

# Logical Fallacies in the Literature on Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research

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# Definition of “Logical Fallacies”

Logical fallacies are those errors in thinking which occur when rules of reasoning are not precisely followed

Some common fallacies are:

- Ad Hominem
- Ambiguity
- Bandwagon
- Either/Or Fallacy
- Equivocation
- Faulty Syllogism
- Hasty Generalization
- Non Sequitur
- Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc
- Unfair Emotional Appeal

Charles Krauthammer  
"Why Pro-Lifers Are Missing the Point"  
(2001)

At immediate issue are "stem cells," cells often taken from the very earliest embryo [. . . .] Pro-life forces find the procedure ethically impermissible, because removing the cells kills the embryo [. . . .] But their arguments fail. First, stem cells are usually taken from embryos produced for in-vitro fertilization or from aborted fetuses. (201)

# Venkatachari Jagannathan Dronamraju

## Biological Wealth & Other Essays

(2002)

Powerful lobbies in Washington and the nation have been debating the pros and cons of allowing stem cell research to go forward [. . . .] The debate is being carried on at several levels--theological, ethical, political and scientific. For a scientist, the decision is fairly simple. If the research is scientifically sound and is likely to yield beneficial results, then one must go forward with the project [. . . .] However, anti-abortion forces argue that research should be restricted to adult stem cells, which can be harvested without destroying embryonic life. On the other hand, some conservatives in the Republican Party favor research using human embryos. They include Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah, the ranking Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee[,] and Senator Connie Mack, a Roman Catholic, of Florida.  
(116-7)

Hwa A. Lim  
Genetically Yours:  
Bioinforming, Biopharming, Biofarming  
(2002)

[Opposition to President Bush's ban on human embryonic stem cell research came from four groups, one of which is the] Religious group [for] This group, which believes stem cell research should be banned completely, views the decision compromises [sic] the sanctity of life. (192)

William Brennan  
Dehumanizing the Vulnerable:  
When Word Games Take Lives  
(1995)

Removal of individuals from membership in the human community and re-classifying them as animals has the effect of consigning them to a lower level of existence where their victimization can be more easily rationalized. (89)

Lewis D. Solomon

The Jewish Tradition, Sexuality, and Procreation  
(2002)

An embryo put into the deep freeze typically consists of about one or two hundred cells, each of these cells containing all the information needed to start a unique genetic existence. Researchers take stem cells from a frozen embryo, four to seven days after fertilization, when it is a hollow sphere consisting of one or two hundred cells. (208-9)

Lewis D. Solomon

The Jewish Tradition, Sexuality, and Procreation

(2002)

Experimentation with embryonic stem cells, obtained from spare human embryos, lacking any fetuslike features, slated for destruction at fertility clinics, remains controversial in the United States. (209)

Audrey R. Chapman, Mark S. Frankel, Michele S. Garfinkel  
"Stem Cell Research and Applications:  
Monitoring the Frontiers of Biomedical Research"  
AAAS Science and Technology Policy Yearbook: 2000  
(2000)

Human stem cell research can be conducted in a fully ethical manner, but it is true that the extraction of embryonic stem cells from the inner mass of blastocysts raises ethical questions for those who consider the intentional loss of embryonic life by intentional means to be morally wrong. Likewise, the derivation of embryonic germ cells from the gonadal tissue of aborted fetuses is problematic for those who oppose abortion [. . . .] Public funding should be provided for embryonic stem cell and embryonic germ cell research, but not at this time for activities involved in the isolation of embryonic stem cells, about which there remains continuing debate [. . . .] Although the derivation of human stem cells can be done in an ethical manner, there is enough objection to the process of deriving stem cells to consider recommending against its public funding. (411)

Richard Cohen

"Embryonic Stem Cell Research Will Save Lives"

(2003)

- Anyone can see that, ultimately, stem cell research and the related field of cloning are going to produce ethical questions galore. But the one that exists at the moment is entirely manufactured—the product of calling an embryo a “human being.” (127)
- [I]t is at that very stage in the process--the mere production of a fertilized egg--that George W. Bush and his fellow "pro-lifers" declare that a "human being" has been created, a term Bush himself has used in reference to mere embryos, particularly those created by cloning. (127; internal quotes in original)

## Richard Cohen

### "Embryonic Stem Cell Research Will Save Lives" (2003)

- [We] get stuck with a kind of awful determinism, embracing as "human" embryos that nature ordinarily rejects. The pro-lifers would even overrule nature itself, insisting that anything moving through the birth canal is a human being and thus inviolate. They know, somehow, that this is what God intended [. . . .] (128; internal quotes in original)
- Common sense would at least suggest that we are entitled to do what nature itself does all the time. Yet, by fiat based on religious belief, the president has decided to severely limit stem cell research funded by the government and maybe even conducted by private industry as well. (129)

Richard Cohen

"Embryonic Stem Cell Research Will Save Lives"  
(2003)

- A sperm is swimming like crazy toward the egg. It makes contact and fertilizes it. The egg then moves up the tube so that it can attach itself to the wall of the womb. (127)
- [I]f the process [of a human being "progressing from the embryo stage to the fetus stage"] is interrupted, which is more the rule than the exception in nature, then we do not have life. We had merely the potential for it. (127)
- In the end, it's possible that human beings may die so that embryos will live. (129)

William Gentry

"The Morality of Using 'Surplus' Human Embryos in Stem Cell Research"

(accessed 15 April 2004)

Many opponents base their conviction on religious dogma instead of on scientific discovery or philosophical reasoning. They see no need to provide rational justification for their belief about the essential nature of the human embryo. They are likely to say that they "believe" their conviction is true rather than that they have arrived at their conclusion as the culmination of a process of sound reasoning. (internal quotes in original)

## A Correct Syllogism

Major premise: All human beings are mortal.

Minor premise: Socrates is a human being.

Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

# An Incorrect or Faulty Syllogism

Major premise: All birds sing.

Minor premise: Eminem sings rap songs.

Conclusion: Eminem is a bird.

William Gentry

"The Morality of Using 'Surplus' Human Embryos in Stem Cell Research"

(accessed 15 April 2004)

Premise 1: Whatever possesses human biological components is essentially a human being.

Premise 2: All human embryos, even those excess embryos fabricated in clinical fertility efforts, possess human biological components.

Conclusion and Premise 1a: All human embryos are essentially innocent human beings.

Premise 2a: To kill any innocent human being is murder.

Conclusion: To kill a human embryo is murder.

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