

# **Cultural Impacts of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology – a Psychohistoric Viewpoint**

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# Starting Point

- Prenatal Psychology and Psychohistory belong together
- Both focus on the preverbal dimension of our life  
- individual level and collective level
- Rank 1909 Pioneer, “Myth of the Hero”
- The myths show often the birth characteristic as clear as it can be in birth dreams
- Myths are collective dreams of the preverbal experience

# Mythology

- The world beyond is a reflection of the world before
- Examples:
- the tree of life – placenta
- the world is a living cosmos - womb
- the children come from a lake or a tree
- In the traditional cultures, world beyond was the primal world, the earthly world depended on it and was secondary

# Main Topics of Cultural Impacts

- Humans descended from the apes, but we are a new type of Primate because:
- Humans are born too early and are incomplete, and live in the first “extra-uterine year”, in a dreamlike fetal consciousness
- Therefore they are related on two worlds – the real world and the world beyond
- Humans change the real world so that it resembles the early lost prenatal world
- Four forms of social relatedness: 1. the world is a living being, animistic cultures, 2. all depends on the “Big Mother”, matriachal cultures, 3. all depends on the “Big Father”, the patriarchal cultures, and 4. all depends on the democratic institutions, our individualistic cultures

# Reflection of prenatal experience in later life



# Primary experience of the placenta



## **The bio-psychological meaning of the “physiological prematurity”**

- Human babies are born 9-12 months too early with unripe brain structures, esp. hippocampus
- The first year is the „extra-uterine“ transition year
- Special condition: out in the reality and inside from the inner development
- Somatic and social impact: prolonged infant time
- Psychological impact: emotionally unborn

# How to survive and handle the “physiological prematurity”

- On the infants side

Development of facial expression, of gestures and eye-contact for security in the relationship

- On the parents side

Increasing motherhood, fatherhood and of social familiarity



# Psychological impact of the

## “physiological prematurity“

- Primate baby: security by holding in the fur of the mother
- Human baby: security by intensive relationship
- The relationship has prenatal aspects: imaginary, magic, mystic
- Consequences: human babies are only halfway born - bodily born, emotionally unborn; babies are living in two worlds: somatic real world, emotional prenatal world

# Human beings and other primates I

- Primates live in one world corresponding to the biological adjustment to a certain surrounding
- Human beings live in two worlds: first in the real world and in a second world of magic emotions
- And these two world views are interacting with each other
- Because of the prolongation of childhood (neoteny) in human beings, the change of puberty is experienced as a regression to the womb and a rebirth, see rites of passage

## Human beings and other primates II

- Because it's unfinished the birth experience remains in an experiential status in the preverbal memory
- Therefore this memory is activated in life changes like puberty and determines the puberty rites. And what was restaged in the puberty rites is told in the fairy tales: to realize the change from youth to adulthood the "hero" or the "heroine" has to go back to the tree of life and the water of life and then come back to the real world

# The basic forms of relatedness seen from outside

- Prenatal: symbiotic: the mother nourishes, keeps breathing, detoxicates
- Early first year of life: unripe, incomplete hippocampus, incomplete body scheme
- Second year of life: ripe, able to move, to orientate in space, to attach to the mother

# **The basic forms of relatedness seen from inside**

- Prenatal: magic sensing and feeling of living in communion with the whole world, that is experienced as a living being: animistic world view
- Early first year of life: mythological feelings of living in a world ruled by godlike beings, that is split into the sphere of heaven and earth: mythological world view
- Second and third year of life: exploring the reality and the social world of family and social groups: realistic world view

# **The interacting of the two worlds as the motor in the emotional development of mankind**

- Magic world of hunters and gatherers: real world and emotional-magic world are mixed:
- People live in the projection of their feelings as the aborigines in Australia in their „Dreamtime“
- So called „archaic consciousness“ (Willy Obrist)
- Basic urge to change the real world into a uterine world satisfying all needs, a land of milk and honey



# **Basic urge to create a better world from generation to generation**

- This enables early tribes to modulate the real world in a need satisfying world
- By intelligent use of the natural resources
- Specializing in fishing if living at a river, specializing in hunting if living in the savanna, making fire, fabricating clothes, houses and so on: spreading out all over their world



