

REVIEW

Revisiting the Th1/Th2 Paradigm

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The identification of subsets of CD4⁺ helper cells producing distinct pattern of cytokines has provided a valuable framework for understanding how different effector populations of immune cells can be recruited *in vivo* during infection. In the view of most investigators, Th1 and Th2 cells produce factors that serve as their own autocrine factors and cytokines exerting suppressive activities on each other's development and activity. This concept intuitively explains the natural tendency of immune responses to become progressively polarized. However, several experimental observations appear difficult to rationalize with a simple, 'symmetrical' Th1/Th2 paradigm including those that Th1 cells do not produce their own growth factor; that both Th1 and Th2 cells can promote inflammatory responses; that interleukin-10 (IL-10) inhibits inflammatory responses in a Th1/Th2-independent fashion; that IL-10 promotes the development of Th1-type effector cells; and that IL-12 can amplify pre-established Th2 responses. The purpose of the present analysis is to provide a revised model for better understanding how cytokines regulate immune responses *in vivo*.

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INTRODUCTION

The most important function of the immune system is probably to protect the organism against infectious diseases. Since no single effector response can effectively deal with all forms of pathogenic aggressions, the diversity of effector mechanisms and their regulation are absolutely essential for host survival, as demonstrated in many experimental infectious animal models [1–3]. The identification of functionally distinct CD4⁺ T helper subpopulations (termed Th1 and Th2) [4], producing distinct patterns of cytokines, has provided an important insight into the mechanisms by which polarized immune responses occur *in vivo* in response to several pathogens. Indeed, Th1 cells secreting interferon- γ (IFN- γ) are involved in monocyte/macrophage-mediated inflammatory responses, while Th2-derived cytokines [interleukin-4 (IL-4), IL-5 and IL-10] encourage antibody production (including IgE responses) and promote mast cell and eosinophil proliferation and function (reviewed in refs 1–3). Observations performed using T-cell receptor (TCR)-transgenic mouse models have clearly demonstrated that the cytokine environment present during early T-cell activation determines the dominant cytokine profile of the subsequent T-cell response. Thus, antigen-presenting cell-derived IL-12 has been shown to promote the differentiation of naïve T cells toward the Th1

response phenotype, while IL-4, produced early in the response by mast cells, basophils and/or subpopulations of CD4⁺ NK1.1⁺ and/or CD4⁺ NK1.1⁻ [5] cells favours the development of the Th2 response phenotype (reviewed in refs 1–3). According to this scheme, the differentiation of helper cells from uncommitted precursors is regulated by the balance of IL-4 and IL-12 present during the onset of the response (Fig. 1A).

A natural tendency toward polarization of immune effector *in vivo* has been inferred from the observation that cytokines produced by Th2-like cells (IL-4, IL-10) inhibit the induction of Th1 responses, while Th1-derived cytokines (notably IFN- γ) are thought to counteract Th2 cell development (reviewed in refs 1–3). Collectively, these studies have led to the classical model of Th1/Th2 cross-regulation, as depicted in Fig. 1B, implying the existence of two 'competing helper subsets', each producing their own autocrine growth factor and cytokines able to counteract each other's development and activity.

The purpose of the present study is to discuss recent experimental observations which suggest that regulation of an immune response does not rely on the 'symmetrical' cross-regulatory activity of Th1- and Th2-like cells. In particular, cytokines that have long been considered to act in a helper subset-specific manner (such as IL-10 and IL-12) can exert their regulatory functions in a Th1/Th2-unrestricted fashion, a finding that led us

