Dear Scott,
I am a graduate student in biological sciences at a local university. In three weeks, I will be doing a group panel discussion on embryonic stem cell research. It's actually a debate and I'm the only one arguing against ESCR. Keep in mind that I'll be doing this in front of about 35 graduate/upper level undergrad biology students, as well as a biology professor who thinks George W. Bush is a moron because he refused to fund embryonic stem cell research.

How should I prepare for this event? What materials should I study?

This presentation is very important to me because I feel like I have the opportunity to help some of my classmates (and maybe even my professor?) see things a different way, from a moral point of view. I want to represent Christian values in a persuasive and respectable manner. But I feel a bit intimidated by my professor and others who think that Christians like me are uneducated and crazy. What should I do? Where do I begin?

God bless,
Kim

Dear Kim,
Thanks for contacting us. I appreciate your willingness to publicly defend a pro-life view on embryonic stem cell research (ESCR), especially in a hostile environment like a secular classroom. I'm proud of you for being so courageous.

The case you will make is clear and to the point. Hadley Arkes provides the soundbite you'll essentially want to argue:

Given a choice between a therapy that happens to be lethal for human subjects and one that is not, wouldn't we be inclined to favor the therapy that is not lethal? Wouldn't that be even more the case if that non-lethal therapy turns out to be vastly more promising, and far less speculative, than the lethal therapy?[1] *Stem cells drawn from adults have already yielded some striking achievements, and they do not require the killing of the human being from whom they are drawn.*[2] *The extraction of stem cells from human embryos does, however, result in the destruction of defenseless human beings. Therefore, it is morally wrong. There's nothing complex about it*

In short, preparing for your classroom debate requires <u>two steps</u>. First, you must master the case against ESCR intellectually. This will help you think on your feet and demonstrate to the audience your superior preparation. Second, you need a strategy for simplifying the debate for your audience. You'll do that by pounding home (again and again) the question, What is the embryo? But for now, it's time to get started on some hefty reading. I suggest reading through the articles below once (to get the big picture), then go back and study them for detail.

[1] Hadley Arkes, "Senseless on Stem Cells," *National Review On-Line,* 8-23-04.
[2] For a complete summary of these adult stem cell treatments, go to www.stemcellresearch.org

Step #1: Master the Argument. Study the articles below in the following order:

- Scott Klusendorf, Is Embryonic Stem Cell Research Morally Complex?
  http://prolifetraining.com/stem-cell-ethics.pdf

- S. Klusendorf, A Short Defense of the Pro-Life Position
  http://prolifetraining.com/abortion-debate.pdf

- Greg Koukl, "The Confusing Moral Logic of ESCR"
  http://www.str.org/free/solid_ground/SG0109.htm

- Robert P. George, Cloning Addendum
  http://www.nationalreview.com/document/document071602.asp

- Hadley Arkes, Senseless on Stem Cells
  http://www.nationalreview.com/arkes/arkes.asp

- Andrew Sullivan, Only Human
  http://www.tnr.com/073001/trb073001.html

- Maureen L. Condic, The Basics About Stem Cells
  http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0201/articles/condic.html

- Maureen L. Condic, Stem Cells and False Hopes
  http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0208/opinion/condic.html

- Paul Cella, Philosophy and Stem Cells
  http://www.techcentralstation.com/120304D.html

- Fact Sheet: Adult versus Embryonic stem cell treatments:
  http://stemcellresearch.org/facts/treatments.htm

- Ramesh Ponnuru, Lapse of Reason: The Libertarians and Cloning
  http://www.nationalreview.com/11feb02/ponnuru021102.shtml

- Maureen L. Condic, Life: Defining the Beginning by the End
  http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0305/articles/condic.html

Next, I suggest that you review a debate featuring Ronald Bailey (pro-ESCR) against Robert George and Patrick Lee (anti-ESCR). Lee and George very successfully handle many of the objections that you will likely hear from your critics and, in my view, destroy Bailey's case for ESCR. Review the debate in the following order:

