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# Stem Cell Research on Embryonic Persons Is Just

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**Abstract** I argue that embryonic stem cell research is fair to the embryo, even on the assumption that the embryo has attained full personhood and an attendant right to life at conception. This is because the only feasible alternatives open to the embryo are to exist briefly in an unconscious state and be killed or to not exist at all. Hence, one is neither depriving the embryo of an enduring life it would otherwise have had nor is one causing the embryo pain. I also argue that a rational agent in a situation relevantly similar to that of the embryo would consent to such research, and I use this insight to ground two justice-based arguments in favor of this research.

**Keywords** Stem cell · Embryo · Justice · Fairness · Personhood

## Introduction

Many persons and organizations oppose embryonic stem cell research (ESCR) because they believe it results in the death of a human being with full moral rights (e.g., Pontifical Academy for Life 2000). Let us

define someone as strongly pro-personhood if he or she believes that full personhood and an attendant right to life is attained at conception. Of course, many persons and groups are not strongly pro-personhood. Peter Singer (1987), for example, believes that an embryo does not have any rights because it cannot experience pain. Mary Anne Warren (1973) famously distinguished between a biological human and a functioning person with moral rights, and she denies that embryos and fetuses fit into the latter category. Some Kantians such as Bertha Alvarez Manninen (2008) think that embryos lack the requisite capacity for rationality that underlies the right to not be treated as a mere means to an end. Bortolotti and Harris (2005) have argued that an embryo is not a member of the moral community because it does not have an interest in its own well-being. Finally, traditional Judaism has historically held that the embryo does not have status in the moral community until 40 days after conception (Tendler 1999).

Given that there is such a broad diversity of views concerning the embryo's moral status, it would be beneficial to have an argument that established that ESCR is fair to the embryo, and therefore morally just, even if the embryo is a person. Hence, the question I would like to address is whether or not a person can be strongly pro-personhood and also morally consistent in accepting the practices of ESCR. This will, of course, depend on what specific ethical principle(s) ground objections to the justice of ESCR. I have developed several nonutilitarian arguments in favor

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of ESCR that are geared toward a strongly pro-life person and are grounded in familiar and important notions of justice.

One particularly important principle of justice is that we should not *harm* persons merely for the benefit of others. I argue in section two that the embryo is not being harmed even though she is being killed. This sounds paradoxical until one takes into account some peculiar facts that surround the embryo's lack of conscious experience and the feasible (and, therefore, morally relevant) alternatives that are open to the embryo in terms of the lives she can lead. I argue that there are two ways in which one can harm a person. A person can be harmed either by being caused to experience pain or by being deprived of future goods that one would otherwise have. That embryos lack the capacity for consciousness, and therefore cannot experience pain, is an uncontroversial assumption. Many of the ethicists mentioned above use this fact, or similar facts, in order to establish that embryos are not a part of the moral community. Although, I am not taking this approach, it is worth mentioning the uncontroversial nature of this assumption.

What is in need of defense, however, is my assertion that the embryo is not being deprived of a future she would otherwise have. If I can establish this fact, then it also can be established that ESCR is not unjust to the embryo in the sense that the embryo is not being harmed. I distinguish between cases that involve left-over eggs from in vitro fertilization and cases in which an embryo has been made in a laboratory setting for the express purpose of performing ESCR.

In section three, I introduce a thought experiment that establishes that any rational person who is minimally concerned for others and is *in a position relevantly similar to the embryo's own* would choose to be used for ESCR. I want to accomplish two things in section three. First, I want to augment the argument in section two. The fact that persons in a similar situation would volunteer to be sacrificed serves to drive home the point that no harm is actually being done to embryonic persons. I also base an argument on the golden rule to the effect that it is fair to perform ESCR on embryonic persons precisely because any reasonable person would consent to such a procedure being performed on them if they were able to consent. Furthermore, I present an argument modeled on Rawls' concept of the original position for the justice of ESCR.

My concern with justice/fairness considerations also places my argument in the tradition of Immanuel Kant. In section four, I compare the principles of justice on which I have based my argument with Kant's practical imperative to "never treat others as a means to an end" and related pro-life arguments that are based on the dignity of the human person. I conclude that some deontologists will remain unconvinced that ESCR is all things considered justified because they are employing concepts of dignity and justice that are responsive neither to harms that are done to the individual nor to what a reasonable person would consent to. Nevertheless, I have provided several justice-based arguments in favor of ESCR that focus on what is fair to the individual.

