

Do Women Really Have the Right to Choose Abortion?

Not since slavery during the Civil War has this nation been more divided on a moral issue than a woman's right to choose an abortion. One could contend that the right to choose means that a woman can elect to either carry an unplanned conceptus to term or to eliminate a developing embryonic organism (individual) that had been fertilized at least four weeks before based on the last missed menstrual date.

Since the human fertilized egg takes eight days to implant into the uterus, it means that the conceptus has been developing for three weeks prior to detection. The conceptus is considered to be an embryo at three to eight weeks and a fetus from nine weeks to birth. However, the first heartbeat occurs prior to one month (21-22 days) in the embryonic stage, and an adult-like heart develops during the fourth to seventh week period.

The arteries, veins and lymphatics of the circulatory system are also in place by the seventh week. A recognizable human being is present by the ninth week, with the sex of the fetus being distinguishable by 12 weeks.

Many fetuses delivered from 26 to 36 weeks of gestation are capable of survival, and more recently, some are viable at 24 to 26 weeks. Overall, it can be stated that an abortion extinguishes a life form clearly distinguishable as a human being with a beating, four-chambered heart capable of assimilating nutrients and producing waste (urine formation begins at the 9-to-12-week period). In our present American society with a constitution-based republic legal system, the premeditated taking of a human life is considered homicide, while the involuntary form of this act is considered manslaughter at the very least.

A major premise on which the abortion issue rests is that a woman has the right to do with her body as she chooses. While this may at first appear to be an inalienable right easily justified and defensible on any human rights forum, it has a caveat which is not normally addressed. That is, if the cells/tissues of the conceptus could be proven to be biologically and biochemically distinct, and even foreign to the mother's tissues, would such a woman's right be extended to include a body clearly different from that of her own? This line of reasoning invalidates the basic premise, since a woman's right could only extend as far as the uterine/placental interface.

This discussion can next be focused on what evidence is available to demonstrate that the fetus is comprised of cells and tissues clearly distinct from the mother by genetic, immunologic and biochemical criteria. The body's immune system, comprised of the spleen, thymus and lymphoid tissues, is responsible for distinguishing the "self" from the "non-self" chemicals and cells; it also defends our bodies against invading viruses, bacteria and foreign bodies.

It is the immune system that is attacked by the HIV virus in AIDS disease. Unfortunately, this protection also prevents one person from accepting a skin graft or organ transplant from another individual even though graft surgical procedures are readily available. Skin grafts between genetically identical people (identical twins) are readily accepted, while grafts between genetically non-identical people are rejected without exception.

Now, if the pregnant woman's fetal tissues were her own, then skin or organ grafts between the mother and her baby would be readily accepted. But in fact, they are not. They are rejected. The reason for this rejection is that half the genes originate from the father and half from the mother comprising a new individual at fertilization.

This new set of genes produce new identification (I.D.) tag markers (bar codes) on each fetal cell and tissue which tells the new body that these elements are "self" and belong to itself. These cell surface I.D. tags are called ABO and Rh chemicals on red blood cells and HLA chemicals on white blood cells and other body cells.

In fact, if fetal cells gain entry into the mother's body through placental rupture, the mother ultimately gets vaccinated against these elements causing hemolytic blood disease in the mother. Therefore, beyond the placental barrier, the fetal cells and tissues do not belong to the pregnant women, but rather represent foreign cells and tissues in her body. Thus, the right of a woman to do with her body as she pleases does not extend to the fetus, which is a discrete and distinct individual.

A further question may arise as to when does an embryo/fetus attain the structures and functions of an immune system characteristic of adult human beings? Alternatively stated, when does the developing human organism attain the identifying cell surface markers (I.D. tags) to discriminate "self" from "non-self"?

Lymphoid tissues and the spleen start developing in the embryo at the fifth week, while the thymus begins at the sixth week. Human lymphocytes appear in embryonic blood by the eighth week of pregnancy. It is the lymphocytes (white blood cells) that are responsible for the body's host defenses and for the production of antibodies against viruses and bacteria.

The chemical immunoglobulin, which comprises antibodies, can be detected in the fetus at the 12th week, and antibody synthesis commences at the 16th week. It is at this latter time period that the fetus can mount an immune antibody response against the rubella virus, the syphilis bacteria and the toxoplasmosis parasite. The antibodies produced can neutralize these invading infectious organisms.

The time which the fetus demonstrates graft rejection, the onset of transplantation immunity, occurs at the 14th week of gestation. However, the chemicals present as I.D. tags (receptors) at the surface³ of lymphocytes can be detected during the 10th to 12th week. Thus, the fetus is fully immunocompetent long before birth.

The chemical system that distinguishes the fetus as a distinct individual from the mother is thus established in early fetal life; however, the genetic differences have existed since the moment of fertilization (as in sperm and egg fusion).

Finally, it has been documented that the fetus begins to feel pain between the 15th to 20th week of gestation. Thus, the fetus can feel the excruciating pain while being aborted.

From the above discussion, it becomes evident that the fetus exists as a foreign allograft within the pregnant woman. Logic would dictate that such a foreign object in the mother's body be rejected. However, man does not fully understand the immunological mechanism of retaining the baby as a graft (allograft) in the mother's body.

God has provided a mechanism that renders the fetus and placenta as "privileged tissue sites," which prevent graft rejection from occurring. Women have been endowed with the privilege to provide a means to propagate the human species through procreation with the seed of man.

Motherhood is an office established by the Creator for continuing the human race and represents a sacred trust that should not be violated by the taking of a life that is not her own. Although this treatise has attempted to provide the intellect, logic and scientific facts to convince the reader that abortion is equivalent to murder (infanticide), the ultimate guide lies in the Word of God, the Bible, which holds that the beginning of knowledge is fear of the Lord

Postscript: Women should be informed about the scientific

facts concerning the conceptus/fetus which lies in her womb. Society has perpetuated the lie to pregnant women that the "mass of tissue" in her uterus is not a human being until full-term birth. Indeed, life begins at conception.

Dr. Jerimiah Asher holds a doctoral degree in philosophy of zoology from the University of Maryland. He serves as the senior research scientist in the New York State Wadsworth Research Center where, since 1979, he has overseen and directed the Wadsworth's Fetal Defect Markers Proficiency Testing Program in the New York State Health Department. As a professor, he has taught university courses in cell biology, human anatomy and physiology, immunology and serology, histology and cancer and fetal biomarkers. He has been affiliated with the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine, the New York Academy of Sciences for the Study of Reproduction and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.