

Ectogenesis: Artificial Womb Technology – A Women’s Beyond Choice

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Abstract: *In 2017, a Philadelphia research team revealed the closest thing to an artificial womb (AW) the world had ever seen. The ‘biobag’, if as successful as early animal testing suggests, will change the face of neonatal intensive care. At present, premature neonates born earlier than 22 weeks have no hope of survival. For some time, there have been no significant improvements in mortality rates or incidences of long-term complications for preterms at the viability threshold. Artificial womb technology (AWT), that might change these odds, is eagerly anticipated for clinical application. We need to understand whether AWT is an extension of current intensive care or something entirely new. This question is central to determining when and how the biobag should be used on human subjects. This paper examines the science behind AWT and advances two principal claims. First, AWT is conceptually different from conventional intensive care. Identifying why AWT should be understood as distinct demonstrates how it raises different ethico-legal questions. Second, these questions should be formulated without the ‘human being growing in the AW’ being described with inherently value laden terminology. The ‘human being in an AW’ is neither a fetus nor a baby, and the ethical tethers associated with these terms could perpetuate misunderstanding and confusion. Thus, the term ‘gestateling’ should be adopted to refer to this new product of human reproduction: a developing human being gestating ex utero. While this paper does not attempt to solve all the ethical problems associated with AWT, it makes important clarifications that will enable better formulation of relevant ethical questions for future exploration. This is an open access article distributed in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported (CC BY 4.0) license, which permits others to copy, redistribute, remix, transform and build upon this work for any purpose, provided the original work is properly cited, a link to the licence is given, and indication of whether changes were made.*

Keywords: Infertility, Ectogenesis, Artificial womb technology (AWT)

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