- Are Stem Cells Babies? (Ronald Bailey opens the exchange)
  http://www.reason.com/rb/rb071101.html

- Reason, Science, and Stem Cells (Lee and George reply to Bailey)
  http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-george072001.shtml

- My Critics are Wrong (Bailey replies to Lee and George)
  http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-bailey072501.shtml

- The Stubborn Facts of Science (Lee and George reply to Bailey)
  http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-george073001.shtml

- More Stubborn Facts of Science (Bailey responds to Lee and George)
  http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-bailey080601.shtml

- Embryology, Philosophy, and Human Dignity: Ronald Bailey is still Wrong (Lee and George reply to Bailey)
  http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-lee080901.shtml

- Cellular Truths (Lee and George, continued)
  http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-leeprint091001.html

Step #2: Debate Strategy and Tactics

As for your actual debate strategy, remember that the case against ESCR is really quite simple: It's wrong to kill one human being so that another may benefit. Again, you'll want to memorize the Hadley Arkes soundbite mentioned earlier (paraphrase):

Given a choice between a therapy that happens to be lethal for human subjects and one that is not, wouldn't we be inclined to favor the therapy that is not lethal? Wouldn't that be even more the case if that non-lethal therapy turns out to be vastly more promising, and far less speculative, than the lethal therapy?[3] *Stem cells drawn from adults have already yielded some striking achievements, and they do not require the killing of the human being from whom they are drawn.*[4] *The extraction of stem cells from human embryos does, however, result in the destruction of defenseless human beings. Therefore, it is morally wrong. There's nothing complex about it.*

As Frank Beckwith points out, if I have a bad eye and you have a good one, I do not have the right to take your good eye to make my bad eye feel better. Hence, the entire moral question of ESCR comes down to just one question: Is the embryo a human being? Pound this question home again and again in your debate. Use the Lee and George material to build a solid scientific case for your view. When your critics accuse you of bringing religious beliefs into the debate (because you think the embryo is human), remind them of the scientific facts you've presented and politely dare them to refute the actual case you have presented rather than one they'd rather refute. They can call you names all they want, but it will do nothing to refute your scientific facts.

[3] Hadley Arkes, "Senseless on Stem Cells," *National Review On-Line,* 8-23-04.
[4] For a complete summary of these adult stem cell treatments, go to www.stemcellresearch.org

At the same time, you should argue that ESCR violates the very principle that once made political liberalism great: a concern for the small, weak, and defenseless. Sadly, those supporting ESCR believe that human beings that are in the wrong location or have the wrong level of development do not deserve the protection of law. They assert, without justification, the belief that strong and independent people deserve the protection of law while small and dependent people do not. This view is elitist and exclusive.

We can do better than that. In the past, we used to discriminate on the basis of skin color and gender, but now, with ESCR, we discriminate on the basis of size, level of development, location, and degree of dependency. We've simply exchanged one form of bigotry for another. In sharp contrast, the position you will defend is that no human being, regardless of size, level of development, race, gender, or place of residence, should be excluded from the human family. In other words, your view of humanity is inclusive, indeed wide open, to all, especially those that are small, vulnerable and defenseless. Your critics' view, meanwhile, is elitist and exclusive.

Of course, your critics will hit you with the standard objection that these embryos are not even self-conscious, so how can they be valuable human beings? The claim is problematic for several reasons. First, your critics are begging the question: Why is self-awareness relevant? And why this accidental property rather than another? Second, the self-awareness objection proves too much. Newborns are not aware of their own existence until several months after birth, so what's wrong with infanticide? As Peter Singer points out *in Practical Ethics*, if self-awareness makes one valuable, and newborns like fetuses lack that property, it follows that fetus and newborn are both disqualified. You can't draw an arbitrary line at birth and spare the newborn. Third, your critics cannot account for human equality. That is, if humans have value only because of some acquired property like self-awareness or sentience and not in virtue of the kind of thing they are, then it follows that since these acquired properties come in varying degrees, basic human rights come in varying degrees. Do we really want to say that those with more self-awareness are more human (and more valuable) than those with less? As Robert George points out, this relegates the proposition that all men are created equal to the ash heap of history. Philosophically, it's far more reasonable to argue that although humans differ immensely with respect to talents, accomplishments, and degrees of development, they are nonetheless equal because they share a common human nature that comes to be when they come to be—either at conception or the completion of a cloning process.

