired by various humanistic and transformational psychologies, led to a third perspective. Simple non-judgmental acceptance of the experience of being born cesarean became a powerful tool for personal growth and transformation. The eventual limitation of this perspective was a sense of being OK only when changing, growing or transforming. Inspired by experience of the quantum mechanical wave-particle paradox as a "zen koan," a riddle whose answer is an experience, not words, a fourth "perspective" emerged. This was going beyond the subject-object split and understanding that consciousness and identity transcend the physical body, particular ways of being born and individual lifetimes. The only potential difficulty with this was lapsing into worrying that nothing was real, that all these ideas about cesarean birth were illusions. (Which they are, as are all ideas, from a transcendent perspective!) All these stances are useful at particular moments. None is inherently better than the other. Mastery comes in taking them appropriately. As noted above they all can have distorted shadow sides. The following outline summarizes these four perspectives. These are all stances that I have experienced during my journey. They are all useful at appropriate moments. No one is better than the others. Mastery comes in experiencing each of them appropriately. They all have shadow sides that are distortions or contractions.

Thesis Being born cesarean causes certain personality traits. "I am the way I am because I was born cesarean."
 Shadow side: "I am shaped by events over which I had no control so I'm not responsible for how I am."
 Antithesis There are certain karmic patterns or soul intentions that cause a cesarean birth. "I was born cesarean because of what I experienced in a past life." "I create my reality."
 Shadow side: "I am to blame for everything I experience."
 Synthesis Non-judgmental acceptance of the experience of being born cesarean is a powerful tool for personal growth and transformation. "Cesarean birth is part of my 'native' culture; my past is 'compost' for my future." "Cesarean born and vaginally born, we have been given birth, given life, breath, heartbeat and a chance to be on Earth."
 Shadow side: "I am OK only when I am transforming myself."

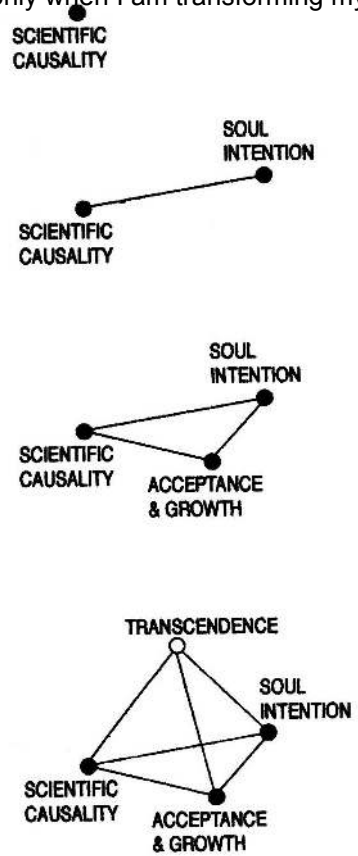
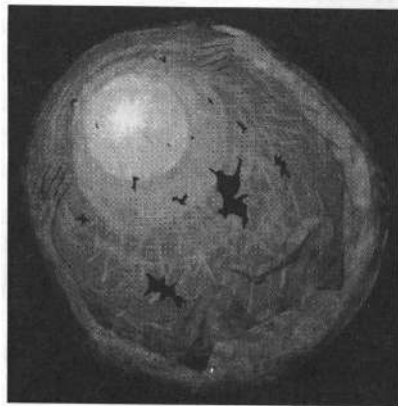