## ESCR and Morally Relevant Alternatives

### Two Preliminary Definitions

The arguments I present below rest in part on the claim that the *embryonic persons* who are used for ESCR purposes are not *conscious*. So as to avoid confusion, I want to define (or at least characterize) what I mean by "consciousness" and "embryonic person."

By consciousness I have in mind those qualities associated with what philosophers of mind call "the hard problem of consciousness" (Chalmers 1996, xii). I have in mind first-person subjective experiences that have a phenomenological character that is hard to explain using the language of the brain and mere functional states. Paradigmatic examples include feeling a pleasure or pain and experiencing the vivid color of a bright red wall or the music of a symphony. Another type of conscious state is the awareness of a thought and its meaning. My arguments do not rest on any particular views as to the fundamental ontology of these phenomenal states; I only need be granted that embryos do not have a first-person perspective on the world that either has, or is composed of, these states. This is not a controversial assumption. Indeed, defenders of the strong pro-personhood view have emphasized that achieving consciousness in my intended sense is not necessary for human personhood (Beckwith 1993).

There are, of course, many reductive views of the mind, mental states, and therefore consciousness that attempt to explain how mental states are just physical

states of some sort. The type-identity theory of David Lewis (1966) and others posits that each type of mental state (a thought of a zebra, an itch, etc.) is really nothing more than a specific type of brain state or central nervous system state. Embryonic persons have neither brains nor even a rudimentary central nervous system until after the primitive streak is formed at day 14. Hence, this theory of consciousness fails to raise any difficulties for the arguments of this paper. Similarly, token-identity theories of consciousness also rely on brain and central nervous states that the embryonic person fails to possess.

What about functionalist analyses of mental states such as being in pain? There are many types of functionalism, and I do not want to state anything in haste about this family of views (Fodor 1987). However, it should be noted that the whole point of most functionalist analyses of mental states (e.g., being in pain) is to rid them of the very first-person, subjective, experiential character that is relevant to the arguments of this paper and to our moral theorizing about pain and pleasure more generally speaking. An illustration might be helpful.

Generally speaking, with regard to functionalism a mental state is whatever causes a specific type of response to a specific type of stimulus. If one were to touch a hot stove and then pull one's hand away, the "being in pain" is whatever caused the pulling away of the hand. A natural suggestion is that the feeling of intense heat is what caused the hand to pull back. It is possible to have a functionalist account of the mental that allows for this result, but most functionalists embrace functionalism precisely in order to avoid something like this. What is desired is a state that can be described without using traditional mental vocabulary such as how things *feel*. If a functionalist account of the mental is correct, then a radical revision of our moral outlook is in order. I do not have the space to say more about this issue here. Similar thoughts apply to eliminativist accounts of the mental such as those espoused by Paul Churchland (1984).

With regard to the issue of when an embryonic person comes into being, I accept for the sake of argument the view that is held by defenders of the strong pro-personhood view. Remember, this view entails that full personhood and an attendant right to life is attained at conception. For example, George and Tollefson (2008) have argued that a unique embryonic human person is present at the moment of fertilization.

They hold this view in full awareness of the fact that twinning can occur until the primitive streak is formed. This is important, because embryonic stem cells are harvested from embryos in the blastocyst stage four to five days after fertilization, before the primitive streak is formed.

#### Embryos Created for ESCR

Let us first consider an embryo that is going to be created specifically for ESCR by a research team in a laboratory. This team has to choose between creating a specific person who will live briefly in an unconscious state and then be killed or not creating that person at all. Notice that, if an embryo is created specifically for research purposes, then the odds of her coming into being under circumstances in which the goal of her creation is birth and continued life are astronomically small. This follows from mundane facts that surround the relationship between the identity of individual human persons and the gametes that give rise to them. Different gametes give rise to different persons. Therefore, the exact same two gametes would have had to come together under much different circumstances in order for that same embryo to grow into a fully functioning human person. The embryos that are created in a laboratory specifically for ESCR do not have any realistic potential to be created in a setting where reproduction is the goal.