## Mentality Change by the „Neolithic Revolution I

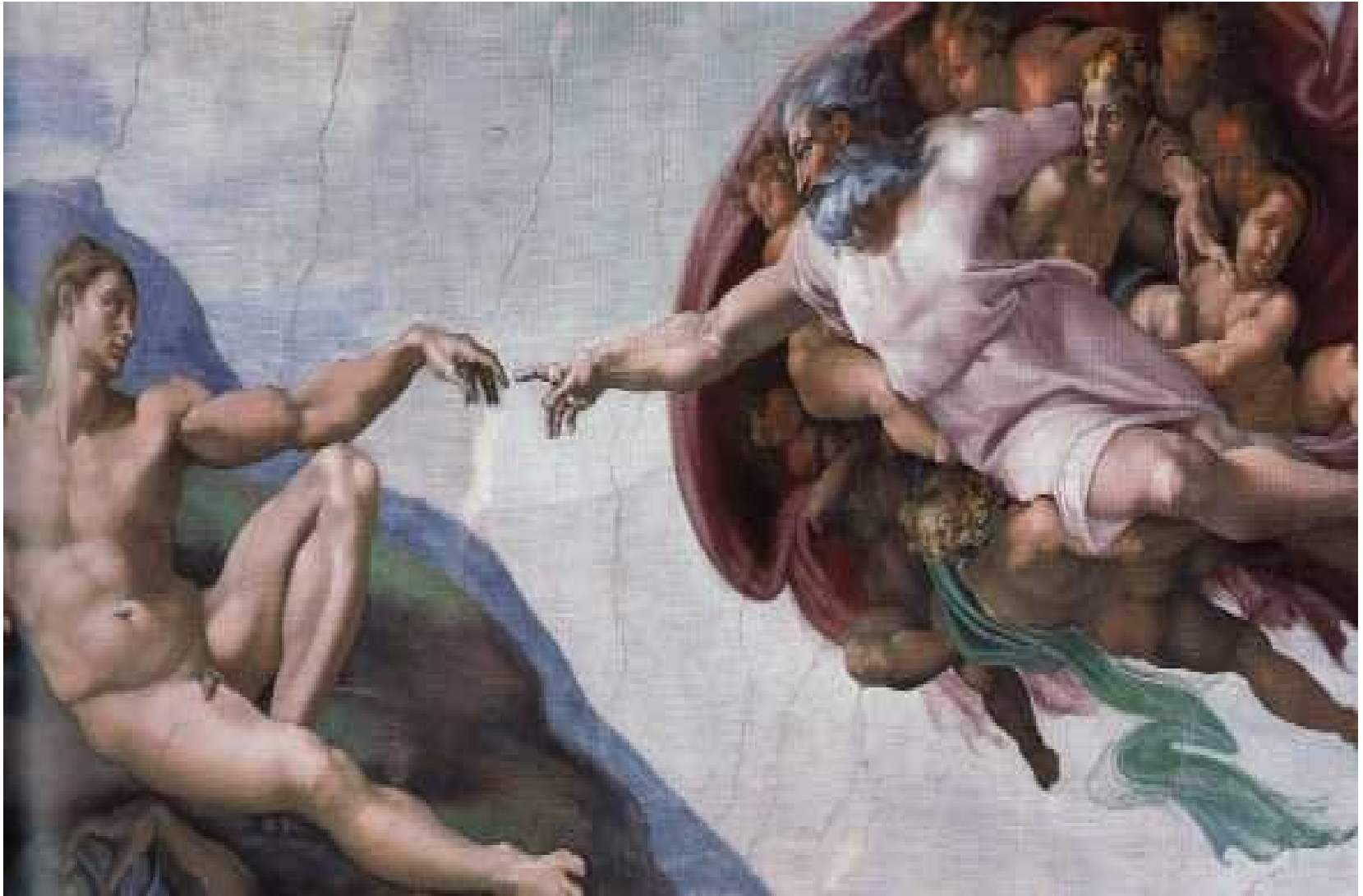
- Up to 12000 b. Chr. Man lived in small groups with instinctive social regulation from the heir of the primates
- By the invention of agriculture the population rose to 1000 or more. These matriarchal organized societies were **held together by early mother related feelings in the cult of the “Big Mother”**