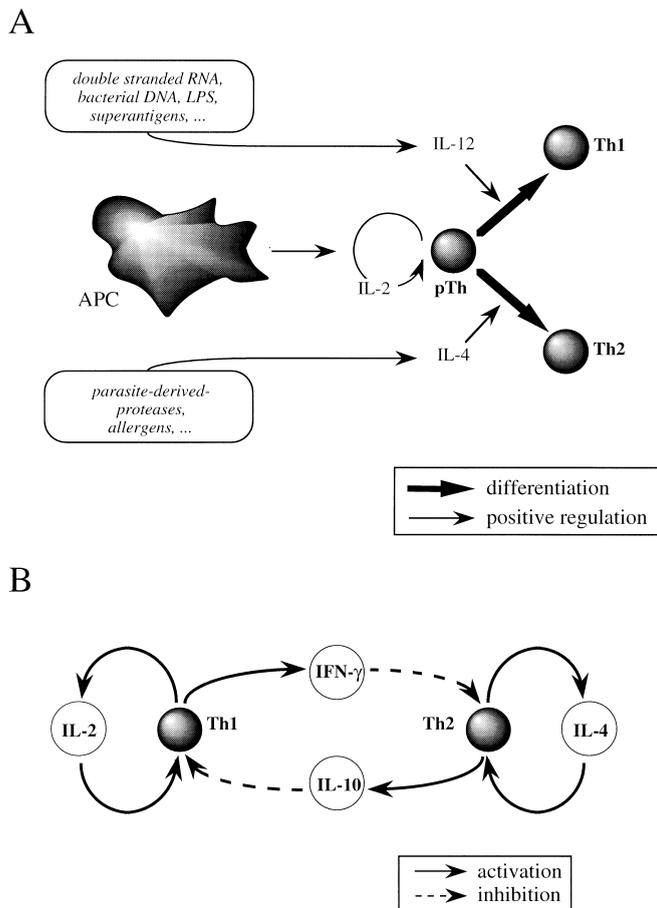


Fig. 1. (A) Differentiation of CD4⁺ T helper subsets. Following interaction with appropriate costimulatory antigen-presenting cells, uncommitted T helper precursor cells (pTh) undergo IL-2-dependent clonal expansion and differentiate into helper subsets (Th1, Th2) producing a limited set of cytokines. Both environmental (including pathogen-derived) and genetic factors determine the early predominance of IL-12 and IL-4, the most potent factors inducing selective Th1 and Th2 differentiation. (B) The classical (symmetric) model of Th1/Th2 cross-regulation.

to propose a revised version of the Th1/Th2 regulatory pathway. This study also offers an alternative explanation to the frequently observed dichotomy between cellular and humoral responses, a finding difficult to rationalize with the current concept of Th1/Th2 cross-regulation.

PARACRINE AND AUTOCRINE GROWTH OF HELPER SUBSETS

Studies performed on differentiated helper cells have suggested that IL-12 represents not only an important differentiation cytokine promoting the development of Th1 responses, but also acts as an important growth factor for Th1-like lymphocytes. In a particular study, the proliferation induced by antigen/antigen-presenting cell (APC) stimulation of several Th1 clones was not significantly affected by anti-IL-2 antibodies but was

markedly inhibited by anti-IL-12 antibodies [6]. These findings confirm previously reported observations suggesting that, in contrast to naive T cells, proliferation of terminally differentiated Th1 clones, relies on IL-12 rather than on an IL-2-driven autocrine mechanism [6–8]. IL-2 production by established Th1 clones may therefore result from *in vitro* selection, and may not represent a physiologically relevant autocrine growth mechanism. In support of these findings, it has been recently demonstrated that Th1 and Th2 cells derived from TCR transgenic mice rapidly lose the ability to produce IL-2 while acquiring the capacity to produce, respectively, IFN- γ and IL-4 [9, 10].

It has been recently recognized that exogenous IL-12 does not exert an inhibitory effect on IL-4-producing cells [11], and sometimes even enhances the production of IL-4 when present during restimulation of differentiated Th2 cells [12–14]. Similarly, IL-12 has been recently shown to induce IL-4 mRNA in naive murine T cells [15]. These *in vitro* observations have been corroborated by *in vivo* studies, which showed that although IL-12 is a potent inducer of Th1-like responses when administered during antigen-priming of naive animals, it supports the development of a Th2 recall response when injected into previously immunized animals [16]. In particular, IL-12 given with inoculation of *Leishmania* parasites in susceptible BALB/c mice induced IFN- γ and suppressed IL-4 production, while when it was injected 14 days following infection, it led to increased IL-4 production [17]. Thus, and although the cellular targets and molecular basis of this phenomenon have not been established yet, IL-12 appears to exert a positive regulatory role on established Th2 responses. It should be noted that although Th2 cells selectively lose expression of the $\beta 2$ subunit of the IL-12 receptor required for STAT-mediated signalling, they express high levels of the IL-12 receptor $\beta 1$ subunit mRNA and protein, indicating that they may retain some responsiveness to IL-12 [18].

