

## **Abortion – A Woman’s Right to Choose?**

*(Foundation for Human Development)*

### **1. Why shouldn’t a woman have the right to choose an abortion if she needs one?**

The ‘right to choose’ sounds desirable, but whether it is desirable or not depends on what the choice is about. Very few people these days would say a man should have the right to choose to beat up his wife. Most people would agree that whites in South Africa shouldn’t have the right to choose where blacks can and can’t live. Most feminists would deny employers the right to choose their employees on the basis of gender. Most people would agree with a law denying women the right to choose to abuse their children. Our right to choose in so many areas is limited by the more fundamental rights of other people, and most people accept this.

### **2. But how does this apply to the case of abortion, where the woman is the only one affected, and no-one else’s fundamental rights are in question?**

The fact is that the woman is not the only one affected. Abortion kills an unborn child. A society that allows abortion is denying the most fundamental human right – the right of life – to one group of human beings, the unborn.

### **3. How can a foetus be a human being when it has no separate existence? Surely it is just part of the women?**

Advances in medical science have proved beyond doubt that the human embryo or foetus is biologically separate from its mother. From the moment of conception, after the sperm penetrates the egg, a new individual comes into existence, genetically different from its mother and father. This individual must be human – human beings can only conceive human beings just as dogs can only conceive dogs. Far from being part of the mother, the baby is in fact foreign tissue to the mother. The baby’s immediate environment – the amniotic sac – and part of the support system – the placenta and cord – are not part of the woman’s body but are formed by the and have the child’s chromosomes. Ultrasound and other new technology make it possible to see the child in the womb from an early age. Since the development of in vitro fertilisation the embryo can certainly exist outside a female body, and medical science is steadily pushing back the age at which a baby will survive if born prematurely. All these scientific advances confirm that the unborn is a separate human being.

### **4. Isn’t the foetus only a potential human being?**

The terms ‘embryo’, ‘foetus’, ‘baby’, ‘child’, ‘adult’, are just different words for a human being at different stages of life. A child is a potential adult, and will grow into an adult if given the necessities of life; the fact that a child does not yet have all the capacities of an adult doesn’t mean the child is not a human being. The foetus, like the child, is a human being with potential. Given the necessities of life, a human foetus will grow into a human child and then a human adult. If a human foetus is not a human being, what is it? It is obviously nonsense to say it belongs to any other species.

**5. But isn't the foetus completely dependent on his or her mother?**

Until born, the child depends on his or her mother for food, oxygen and warmth. Even after birth the baby is dependent on her or someone else for these things, for a very long time. Very few people are ever entirely independent of others for their basic needs. At certain times of our lives, eg in serious illness, we may be extremely dependent on others. This does not give anyone the right to kill us, even if they find our dependency a burden.

**6. Even if the foetus is human, it is not a person with rights.**

Most of us use the terms 'person' and 'human being' interchangeably, except when we want to justify killing some type of human being. For example, the genocides of European Jews and Tasmanian Aborigines were carried out by people who did not think they were killing people with human rights. If it is just up to those in power to decide which human beings have fundamental rights, we are all in danger. In fact, however, society has traditionally regarded the unborn as having rights. For example, the unborn may own property or be an heir, and convicted pregnant women on death row were not executed until after the child was born.

**7. Why should the rights of an undeveloped foetus take precedence over the rights of a grown woman?**

We are talking about the most fundamental human right – the right to life – in the respect of the unborn child. In the vast majority of cases, continuing her pregnancy does not pose a threat to the actual life of the mother. (This is not to deny that her pregnancy may greatly affect her life, especially if she chooses to keep her child.) Because it is so basic, the right to life of the unborn child should take precedence over other rights of the mother, just as the right to life of a born child does. A woman is not allowed to kill her born children or her husband or her boss, even if things they make her life miserable and prevent her doing things she would like to do. The mother's right to a certain lifestyle should not take precedence over the unborn right to life.

**8. But bringing up a child means a huge commitment of time and energy for a major part of the woman's life.**

This need not be true, as the baby can be given up for adoption. These days there are long waiting lists of couples eager to adopt a child whose mother feels this option would be best for her and her baby. Mothers who choose to keep their babies are making a major commitment of their lives. However, most parents find this is repaid in the love of their children. Fortunately, society has a more accepting and helpful attitude to single mothers now than in the past, although there is still a long way to go in getting society to cater for the reality of women's role as child bearer and childrearer.

**9. The woman may lose her job or have to give up her education because of her pregnancy.**

This is less likely to be true now than it was in the past. For example, there are laws in New South Wales that prohibit discrimination on the basis of pregnancy. It is usually possible to continue education through pregnancy, at least. However, a woman may have to postpone some of her plans for a time.

**10. How can women ever be equal to men if they are not allowed to control their fertility?**

Woman should be allowed to control their fertility to the extent that is consistent with the basic rights of others. For example they have the right to consent to or refuse intercourse. It is true that men have able to avoid the consequences of their sexual behaviour to a much greater extent that women have. Now that it is possible to identify genetically the father of a child, this may change. Even if it does not, rights to fertility control should stop short of killing the unborn child. Abortion on demand, of course, makes it even easier for men to evade their responsibilities. Many women have abortions because of pressure from their male partner. This is not free choice.

**11. Feminists regard the right to abortion as fundamental to women's liberation from male oppression.**

Not all feminists do, and many others see abortion as a necessary evil rather than as morally neutral. It should be remembered that half of the babies aborted are likely to be female. They are not being given any 'right to choose'. Where sex identification of the unborn is available, there are recorded cases of females being aborted simply because they are the 'wrong' sex. This is a form of discrimination against women which 'pro-choice' activities would find hard to argue against. Abortion is really another form of oppression of the weak by those more powerful. It is a denial of true liberation for women to combat oppression by oppressing their own offspring.

**12. If legal abortion is not available, women will simply resort to illegal 'backyard' abortions or self-abortions, which carry great risks to women's lives and health.**

Studies have shown that most women with an unwanted pregnancy will not seek out an illegal abortion or self-abort if a legal abortion is not available. In any case, doctors, using the same methods as in legal abortions, have generally done illegal abortions in recent times. Abortion advocates to gain sympathy for their cause have grossly exaggerated this number of deaths from illegal abortion.

**13. Why should the law impose compulsory motherhood on any women?**

A woman who is pregnant is already a mother. Her child already exists. Once the child is born, she may be free of it by giving it up for adoption. (However, many unwanted pregnancies end up producing wanted babies.) A law outlawing abortion seeks only to prevent a woman killing her child while the child is developing in her womb.

**14. Why should the law interfere with what goes on in the privacy of a woman's womb?**

Because what goes in the privacy of the womb is the growth and development of a human being, who is entitled to the protection of the law. The same reason allows the law to interfere with what goes on in the privacy of someone's home if violence is involved.

**15. A woman is the only one who should decide whether she should bear a child or not. In particular, the women's partner should have no right to prevent her having an abortion.**

If this were true, it would mean that she had no right to call on him for support if she decides to have the child. If a woman can choose to reject motherhood of a child conceived 'by mistake', the father of the child should equally have the right to reject his fatherhood and its responsibilities if he so chooses. This hardly seems conducive to true women's liberation, let alone justice for the child.

**For further information**

**Contact  
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