# **Mentality Change by the Neolithic Revolution II**

- By elaboration of agriculture and cattle-breeding the population rose up to 3500 b. Chr. to 20 000 people, who began to fight against each other. This is the beginning of the patriarchal warrior cultures, described in the Ilias and typical in the Roman Empire, **held together by the power and force of the father.**

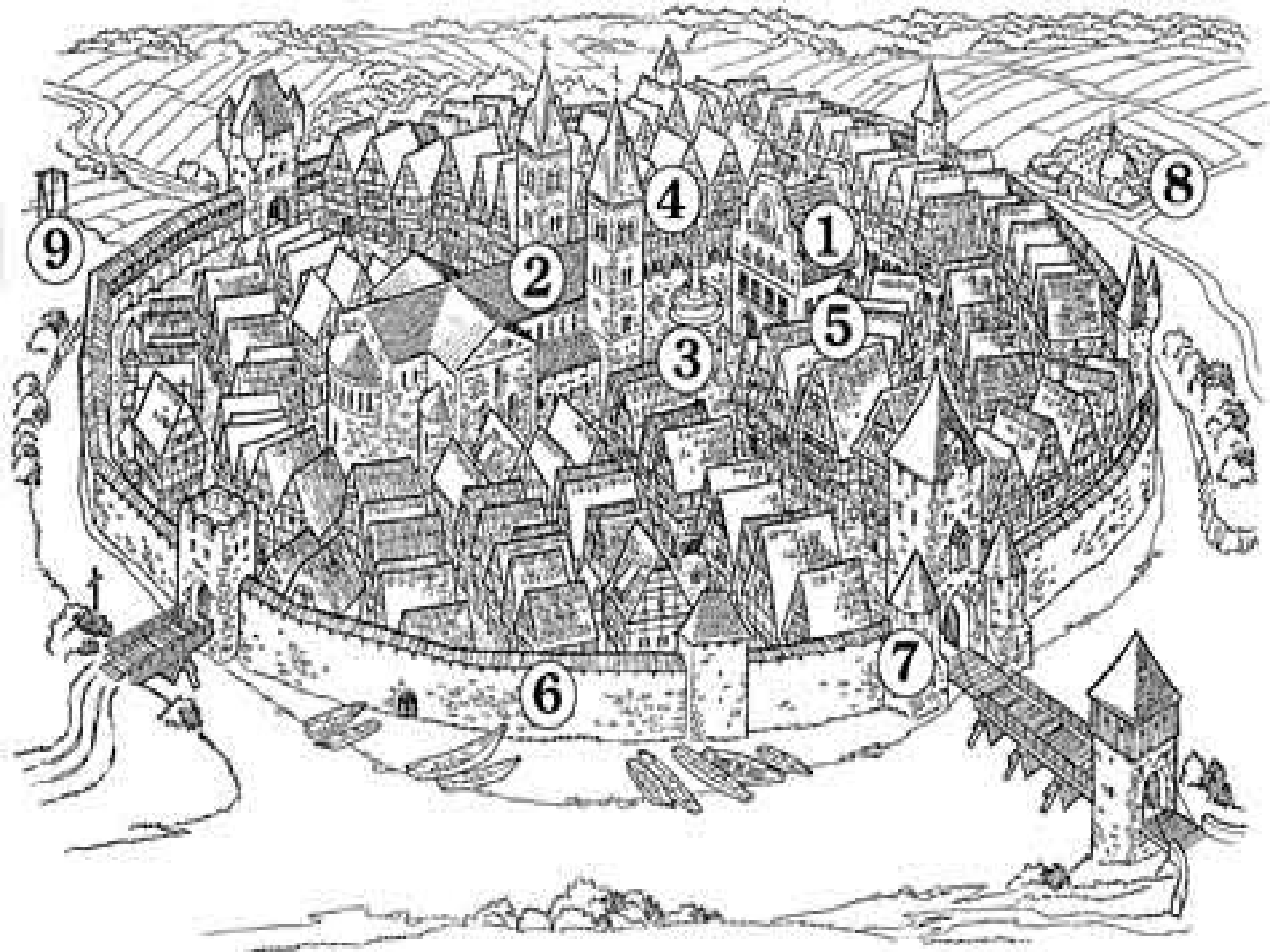
# **Mentality Change by the Patriarchal Structure**

- The world beyond was ruled by male father gods, the women were devalued and were property of the men. The patriarchal heavens were separated from life on earth. But there were present in the temples.
- The social structure was determined by hierarchy and violence.