IL-12-mediated suppression of IL-4 producing cells observed in several *in vivo* models may therefore reflect the Th2-inhibitory properties of IFN- γ , rather than a direct antagonistic effect of IL-12 on IL-4 production [19], as evidenced by the finding that IL-12 administered to IFN- γ knockout mice exacerbated schistosome-induced Th2-dependent granuloma formation and caused a dramatic increase in serum IgE levels [19]. Note that in a similar fashion, IL-12-induced IFN- γ has been shown to down-regulate the stimulatory activity of IL-12 on haematopoiesis [20]. Suppression of Th2 responses by IL-12 in several models may therefore reflect the positive selection of non-IL-4-producing cells rather than the suppression of IL-4 secretion.

Collectively, these data suggest that APC-derived IL-12 and not IL-2, plays a major role in the development and clonal expansion of Th1-like cells, while Th2-like cells produce their own growth factor (IL-4) in an IL-12-independent fashion [21]. Moreover, although IL-12 clearly represents a Th1-promoting factor when present early during the response, it does not counteract, and may even amplify, an existing Th2 response. Thus clonal expansion of Th1-like cells depends on the paracrine secretion of growth factors, while Th2 cells appear to grow in an autocrine fashion.

IL-10 DOWN-REGULATES BOTH Th1 AND Th2 INFLAMMATORY RESPONSES

The observation that murine Th2 clones produce large amounts of IL-10, a cytokine known to block the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as IFN- γ and IL-12 (see refs 2, 3 for review and references below) has led to the conclusion that Th2 cells act as natural regulators of Th1-mediated inflammatory responses. However, although inflammatory responses have been generally associated with macrophages and natural killer (NK) cell activation (Th1-mediated inflammation), recent observations have clearly established that both Th1 and Th2 cells can mediate inflammatory responses, i.e. a local increase in blood flow and permeability of the microvascular wall, leading to accumulation of leucocytes in the inflamed tissue. Collectively, these responses have been referred to as hypersensitivity reactions, ranging from type I (immediate hypersensitivity reaction, mediated by IgE and mast cells) to type IV (delayed-type hypersensitivity reaction, mediated by IFN- γ -regulated effectors).

The airway inflammation observed during asthma is characterized by infiltration of the airway wall by Th2-like cells, eosinophils and mast cells [22]. Subcutaneous injection of activated Th2 cells in normal mice results in rapid interstitial oedema associated with a cellular infiltrate of neutrophils and mononuclear cells at the site of injection [23]. Th2 cells are also responsible for granuloma formation and hepatic fibrosis observed in mice infected with *Schistosoma mansoni* [24]. It has been recently demonstrated that polarized Th2-like cells can promote acute allograft rejection [25], an effector mechanism generally attributed to Th1-like responses. Finally, a detailed kinetic study performed in an *in vivo* model of delayed-type hypersensitivity (DTH) has recently shown that both IFN- γ - and IL-5-producing lymphocytes are recruited at the site of antigen injection [26]. Collectively, these data suggest that both Th1 and Th2 responses can mediate acute inflammatory responses characterized by local recruitment of antigen-non-specific effectors (such as macrophages, mast cells, eosinophils), causing tissue damage.

IL-10 was originally described as a Th2-derived factor inhibiting the synthesis of cytokines, particularly IFN- γ , by Th1 cells. Although IL-10 may have some direct effect on T cells [27], most of its inhibitory activity has been associated with an effect on macrophages and APC functions [28].

Several studies, mostly performed on human T cells, have recently suggested that IL-10 may down-regulate immune responses in a Th subset-unrestricted fashion. Indeed, IL-10 down-regulates APC-dependent cytokine synthesis by Th0, Th1 and Th2 human cells. In particular, synthesis of the Th2-type cytokines IL-4 and IL-5 was clearly inhibited [29]. Similarly, human IL-10 has been found to inhibit IL-5 production from both human T and natural killer (NK) cells [30, 31]. Down-modulation of both constitutive and IFN- γ -induced expression of major histocompatibility complex (MHC) class II by monocyte/macrophage may at least in part explain the lack of helper subset restriction for the inhibitory properties of human

IL-10. It should be noted, however, that human IL-10 also inhibits T-cell growth triggered by immobilized anti-CD3 antibodies in the absence of monocytes [32].