This point has great moral significance. By creating an embryo for research purposes, the research team has not destroyed a realistic opportunity for that same person to lead a normal life. This is because there was not a realistic opportunity to destroy. Hence, the set of morally relevant alternatives the team has to consider only includes the alternative of creating an embryonic person who will live briefly in an unconscious state of existence and die and the alternative of not creating that embryonic person at all. These are the only morally relevant alternatives precisely because these are the only feasible alternatives. The research team is, therefore, neither causing the embryonic person harm in the form of pain, nor causing the embryonic person harm by depriving her of future goods she would otherwise have. Hence, they are not treating the embryo in an unjust fashion by causing her what we typically mean by harm. If they are not treating the embryo unjustly (in this sense), then it follows that they are treating her justly (in this sense).

Let me explicitly state the principle of justice my present argument employs. The sense of justice or fairness employed is one that pertains to surrogate decision-makers. This is because the fairness of ESCR from a strongly pro-personhood view depends crucially on whether or not researchers can justly “volunteer” embryonic persons as research subjects. Consider:

Justice<sub>harm</sub>: If the only feasible courses of action have roughly the same consequences for a person A, and A cannot make the choice between these courses of action herself, it is fair for person B to make the choice for A only if B knows that the consequences for A are roughly equivalent and that A cannot make the choice.

A couple of comments about this principle and its application to the present case are in order. The first thing to note is that this principle is quite modest. “Justice<sub>harm</sub>” does not in any way restrict the autonomous choices of agents who are capable of making decisions. Also, the principle requires that the surrogate decision-maker know that the consequences of the two courses of action for the patient are roughly equivalent. This condition greatly restricts the scope of application of Justice<sub>harm</sub>, since it is usually very difficult to know the values of other persons and predict the range of consequences that a course of action entails. The harm that is commonly done when one person or group chooses for another is done precisely because that person or group does not know (and perhaps does not care to know) how competing courses of action will affect persons in the other group.

The requirement that the surrogate decision-maker must have knowledge that the consequences of competing courses of action for person A are equivalent facilitates a partial response to a potential counterexample to this argument. One might think that this argument would render it just to experiment on a person in a perpetual vegetative state (PVS); one might also think that such experimentation would be unethical. However, it is actually quite difficult to attain knowledge that a person who appears to be in such a state is actually unconscious. The best that we can do is infer from brain-wave data that the patient is probably not conscious. Even though common sense and contemporary epistemologists (with rare exception) are united in denying that absolute certainty is required for knowledge-level evidence, exactly how

high the probability has to be that the patient is unconscious in order to attain knowledge that this is the case is a vexed question.

It is safe to say that the probability would need to be quite high given what is at stake. Indeed, several leading epistemologists have argued that what is at stake with regard to a decision can raise the standards for knowledge of the proposition that guides that decision (Fantl and McGrath 2009). In contrast to PVS patients, embryos do not even have brains and, hence, we can be quite certain they are not conscious. Furthermore, Justice<sub>harm</sub> would only apply to a particular PVS patient if we also had knowledge that such a patient would not regain consciousness in the future. This occasionally happens. In contrast, we do know that there is no realistic possibility for embryos that are created for the express purpose of ESCR to develop to the point of achieving consciousness. If their stem cells are not harvested, they will simply perish.

Even if there are persons in a PVS whom we know are currently unconscious and will not regain consciousness, there are still morally relevant differences between such a person and an embryonic person. Justice<sub>harm</sub> is a principle of surrogate decision-making that is only relevant to preserving patient-centered goods and preventing patient-centered harms. There are non-patient centered goods and harms that are also morally relevant. For example, most PVS patients have relatives and friends who would be emotionally affected by such research.

These relatives' wishes and interests should be (and most likely would be, given the relevant laws in most countries) accorded moral significance. Similar considerations apply to anencephalic babies who are born without a cerebrum and are, hence, unconscious. The parents of these children have a right to decide what happens to their child. I do not have any particular moral framework in mind when I assert that the interests of parents and other concerned surrogates are morally relevant with regard to the question of how PVS patients and anencephalic babies should be treated. I consider this to be the sort of bedrock intuition we use to derive our general principles of right and wrong. Any theory that discounted the interests of relatives and concerned surrogates would be objectionable.

Justice<sub>harm</sub> entails that allowing scientific research to be done on PVS patients and anencephalic children is just in the sense that the patient is not harmed by

such research. If nobody else is harmed by an instance of this research, I think that such research should be allowed. Would it not be just to conduct research on anencephalic babies if such research had the potential to aid the prevention of future cases of anencephaly and if the child's parents and other concerned persons were in favor of going ahead with the research? I think this research would be just and, hence, we do not have a counterexample that threatens ESCR.