Figure 2

Metathesis (Transcendence) From an expanded state of consciousness, identity transcends the physical body, ways of being born, and individual lifetimes. "I-Not I-All is delight." Shadow side: "Nothing is real. All my ideas about cesarean birth are false." As I indicated, my own background is not in psychology-not in a medical profession. I have a doctorate in physics, sub-atomic physics. I worked with bubble chambers and particle accelerators. My current profession is as a photographer and a publisher. The other important fact you need to know about me is that I was born non-labor cesarean, in 1942. So I know about cesarean birth from the child's point of view. Except for my own book, *Different Doorway*, there are no books that I know of on the child's experience of being born without the universal initiation of the trip down the birth canal, a trip that all vaginally born people take for granted. So I am the voice from the inside. You are all looking from the outside.² Working with cesarean birth was not really what I planned to do with my life. It evolved out of my own journey, out of dreams and out of trying to understand some of my personal and inter-personal difficulties. I lived at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California for a year (1974-1975) and allowed images and emotions to emerge from within myself. A couple of years after that I worked extensively with Stanislav and Christina Grof, who helped me through this process. Stan, as many of you know, has made a wonderful map of vaginal birth, and a beautiful slide show of traditional art and art from his various patients. I looked at his map and thought, "Wonderful map, but it does not fit my territory." All the way through his four-hour long slide show I had mixed feelings, fascination and feeling left out. So I made my own map. We who are cesarean born are at the beginning of technologically assisted birth. Use of in vitro fertilization, surrogate mothers, and all the different technologies are changing the traditional sequence and meaning of conception, labor and delivery. In the years to come, there will be people standing up and telling what it is like to be conceived in vitro. We whose births were technologically assisted tell about not only our own way of being born, we tell you, by contrast, something about traditional birth. For instance, I have been able to verbalize much of what goes on in labor because I have had to learn it piece by piece, from the outside. Since I have not had children and because I was born non-labor cesarean, my body has never experienced labor, either coming or going. I arrived here without having gone through the usual initiation of labor. I think there is a great deal one learns in the journey down the birth canal. The stories of the vaginally born are all around us in the mythologies and artwork of many cultures. I am beginning to collect the mythology of the cesarean born. It is unfortunate that little attention is paid to the difference between labor cesarean and non-labor cesarean. I coined the phrase nonlabor cesarean, and it makes me happy to see it begin to appear in other places. From the child's point of view just sitting there and then suddenly being out is quite different from going through a long hard labor and then being pulled back out through the mother's abdomen. It is a very different dynamic. For the labor cesarean, take some of the vaginal birth patterns Stan Grof has talked about, and some of the non-labor cesarean patterns I talk about, and each labor cesarean person can pick and choose what fits them, weave their own story. There may also be things that are unique to labor cesareans. Going beyond a psychological perspective and using an anthropological perspective, I think of cesarean birth as creating a different native culture, native in the literal sense of having to do with birth. The four perspectives in the chart are a theoretical overview. I will use this framework to discuss some of the ways I have looked at cesarean birth. I will give particulars for each of the stages. Thesis This is the easy place to start. Here we look through the lens of cause and effect of traditional science. The question with which I started my journey was, "What are the effects of being born cesarean?" As a scientist, that was the obvious question for me to ask. In broad terms a non-labor cesarean birth creates a different view of space and of time. Here I mean space in terms of our personal boundaries, our psychological boundaries, our emotional boundaries. In a workshop given by William Emerson, we did an exercise to find out where we felt a need to stop when we walk up to a person. Several people in the workshop walked right up and bumped into me without feeling that stopping place. William said that my boundaries were different, that everyone in the room was already inside my boundaries, that my boundaries were way out. That was helpful to me; it helped me

understand some of my interpersonal misadventures. I had been letting too much in. I think one of the things vaginally born people learn in labor is a sense of "this much and no more." Non-labor cesarean people tend to let everything in. This is both a gift and a problem. As for time, non-labor cesarean birth takes only about two minutes. In my own journey I came to realize that I felt a deep sense of panic if I couldn't complete something quickly and all in one movement. Deep down I felt I was not allowed to take a rest and leave something part way done. My survival programming was that method wouldn't work. You have to do it all at once or it doesn't count. A teenage friend recently said to me, "You know, Jane, when you decide to do something you give it all of your energy and you just really do it." That's a good description of the cesarean pattern-to either hold back timidly or be totally involved. It has been wonderful to learn from my vaginally born friends that it really is OK to do a bit then take a break, like the rhythms of labor. You do a bit, then rest, do more, rest, and so on. A vaginally born person is on a positive trajectory when they are born. Things are getting better when they arrive. For a non-labor cesarean things are going along OK, the anaesthesia hits, then everything disintegrates just as they are delivered. One of the gifts for a cesarean born is the ability to get from here to there quickly by enlisting the support of a group of helpers. At a cesarean birth there is a group of highly skilled people each doing their job, and the incredible transition of birth is thereby made rapidly. The ability to not have to struggle, to not have to labor every time you make a transition is a gift that cesarean born people bring to the world. A cesarean born who is identified with her own way and looks at a vaginally born, she sees that they have a lot in common, but there are pieces that the vaginally born people don't seem to recognize. There is a part that the vaginally born people seem to ignore. If a vaginally born looks at a cesarean born there is a similar thing. "You are sort of like me but you seem like there is something you don't understand. What is the matter with you. You don't know how to relate in the way people are supposed to know how to relate." But when we get to fully appreciating our differences and not identifying with our own form, what we end up with is something that is larger than either of us. So the cesarean born brings gifts as well as difficulties, and the same for the vaginally born. As for research on this topic, there is very little done. One woman did a master's thesis at Smith College. She asked questions of 25 vaginally born women and 25 cesarean born women and came up with some differences. One of them was that most of the cesareans had been fired from jobs somewhere along the way, and none of the vaginally born had. Being fired, like cesarean birth, is a sudden involuntary transition. But her sample was small and the experiment was not double blind. Some of the reasons I think this research has not been done are: 1) It is cross-disciplinary and it does not fit into an academic category for which funding is available; 2) the idea that birth has anything to do with personality is only recently beginning to be widely accepted; 3) it is hard to design appropriate research questions because the differences are at a deep level. I believe many orthodox research protocols make assumptions that are based on a vaginal birth worldview. They don't ask the right questions. For instance, double blind protocols assume a degree of separation between researcher and subject that may not be accurate for cesarean born people with their expanded sense of boundaries. One has to consider things like parapsychology. There are ways to know what is in a sealed envelope. With expanded consciousness one can do that. The ancient shamans knew this. So the whole double-blind protocol has its limitations. It assumes that we are separate individuals. Perhaps that deep sense of distinctness is one of the things learned in vaginal birth. Antithesis Here we still use cause and effect, but turned around. Instead of asking, "What are the effects of being born cesarean?" we ask, "What are some of its causes? What are the soul intentions, what are the karmic patterns that best find expression in a cesarean birth." For me this perspective was important because in dreams and in therapy work I had several apparent past life memories. An example of this was a sense of having been the subject in an Aztec sacrifice. I found myself wondering to what extent a cesarean birth is a resonance of Aztec sacrifice. In both there is a person who is drugged, surrounded by a group of people, under a bright light, and cut open, then something precious is lifted up into the light. In a cesarean there is a birth; in the Aztec ritual there is a death. Perhaps the epidemic of cesarean births is all the Aztec victims coming back to heal themselves! Synthesis What became deeper truth for me was to step out of cause and effect totally. What