In murine models, IL-10 has been generally shown to inhibit Th1 but not Th2 cell growth. IL-10 inhibits the development of Th1 responses by down-regulating IL-12 production by APC [33–35] including dendritic cells [36]. Accordingly, IL-10 has been shown to play an important regulatory role during Th1-type bacterial superantigen and endotoxin-induced septic shock. Indeed, antibody-mediated neutralization of endogenous IL-10 significantly enhanced SEB and lipopolysaccharide (LPS)-induced IFN- γ secretion and lethality in murine models [37, 38]. However, it has been recently demonstrated that IL-10 can down-modulate IL-5 production by murine T lymphocytes. Treatment of ovalbumin-sensitized animals with recombinant murine IL-10 (rmIL-10) down-regulates antigen-induced allergic eosinophilia and *in vivo* IL-5 production [39]. In agreement with these findings, it has been reported that mice rendered genetically deficient for IL-10 expression and infected by *Nippostrongylus* produced higher levels of both IL-5 and IFN- γ in response to lectin-mediated *in vitro* stimulation [40]. Notably, these animals also displayed increased levels of serum IgG2a and IgA (immunoglobulin subclasses positively regulated by, respectively, IFN- γ and IL-5) before immunization. Of note, murine IL-10 has been recently shown to prevent CD86 up-regulation on macrophages [41] and Langerhans' cells [42]. As priming of Th2 cells appears to require CD86 expression [43–45], IL-10 may also inhibit Th2-cell activation by interfering with the delivery of appropriate costimulatory signal(s).

Although observations made with human cells suggest a broader regulatory role for IL-10 (including inhibition of Th2-cell proliferation and IL-4-induced IgE synthesis, see ref. 46), the available data demonstrate that, in murine models, IL-10 is at least able to down-regulate the production of IL-5, a typical Th2-derived cytokine. Thus IL-10 appears to inhibit pro-inflammatory cytokine production by both Th1-like [tumour necrosis factor (TNF- α), IFN- γ] and Th2-like (TNF- α , IL-5) effectors. We therefore propose that, in contrast to the classical 'symmetrical' view of Th1/Th2 cross-regulation, IL-10 represents an anti-inflammatory agent acting in a Th-subset independent fashion (see Fig. 2).

THE POSITIVE REGULATORY PROPERTIES OF IL-10

Although originally described as cytokine synthesis inhibitory factor, IL-10 expresses proliferative, activating and chemotactic properties upon various subsets of lymphocytes. In particular, IL-10 acts as a chemoattractant for CD8⁺ T cells [47], and enhances the differentiation, growth and cytotoxic activity of CD8⁺ cytotoxic T lymphocytes [48] and NK cells [49, 50]. IL-10 extends the viability of mouse mast cell lines *in vitro* and synergizes with IL-3 and IL-4 to stimulate their proliferation. Recent studies have also disclosed the positive effects of IL-10 on B-cell responses, including induction of class II expression,