If we take seriously (as we are doing here) the idea that embryonic persons are persons, then it follows that the gamete donors are their parents. One could quite easily imagine cases in which the desire of the gamete donors to prevent such research on their child is a morally relevant desire. In such cases, ESCR might be unethical, but this would not affect the main argument being put forth here in defense of the justice of ESCR.

#### ESCR and “Leftover” Embryos

The cases of stem cell research that involve in vitro fertilization are a bit more complex. Many persons who are strongly pro-personhood believe it is unethical to create more embryos than one knows they are willing to implant (Rae 1995). Such persons might think it is unethical to use leftover embryos for ESCR, because this would serve to legitimate the unethical practice of creating excess embryos in the first place.

I want to argue two points by way of response to this claim. First, John Harris (2003) has given what I think is a very cogent response to the view that it is unethical to create more embryos than one knows they are willing to implant. Harris has pointed out that nature spontaneously aborts the majority of conceived embryos. Hence, whenever a person who is fully informed of this fact attempts to have a child, he or she does so knowing the attempt is likely to result in the death of an (*ex hypothesi*) embryonic person.

Creating many embryos in a laboratory in the hopes that one will successfully implant and grow into a fully functioning person is, therefore, morally parallel to creating embryos through traditional intercourse in the hopes that one will successfully implant and grow. Since it is clearly ethical to attempt to reproduce naturally, it is also ethical to attempt to reproduce with the aid of in vitro fertilization. Thus, when one uses leftover embryos for ESCR, one is not further ingraining an already unethical practice.

My second point involves considering what course of action is in the embryo's best interests. Mary, for example, is an embryo that has been created with a batch of other embryos for the purpose of in vitro fertilization. Before Mary was created, her parents and a medical team had to decide whether or not it would be fair to create Mary knowing they might not implant her. Her parents only want two children and, if the first two embryos work, they will not implant a third. Mary may or may not be one of the first to be implanted.

If they do not create Mary, then of course the odds overwhelmingly favor that she will never exist at all. If they do create her, she will either live a brief unconscious existence and die (which is very similar to never living at all) or she will be implanted in her mother's uterus and possibly grow into a fully functioning human person. Which course of action is in Mary's best interests? Clearly, the action that gives Mary the best odds of growing into a fully functioning human person is the one that is in her best interest. Creating Mary and giving her the potential opportunity to mature is, therefore, the correct choice from the perspective of what is best for her. Hence, we have a strong embryo-centered reason to conclude that it is just to create more embryos than one knows one will implant. One is, therefore, not further ingraining an unjust practice when one uses leftover embryos for ESCR.

Now let us proceed and imagine that Mary has not been implanted because the two embryos that were used before her were successfully implanted. Is it morally permissible to use Mary for ESCR? One could reason that, since she is going to die anyway, it is permissible. This is an argument that is commonly made. Indeed, I think this is the correct way to think of this case.

Why might one reject such an argument? For one thing, even if it is the case that Mary will die anyway, there may be a morally significant difference between killing her by using her for ESCR and simply letting her die. This distinction between killing and letting die is familiar because of the active euthanasia/passive euthanasia distinction in the end-of-life debate (Rachels 1975).

I agree that killing a person is sometimes morally worse than letting a person die. Generally speaking, in cases where both killing a person and letting that person die are evil acts, killing a person is the greater

evil of the two. Let us consider such a case. Jones walks by Smith on a busy street. Smith is bleeding profusely. Jones does not offer to wrap Smith's wounds (at no risk to himself) with the bandages Jones happens to be carrying. This refusal to offer help is indeed morally pernicious but not nearly as pernicious as deliberately killing Smith.

Notice that with regard to Mary and ESCR we are not dealing with a case in which it is obvious that either killing Mary or merely letting her die are evil actions to begin with. I grant that if they were both evil actions, then killing her is the worse of the two. However, I already offered an argument above for the conclusion that letting Mary die by not implanting her is not an evil action. This is because the need to let her die resulted from a course of action that gave Mary her best and only chance to develop into a normally functioning human. Similarly, I would argue that killing Mary is not an evil action, either. This is because one is neither causing Mary pain nor depriving her of a future life she would otherwise have.

