

There has been a lot of discussion concerning an attempt to amend the Vermont constitution affirming a woman's right to an abortion. I am writing in support of H 57, which would protect access for Vermont women of their reproductive rights.

"When does "human life" begin?" was a question I dealt with my entire professional career. As a Reproductive Endocrinologist I assisted many couples in their pursuit of having children through advanced reproductive technologies such as In Vitro Fertilization. There were times however, when couples requested the destruction of their embryos for various personal reasons, and I personally needed to be comfortable with my removing embryos from in vitro life support and allow them to die. I had to feel that it was morally and ethically appropriate.

Science can certainly tell us if we are dealing with "living human tissue" the problem is that it is not science's place to determine when an organism develops to the point that it deserves the respect of being called "a human being". One is a physical definition; the other is a metaphysical definition.

Science is capable growing human cells in cultures, which no one would consider a human being, even though they have the genetic composition of a one-cell embryo at the time of fertilization. Science is capable of cloning animals from a single cell without the introduction of sperm; although cloning is prohibitive in humans, it is technologically feasible.

Various religions view personhood differently; it is a spectrum. The Roman Catholic Church in the 1930's declared that human life began at conception, prior to that it was when the mother perceived fetal movement. Certain Jewish denominations do not consider the fetus a person until after it takes its first breath at birth. Other religions, non-theistic religions, or atheists fall somewhere in between.

The 1<sup>st</sup> sentence of the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution states "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". By arbitrarily, stating that an embryo, or non-viable fetus is a person supports the religious belief of one religion over another, and should be perceived to be unconstitutional under our Federal and our State Constitution.

I have included an editorial I wrote back in 2007 for my specialty medical journal, which gives more detail. I look forward to how this issue will be resolved, but hopefully the woman's reproductive choice, as well as one's individual religious beliefs ultimately needs to be protected. Thanks in advance for considering my position.

Sincerely yours,

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