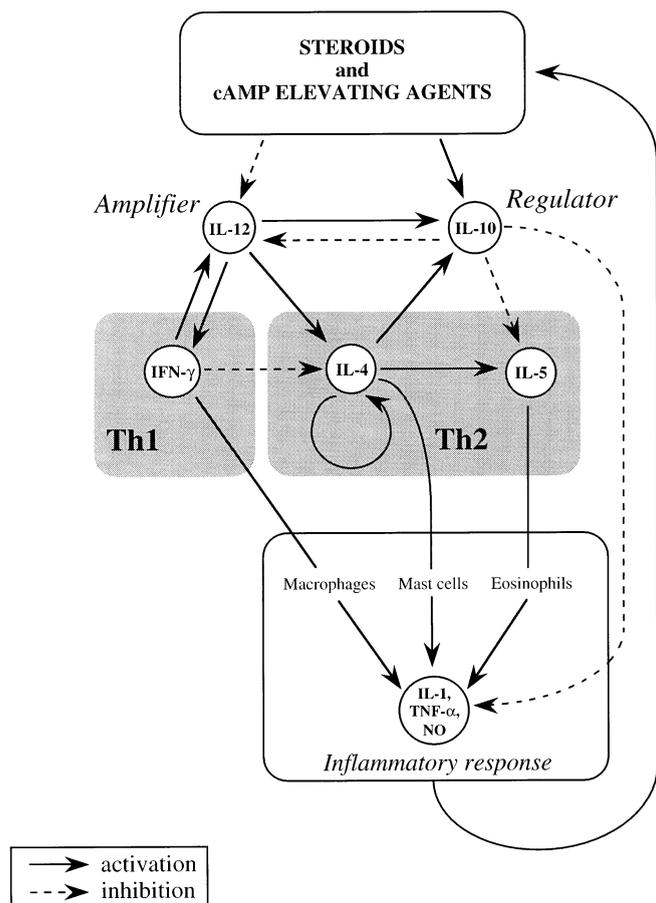


Fig. 2. The relationship between key cytokines during a T-helper-dependent immune response. Both Th1 and Th2 subsets can promote an inflammatory response, characterized by the activation of antigen-specific effectors causing tissue injury. The inflammatory response is regulated in a T helper-unrestricted fashion by IL-12 (acting as an amplifier) and IL-10 (acting as a negative regulator). Steroids and cAMP-elevating agents exert their influence by affecting the IL-12/IL-10 balance.

enhanced growth and differentiation [51] and rescue from apoptosis in germinal centres [52].

These observations have been corroborated by several *in vivo* models showing that IL-10 (administered systemically or produced by engineered tumour cell lines) enhances tumour rejection and elicits a strong cytotoxic and antibody-dependent immune memory response [53, 54]. Similarly, the use of transgenic mice expressing IL-10 under a tissue-specific promoter has led to the conclusion that IL-10 can augment *in vivo* immune responses to self antigens [55]. Collectively these observations indicate that IL-10 does not simply act as an anti-inflammatory agent, but also promotes and sustains the development of immune effectors, some of which (cytotoxic cells) are generally thought to represent typical Th1-like effectors.

A MODEL OF Th1/Th2 CROSS-REGULATION

It has been recently reported that exogenous murine IL-12

induces a large increase in IL-10 secretion *in vivo* [17, 56]. This finding correlates with earlier reports describing the ability of bacterial products to induce both IL-10 and IL-12 [57, 58]. Recently, numerous investigators have confirmed these observations and have shown that IL-12 strongly enhances IL-10 production by human T cells [59–62]. As IL-10 in turn strongly inhibits APC-derived IL-12 production [33–36], these studies suggest that IL-12 itself initiates a negative feedback loop that limits its pro-inflammatory properties.

Thus, several observations are in agreement with the idea that IL-10 represents a key regulatory molecule whose natural function is the down-modulation of immune inflammatory responses. First, as previously discussed, IL-10 can down-regulate both Th1- and Th2-driven inflammatory responses; second, IL-10 can be produced by a very diverse set of lymphoid (including most T-cell subsets [1], CD5⁺ B cells [63], mast cells [64], eosinophils [65], macrophages/monocytes [66, 67]) and non-lymphoid (keratinocytes [68], placental cytotrophoblasts [69]) cells. Finally, many anti-inflammatory compounds exert their immunosuppressive activity by inducing IL-10 production. These include agents able to increase intracellular cAMP such as prostaglandins [70–72], β -adrenergic agonists [73], synthetic peptides representing a conserved domain of the transmembrane envelope of several retrovirus [74], and phosphodiesterase inhibitors [75]. Similarly, glucocorticoids [76] and ultraviolet radiation [77] have been shown to promote IL-10 production. Consistent with the hypothesis that the IL-10/IL-12 balance plays a predominant role in the regulation of an immune response, most anti-inflammatory agents known to promote IL-10 synthesis inhibit IL-12 production (prostaglandin E₂ [72, 78], β -adrenergic agonists [79], dexamethasone [80], phosphodiesterase inhibitors [81] or induce a selective loss of IL-12-producing cells (ultraviolet light [82], dexamethasone [83]).