mattered was the kind of response I got from cesarean people and from their mothers. I saw that deep acceptance of how things actually had been at birth is, itself, healing, and allows one to live more fully, to move on and not worry about cause and effect. In this synthesis, I take my ideas about cesarean personality not as something to be scientifically proved or disproved, but as useful tools for transformation. It is clear to me that they are useful tools. One non-labor cesarean born woman, who has been a yoga teacher for 25 years, said she knew all this in her body, but my book gave her the words. What I have done so far with cesarean birth exploration is not scientific research. I struggled with that, criticizing myself for being too subjective. But the thing that has kept me going these 22 years of exploring has been the reactions from other cesarean born people, especially when I speak of the boundaries and the relationship patterns. They start finishing sentences for me, and they say things like, "Yeah, I'm like that too. You mean I'm not crazy?" There are heartfelt reactions. And there are times when I talk with cesarean mothers and tell them that perhaps they are still laboring with their children. I see their eyes light up as they understand the intensity of the relationship with their child. They had been judging themselves and their children for having very intense encounters. I tell them it's labor! In both the antithesis and the synthesis, we move beyond orthodox science. In his Pre and Perinatal Psychology Journal article "Expanding the Boundaries of Memory", David Chamberlain says, "Part of personal consciousness is alive and well outside the physical body." For me, making this step outside the usual boundaries of science was facilitated by something I first met within science. In sub-atomic physics, particle physics, and quantum mechanics I was faced with the breakdown of the idea of separate objects interacting. As an undergraduate I remember being told something like, "Light is a wave. Light is a particle. Both and neither at the same time." This apparent paradox resolved itself for me fifteen years later in a transcendent, unitive experience in which neither "I" nor external objects existed separately. This leads to the fourth perspective. Transcendence Words separate, divide and categorize but there is a reality beyond words. This is an experience of underlying unity, even beyond the idea of connection, which requires there be separate things to be connected! Images are still apparently separate objects, but they can point to the unity. The left painting is an image of falling into physical form; the right one is of rising out of physical form, rejoining the light. Birth, both cesarean and vaginal, is spirit coming into form, taking on limitation. Limits are good, boundaries are good. They make the dance that we enjoy as life. Death is the releasing, going back. The art is to learn how to journey back and forth through this tunnel, which is not necessarily the birth canal. I haven't been through the birth canal, yet these tunnel images come to me. I think of birth trauma memories as demons that guard this opening between the mundane and spirit. Looking back, scientific causality was my starting point. I moved through a polarity with that reversed, then to a synthesis of these, then to an ability to move beyond. These are all stances that I have experienced during my journey, and are all useful at appropriate moments. No one is better than the others. They all have shadow sides that are distortions. Mastery comes in taking each stance appropriately.



Footnote 1 This work is based on a talk at the Congress of the International Society for Pre and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine in Heidelberg, Germany, May 1995. Jane English is the author of *Different Doorway: Adventures of a Caesarean Born*, and the creator of the "Caesarean Voices" <website at www.eheart.com/cesarean/>. She may be reached at P.O. Box 7, Mount Shasta, California 96067; Phone: (530) 926-2751; email: jane@eheart.com 2 It was noted here that in the large lecture hall there was only one other cesarean born person. AuthorAffiliation Jane English, Ph.D.

Publication title: Journal of Prenatal&Perinatal Psychology&Health

Volume: 14

Issue: 3/4

Pages: 299-308

Number of pages: 10

Publication year: 2000

Publication date: Spring 2000

Year: 2000

Publisher: Association for Pre&Perinatal Psychology and Health

Place of publication: Forestville

Country of publication: United States

Journal subject: Medical Sciences--Obstetrics And Gynecology, Psychology, Birth Control

ISSN: 10978003

Source type: Scholarly Journals

Language of publication: English

Document type: General Information

ProQuest document ID: 198783142

Document URL: <http://search.proquest.com/docview/198783142?accountid=36557>

Copyright: Copyright Association for Pre&Perinatal Psychology and Health Spring 2000

Last updated: 2010-06-06

Database: ProQuest Public Health

Contact ProQuest

Copyright © 2012 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved. - [Terms and Conditions](#)