Technically, one is depriving Mary of those moments of unconscious existence that she will have until she expires, but this type of existence is not of any value to her, since she neither is conscious during this time nor is this state of unconscious existence preparing a path for Mary that leads to a conscious existence she would value. In other words, I think it is usually wrong to kill a person, because it is usually the case that killing a person is a way of harming him or her. In my view, when killing a person does not harm the person, killing the person is not wrong. At least, killing a person is not wrong in such a situation because of the mere fact that a person has been killed. If the act of killing stemmed from a vicious motive, harmed other persons besides the one who was killed, or was unfair to persons besides the one who was killed, then, of course, the action might still be wrong.

## What Every Reasonable Embryo Would Choose

### Do Unto Others

I would like to augment the arguments in section two with an argument that any rational person who is minimally concerned for others and is in a position similar to the embryo's own would choose to be used for ESCR. By "minimally concerned for others" I

mean that the person would consent to a course of action that benefitted others if no harm was done to her own person. Of course, embryos are not rational agents capable of providing consent. Hence, I have to be creative in bringing out the intuition that a rational person who was in the embryo's position (or something like it) would consent to ESCR.

Imagine, for example, that you have just been informed that reincarnation is a real phenomenon and that you have exactly one more life you can choose to live. You have exactly two alternatives open to you concerning your last life. Either you can live briefly in an unconscious state in that next life and then pass out of existence or you can skip the next life altogether and pass out of existence when this life ends. Intuitively, you would be quite indifferent concerning these two alternatives. Now, imagine further that you have been informed that, if you agree to live briefly in an unconscious state, valuable research can be carried out on your person that has the potential to combat a range of illnesses and genetic anomalies. On the assumption that you are minimally concerned to help others, as defined above, you would readily accept the former alternative.

This thought experiment is designed to capture facts that are relevant to evaluating the moral legitimacy of ESCR. First, and most importantly, I have stipulated that the only two alternatives are to live briefly in an unconscious state or to not live at all. This parallels the situation an embryo is in when it is created specifically for ESCR. The fact that you would unhesitatingly choose to live briefly in an unconscious state is traceable to the fact that no harm will accrue to your person in comparison to the feasible alternatives open to you and the fact that you will be helping others by performing such an easy sacrifice.

Similarly, if you were told you would be a leftover embryo from in vitro fertilization in the next life and you could choose to either be used for ESCR or left to thaw out and die, you would probably choose to be used for ESCR. Why would you not? This thought experiment reinforces the arguments of section two by further emphasizing the fact that no harm is being done to the embryo.

Additionally, one of the more commonly used notions of justice is the golden rule. We all learned at our mother's knee that we are "to do unto others as we would have them do unto us." Since we would consent to ESCR under the conditions demarcated in the



reincarnation case, and this case parallels the situation the embryo is in, we would be doing unto the embryo as we would want to be done unto us when we perform ESCR. The golden rule is a principle of justice because of its focus on the consequences that are in store for a specific individual. Considering what we would desire (or at least permit) if we were in another's shoes allows us to appreciate their perspective from the standpoint of what is in their self-interest.

### Zygotes in the Original Position

I want to formulate an argument based on the fact that any reasonable person would consent to being used for ESCR under the conditions we have discussed and draw the conclusion that a just society can allow the use of leftover and deliberately created embryos for ESCR. A reincarnation thought experiment can be used for this purpose as well. This second argument relies on John Rawls' (1971) idea that just laws are the ones that would be created by free and rational persons who exist in a state of equality and are negotiating behind a veil of ignorance.

In the previous section, you were asked to imagine that you could either become briefly reincarnated one last time in an unconscious state or pass out of existence after this life is over. Let us modify that scenario. Now imagine that you and several other persons who are behind a veil of ignorance are deciding whether or not the society in which you will live in the next life should allow ESCR to be performed on leftover embryos and on embryos specifically created for research purposes.

You know that you, or at least your descendants, might benefit from the ESCR research that is performed. You also know that, if you are to be the person on whom the research is to be performed, you will not otherwise have an opportunity to grow into a fully functioning person. Notice that it would be misleading to set up the situation such that you might either benefit or be sacrificed for ESCR without further qualification. Setting up the scenario in this manner makes it look as if you might be deprived of a flourishing existence you would otherwise have if you were selected for ESCR. I think it is clear that you would fear the possibility of being deprived of the benefits of ESCR more than you would fear being selected for ESCR, given that your only other alternative would be

to not exist at all. Hence, persons behind the veil would ratify ESCR.