A model representing the previously discussed regulatory interactions between selected cytokines is presented in Fig. 2. As shown, a predominant role in the control of an ongoing immune response has been attributed to IL-12, considered as an amplifier of the immune response, and to IL-10, which acts as a negative regulator of all inflammatory responses. As we have focused our discussion on the cross-regulatory properties of cytokines produced by differentiated helper/effecter cells, the role of IL-2, known to affect clonal expansion and differentiation of Th0 cells, has not been considered. Similarly, and for the sake of simplicity, the role of several other important cytokines (including IL-1, IL-6, IL-13, IL-15, IGIF or transforming growth factor- β) and the effect of genetic background differences will not be discussed.

It should be noted that IL-10 has not been considered as a typical Th2 cytokine, as it may be produced by virtually all immune effectors under appropriate experimental settings. In contrast to the 'classical' view of Th1/Th2 cross-regulation, the present model postulates a predominant anti-inflammatory role for IL-10 (including suppression of IL-5) and highlights the fact that only Th2 cells behave in an autocatalytic manner (IL-4 enhances its own production). Consequently, a Th2 response

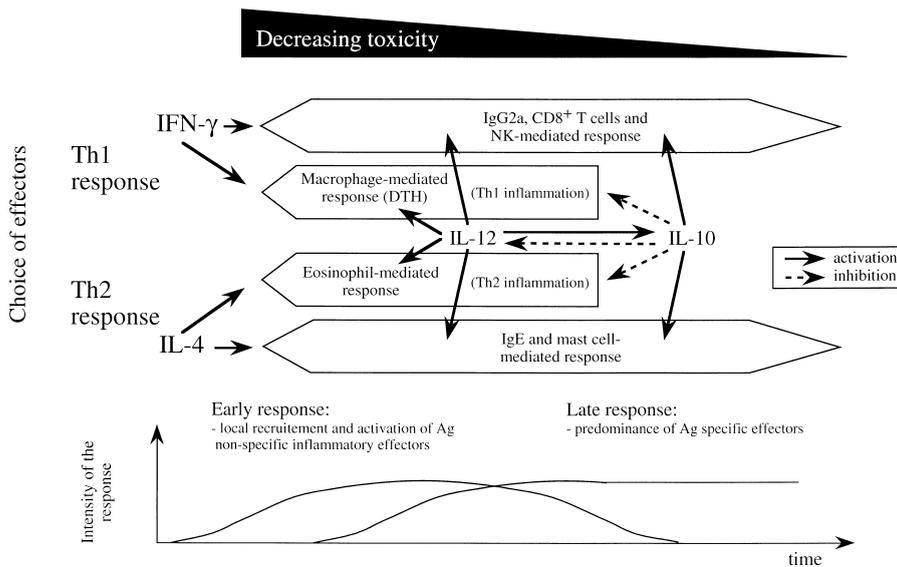


Fig. 3. Regulation of the immune response. IL-10 appears to down-regulate inflammatory, noxious responses, while favouring the 'switch' to less aggressive forms of immune defence characterized by antigen-specific effector and memory response.

characterized by IL-4 and IL-10 production but lacking IL-5 secretion can be envisioned, in agreement with recent observations performed in both human [84] and murine [85] models. Importantly, Th1 responses lack a cell autonomous autocatalytic loop, as expansion of Th1 clones is assumed to require APC-derived IL-12, and are consequently particularly sensitive to IL-10-mediated negative regulation. By contrast, the idea that some Th2 responses (in particular the production of regulatory cytokines such as IL-4 and IL-10) are less stringently regulated than Th1 responses may at least partially explain the high incidence of allergen-specific IgE antibodies in human populations.

IMMUNE DEVIATION AND HELPER SUBSETS DICHOTOMY

It has been recently recognized that in addition to the self/non-self discrimination problem and the selection of an adequate effector response, the immune system must cope with the inherent toxicity of its effectors. A need for regulation of potentially harmful responses specific for non-self constituents has been clearly inferred from studies performed in animal models of experimental septic shock [86] and infectious diseases [87–89]. These studies suggested that regulatory mechanisms must operate to counteract immune-mediated tissue damage. It is therefore tempting to speculate that suppressor mechanisms down-regulating the inflammatory response must have appeared before the development of an adaptive immune response. IL-10-like cytokines may have evolved as natural feedback mechanisms for containing the potentially self-destructive properties of primitive inflammatory cells. To this cell autonomous, early regulatory circuit a more sophisticated process of down-regulation of noxious (inflammatory) cells by other cells (IL-10-producing, regulatory) with shared specificity may have been added during vertebrate evolution.

