

Almost 50 years ago, Shulamith Firestone declared the uneven distribution of reproductive labour to be the source of women's oppression. Ectogenesis, she concluded, would be the key to women's liberation. This paper argues the contrary: we should reject ectogenesis because it relies on and perpetuates a problematic view of pregnancy that is rooted in a harmful patriarchal system, which rather than liberating women, serves to devalue them. Historically, we, as a society, tend to outsource work we do not value. Just as cleaning, once outsourced to the housemaid, is now delegated to machines (such as 'Henry the Hoover'), so too is gestation being passed down the ranks: from gestational mother, to surrogate mother, and now, to artificial wombs. For those privileged enough to have the choice, why use your own womb when you can use the womb of a surrogate? And now, why use the womb of a surrogate when you can use an artificial one? Certainly, there are multiple reasons not to do so, some of which derive from the negative effects that ectogenesis may have on the foetus. But the reasons this paper focuses on are not foetus-centred, nor do such reasons locate the wrongness of ectogenesis in its instrumental consequences. Rather, this paper argues that ectogenesis is intrinsically wrong due to a misunderstanding of pregnancy that is both biologically and morally dubious, which, as is shown in this paper, can be demonstrated through a metaphysical analysis of pregnancy.

To this end, this paper aims to make the connection between ectogenesis and surrogacy and, in turn, explain the devaluing of gestation via an exploration of the metaphysics of pregnancy. In considering the metaphysical relationship between the foetus and the gestational mother during pregnancy, we can see how or why it might be that practices such as ectogenesis arise. Furthermore, by articulating various models for understanding the metaphysical relationship between foetus and gestator, we can see how one model – the Container model, whereby the mother is merely a container for the foetus – may be presupposed in underlying how we conceive of ectogenesis favourably, and how according to another model – the Parthood model whereby the foetus is a proper part of the mother – we may conceive of ectogenesis unfavourably. Under the assumption of the Container model, we are more likely to think that any container will suffice, even an artificial one. Yet under the assumption of the Parthood model, we are less likely to treat the gestator as fungible given the parthood nature of the relationship between the foetus and what is gestating it. Since, as this paper argues, we ought to value gestation and conceive of pregnancy on a Parthood model, we should not welcome reproductive technologies that perpetuate the undervaluing of gestation and disruption of the relationship between foetus and gestator. In conclusion, artificial wombs simply will not do – not in playing the role of the gestator, nor in securing women's liberation. Good things may come from ectogenesis, certainly, but those ends do not justify the means.