# **The necessity to balance the two worlds creates the human “Ego”**

- The condition of dysfunctional social regulation by the “physiological prematurity” is compensated for by the development of a regulating “Ego”
- The ability to change the world strengthened the “Ego” and the self-confidence
- This is the prerequisite for the Neolithic revolution with the invention of agriculture and stock-farming and city living
- Cities represent uterine replacement areas



# Mythological world of the early cities

- Heaven and earth are separated
- The city is held together by the emotional relation to the fetal king in his need-satisfying palace
- The king represents the power of the uterine world
- The king is the symbol of the new ego-power
- Pharaoh Unas: „If he will, then he does, and if he will not, he does not do“
- If the God is in the heaven, man is able to act in the world









# **The time of enlightenment as a cultural change**

- Enlightenment as process of internalization
- We are able to think and to regulate our behavior
- 19th century literature as an experimental field of self-regulation for our emotions
- The knowledge of modern psychotherapies as tools for responsible self-regulation
- Discovery of the importance of childhood experiences

If one is not obliged to have the only orientation in reflection about the heaven, then I can start to reflect about the „earthly heaven“ before birth, see next folia from 1756

Drey merkwürdige  
 Physikalische Abhandlungen  
 Von der  
**Einbildungskraft**  
 Der  
**Schwangern Weiber,**  
 und derselben Wirkung auf ihre  
**Weibesfrucht.**

Davon

Die zwey ersten aus dem Englischen,  
 die dritte aber aus dem Französischen  
 übersetzt worden.



STRASBURG.

Verlegt's Amand König.

1756.

From a diary of William Blake:  
if I am not any longer in the magic trance of the  
descendent of man from paradise, I can get in  
emotional contact of my birth experience, see next folia