Notably, it has been demonstrated that anti-inflammatory cytokines, including IL-10, play an important role in the survival

to term of the fetal allograft in mammals [90, 91], suggesting that the development of a separate set of regulatory/suppressive cells may have been an important evolutionary step towards the development of viviparity. In agreement with the current idea that cellular immunity predates humoral immunity, primordial regulatory cells may have later acquired the ability to promote antibody production (by conferring to immunosuppressive cytokines novel stimulating properties and through the development of novel cytokines such as IL-4), possibly a less autoaggressive form of immune response. The complete set of Th2-like effectors (comprising eosinophils, mast cells and IgE production) may represent a further evolutionary adaptation in response to parasite infection.

Based on these evolutionary considerations and taking into account the experimental evidence accumulated to date, we propose the following model in order to understand the development and regulation of an immune response.

(1) Following interaction with an antigen that is both foreign and sensed by the immune system as a potential threat, uncommitted helper cells undergo clonal expansion and differentiate into cells expressing a limited set of cytokines. IL-4 and IL-12 clearly represent important polarizing factors directing the choice of effectors during the onset of the response (Fig. 1A).

(2) The inflammatory properties of the antigen-specific immune response are controlled by the relative balance between IL-12 and IL-10, acting in a Th1/Th2-unrestricted fashion. During this early phase, the immune system attempts to eliminate and control infection using the appropriate inflammatory effector cells, which can belong to both the Th1 (macrophage, NK cells), or the Th2 (eosinophils, mastocytes) subset and are characterized by lack of antigen-specificity and host toxicity (Fig. 3). The choice of effectors depends on signals provided by members of the innate immune system (APC or other sentinel-like cells such as the NK1.1⁺ CD4⁺ subset) able to detect microbial-derived molecular signatures.

(3) In a later phase, the immune response appears to be

dominated by effector cells displaying a high level of antigen specificity associated with minimal host toxicity (such as antibody and cytotoxic T-lymphocyte responses). This response, which can be well tolerated by the organisms, may represent both an attempt to contain infectious agents that were not eliminated by the early, noxious inflammatory response and/or a long-term protection against further re-infection. IL-10 (and possibly IL-4), may represent a key factor regulating this particular transition in the immune response (Fig. 3). Again it is important to note that memory cells belonging to both the Th1 (cytotoxic T lymphocytes) and the Th2 (B cells) subset can coexist in immune animals [92], a finding difficult to rationalize with the classical view of 'competing immune responses'.

In this context, it is interesting to note that the phenomenon of 'immune deviation' whereby an inflammatory response is gradually shifted towards a less aggressive form of immune response does not fit a simple Th1/Th2 paradigm. According to our hypothesis, immune deviation is characterized by a shift from an immune response characterized by the presence in the extravascular compartment of effectors lacking antigen-specificity to an immune response displaying high levels of antigen-specificity and minimal toxicity. Thus, the reciprocal relationship between cellular and humoral responses, often referred to as an *in vivo* illustration of the competing nature of Th1 and Th2 responses, probably reflects the inflammatory nature of the cellular response studied (such as delayed type hypersensitivity) versus the non-inflammatory properties of the humoral response and does not simply match a Th1/Th2 dichotomy.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

By analogy with ideas developed by C. Janeway [93] and later P. Matzinger [94] concerning the importance for the immune system to detect 'potential threat to the organisms', we would argue that negative regulation of an immune response evolved mainly to prevent self destruction caused by excessive inflammatory responses. In this perspective, IL-10 may represent a key regulatory cytokine acting in a Th-unrestricted fashion to down-regulate dangerous inflammatory responses (which can belong to both the Th1 and Th2 subsets) leaving other effector responses (again both Th1- and Th2-regulated, such as cytotoxic and antibody responses), available to protect against persistent or recurrent infections.

We hope that the present model will contribute to a better understanding of the positive and negative roles of cytokines in immune regulation and will provide information to develop cytokine-based therapies for the manipulation of immune responses in health and disease.

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