### Kant's Kingdom of Ends and Human Dignity

I have provided several arguments that ESCR is just, both when it involves embryonic persons deliberately created for ESCR and when it involves embryonic persons originally created for another purpose. These arguments have used a variety of concepts of justice. However, there are other notions of justice many persons think are sound and that can ground objections to ESCR on embryonic persons. For example, consider the Kantian maxim that we should never treat others merely as a means, but we must treat others also as an end (Kant 1996). To do so, according to Kant, would be a violation of another's dignity. A well-known difficulty with Kant's maxim—indeed with any interesting general moral rule—is that it has to be interpreted and applied despite its general and somewhat vague content.

A Kantian who has found a way to grant the embryonic person status in the moral community, even though such a person is not a rational being (a problem for Kantian pro-lifers), might think that ESCR violates this principle because our motive for using the embryo for research purposes is solely to benefit others, and, hence, the embryo is being used merely as a means to the end of benefitting others. I acknowledge that this intuition has considerable *prima facie* force, but I want to note that, by reviewing the arguments of this article (for example), before practicing ESCR one has treated the embryo as an end in herself by taking her interests into account.

One has honored the embryo's dignity by taking pains to make sure that one is not harming her by causing her pain, etc., nor is one doing something to her that a reasonable person (such as oneself) would not consent to having done under the same circumstances.

ESCR is similar to cases in which we are trying to convince one person or a group to make a donation of some sort on behalf of another group. Our aim is to benefit those to whom the donation is being given. We are often relatively unconcerned about the donor in these cases. Morally speaking, all that is required in such cases is that we have a reasonable belief that we are not harming the donor by enlisting her services.

The key dissimilarity between ESCR and standard donation scenarios is that the embryo cannot give informed consent. However, the point I am trying to make by discussing donor cases is not undermined by this dissimilarity. When we seek donations from one group on behalf of another, an activity Kant would surely endorse, we are only treating the donor group as ends in themselves in a very limited manner. Namely, we only need to be reasonably sure that the giving of the donation will not harm the donating group in order to fulfill our duty to treat them in a dignified manner.

What other principles might be used to object to ESCR, even if ESCR is fair to the embryo according to the principles of fairness discussed and applied in sections two and three? Someone might think that ESCR is “undignified” in another sense. Perhaps, it is simply unnatural, or perhaps improper, to use one human being as spare parts for another without his or her consent, even if doing so would cause her no harm (section two) and would not violate the golden rule (section three), and persons negotiating behind a veil of ignorance would approve of this activity (section three). The sense of “improper” or “unnatural” invoked here is somewhat elusive and vague, but I think we must acknowledge there is *something* to this concern that is hard to capture in words. The feeling of repugnance one may get when contemplating ESCR on embryonic persons is similar to the feeling one gets when contemplating cannibalizing a recently deceased person in order to fend off starvation. This feeling is rational in the sense that it reflects the general respect toward other persons that the moral life is designed to cultivate. As moral persons, we spend our lives learning to take others into account. We expend great moral effort cultivating a respect for other people and learning to deemphasize what they can do for us. ESCR does involve using another for our own ends and, hence, it should initially strike the virtuous person as a morally questionable act. However, my own view is that this initial feeling should serve to cause us to investigate whether or not we are really harming the person we are using for ESCR and whether or not we would be willing to have ESCR performed on us if we were in the embryo’s shoes.

I think that reasoned reflection reveals the answers to these two questions I have detailed above and thus reveals that ESCR is, all things considered, not a disrespectful or undignified action. However, I also acknowledge that the intuition that one is doing

something improper by creating a person for “spare parts” without his or her consent may not be reducible (for some persons) to the worry that one is harming the embryo or that one is performing an action to which a reasonable person would not consent. This renders the intuition that there is something wrong with ESCR, even if it is just in the ways described above that are difficult to evaluate. It is ultimately not enough to ground an objection to ESCR on an unarticulated notion of what human dignity requires and forbids (Kass 2002). However, I think many will retain a largely unarticulated sense that there is something morally offensive about ESCR.

## Conclusion

Persons who care passionately about the sanctity of life are important participants in the moral dialogue concerning how to conduct our medical practices. Such voices are a reminder to us that we cannot sacrifice the rights of the individual for the good of the many. I have attempted to establish that we are not sacrificing the embryonic persons’ right to not be harmed or treated in such a manner to which a reasonable person (such as oneself) would object. As science advances, there might come a day when there is no longer any need to use embryonic stem cells. Even if this occurs, it will still be worthwhile to know whether ESCR is one of several morally viable alternatives for obtaining stem cells.

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