Earth







At length for hatching ripe  
he breaks the shell

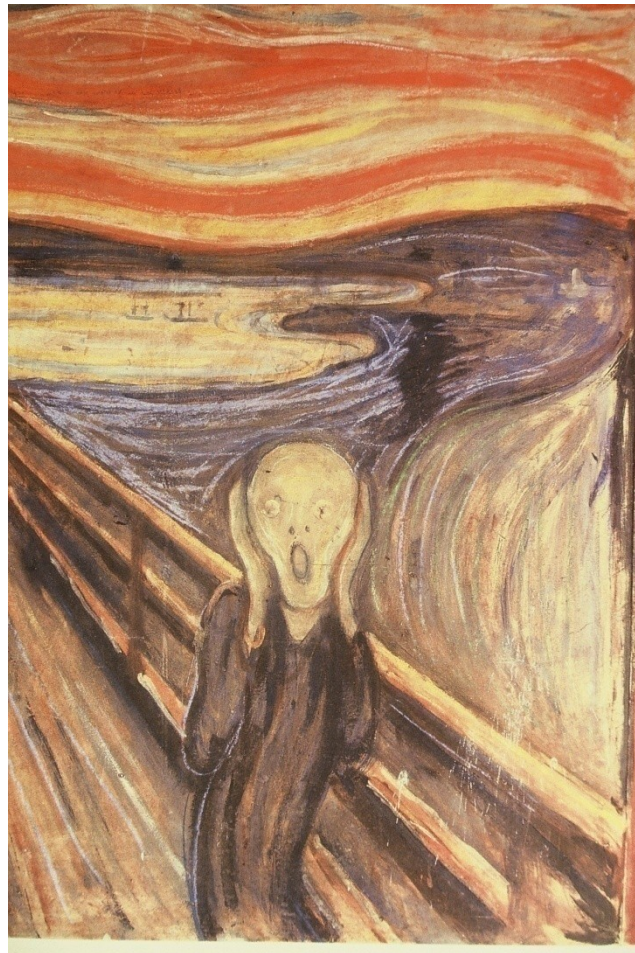
# **Persönliche Liebesbeziehung**



# Negative prenatal experience of Munch



# Horror after birth of Munch



# **Prenatal Psychology as a new stage in the psycho-evolution of mankind**

- Discovery of the central importance of the prenatal experience as an imprint for later life
- Discovery of the specific meaning of the “physiological prematurity” for the anthropological constitution of homo sapiens
- Because of the “two worlds“ condition, humans are able to change the world
- Desmond Morris: “We are the only species who builds their own zoo

## **Prenatal Psychology as the key for understanding cultural phenomena**

- Because of the prematurity we have an inborn unbalance in our relation to the world
- We are constantly driven to renew the roots in our basic vitality, e.g. to balance the prenatal and the postnatal experience
- We do this: by magic rituals, dancing, making music, making ceremonies confirming the frame of the world, making scientific conferences, art and so on
- Telling myths, fairy tales, scientific theories

# **Collective psychotherapies in traditional cultures**

- Central is the balancing of the two worlds
- On the level of tribal cultures by magic rituals and moderate changing of the world
- On the level of mythological cultures with cities and godlike queens or kings, who are representatives of the “Big Mother” or the “Big Father” and by creating an artificial city- world and cultural landscape by technical and organizational inventions
- On the monotheistic level by broadened world management unfixed from natural conditions

# **Individual psychotherapies in modern western cultures**

- Central is the balancing of the two worlds
- By creating a safe situation
- Supporting the relationship on the preverbal level
- Experiencing the “echoes of the womb and of birth” and the authentic primal Self
- All the other tools of psychodynamic psychotherapy, e.g. dream interpretation



# Prevention

- Beginning in schools
- Learning how to live
- Getting acquainted with Prenatal Psychology
- Learning to live love relationships
- Seeking to live parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood
- Supporting the prenatal relationship between mother and child by “prenatal bonding”
- More societal support for expectant parents

# **“Physiological prematurity” a new paradigm?**

- It explains many specifics of homo sapiens
- Well founded by biology and by psychological observations
- It has bearing capacity in explaining cultural phenomena
- It establishes Prenatal Psychology as a basic science in the Humanities
- Wide practical meaning e.g. health sciences, political science, psychohistory, peace science

# Future

- Establishing “Working Groups for Cultural Impacts of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology” in APPPAH, ISPPM, and other related societies
- Establishing Think Tanks of Psycho-Historians and Prenatal Psychologists for the Support of Political Leaders for Handling the Encounter between Societies with different Mentalities
- Parenting for Peace (Axness, Grille): Think Tanks for Supporting Responsible Parenthood in different Countries
- Influencing the Academic Field

# Literature I

- Ludwig Janus: Enduring Effects of the Prenatal and Perinatal Life – Echoes of the Womb (download from [www.Ludwig-Janus.de](http://www.Ludwig-Janus.de))
- Thomas Verny: The baby of tomorrow.
- David Chamberlain: The Mind of the newborn baby. Windows to the Womb.
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# Literature II

- Michael Irving (1989) Natalism as Pre- and Perinatal Metaphor. In: Pre- and Perinatal Psychology 4: 83–110.
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## Literature III

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- Lloyd deMause (2002) The emotional Life of Nations. Karnac, New York, London.
- Ludwig Janus (2018) Homo foetalis. Mattes Heidelberg.
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# Literature IV

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- Carola Meier-Seethaler (1993) *Von der göttlichen Löwin zum Wahrzeichen männlicher Macht. Ursprung und Wandel großer Symbole (From the divine lioness to the emblem of male power. Origin and change of great symbols)*. Kreuz, Stuttgart.



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- Prenatal Bonding: [www.bindungsanalyse.de](http://www.bindungsanalyse.de)
- Psychohistory: [www.psychohistorie.de](http://www.psychohistorie.de)
- Publications: [www.mattes.de](http://www.mattes.de)
- Institute for Prenatal Psychology and Medicine,  
[www.prenatalpsychologie.de](http://www.prenatalpsychologie.de).