Finally, your critics will argue that you are anti-science, that you want to impede progress. Remind them that science without morality has, in the past, lead to unspeakable atrocities. For example, if science trumps morality, how do we condemn the Tuskegee experiments of the 1920 in which black men suffering from syphilis were promised a cure, only to have it withheld so scientists could study the disease? If your critics reply that embryos and black men are not the same thing—that black men are human while embryos are not, say: "Ah, that's the issue, isn't it? Are they the same? You have just begged the question by assuming what you are trying to prove, namely, that embryos are not human. Yet that is the very issue under dispute in the ESCR debate. You must first

refute my case for the full humanity of the embryo before merely assuming the truth of your position." (See my article "Toddler Tactics" for more on this. http://prolifetraining.com/Prolife-tactics.pdf)

Finally, if you have the time, you may want to review my article "Five Bad Ways to Argue About Abortion." Many of the bad arguments that come up in ESCR are a rehash of the ones from the abortion debate. (http://prolifetraining.com/abortion-arguments.pdf)

Hope this helps, Scott Klusendorf

P.S.– I've included below a summary of rough notes on Patrick Lee and Robert P. George's argument against embryonic stem cell research (ESCR). It will help you keep track of their main points as read through their debate with Ronald Bailey. I've also included my reply to a pro-ESCR article that appeared in *The Scientist*.

George and Lee Notes:

The morality of the issue comes down to just one question: Are embryos human beings? Opponents of ESCR do not argue that stem cells are babies (and hence killing them is wrong), but that one form of stem cell research–ESCR–is immoral because you must kill an embryonic human being to harvest the cells. This embryo is a living (though immature) member of the human family.

Critics argue that each of our cells has as much potential for development as any human embryo. Hence, there is no difference in kind between normal somatic cells and human embryos. For example, cloning shows that each of our cells has the genetic information needed to produce an entire human embryo, provided genetic information from the donor is placed inside a vacated human ovum and placed in the right environment. Hence, proponents of ESCR argue, each of our cells is no different in kind from a living, growing human embryo.

However, the argument that there is no difference in kind between human embryos and each of our cells is seriously flawed for the following reasons:

First, proponents of ESCR fail to distinguish between "parts" and "wholes." Unlike the embryo, which is already a whole human organism, each of our cells is merely part of a larger human organism. The capacity of each of our cells is restricted to fulfilling a given purpose within the larger context of a human body. For this reason, it differs radically from the capacity of the human embryo. The human embryo already is a whole human organism. It is a self-unified, distinct individual with the inherent capacity to develop into a fetus, infant, toddler, teenager, and adult. This capacity to develop into all stages of human existence is not something external to the embryo, but inherent in its nature. In the case of our individual cells, each has the capacity to become a human embryo only if something external is done to it–in this case, combining its DNA with a vacated ovum, chemicals, and electricity in hopes it can be jolted into becoming a whole human embryo. In other words, each of our cells has the capacity to become a whole human being only if

acted upon externally through a cloning process. They are unable to produce a whole human embryo by themselves, but must work together with an enucleated ovum; unlike the embryo, it needs more than just the right environment in order to develop into mature stages of a human being. The embryo, meanwhile, already is a whole human being with the inherent (though yet to be actualized) ability to become a more mature human being. True, it is an immature human, as is an infant, but it's a whole human being nonetheless.

With cloning, there is more than a change in environment. Instead, there is an internal change in the kind of thing present. In this case, adult cells are combined with a vacated egg and chemicals and jolted into a new human organism. Thus, the relevant capacity of the adult cell is merely that its genetic material can be used, in conjunction with a female ovum, to generate a new human being. In that sense, each of our cells is analogous to sperm/egg, not a whole human embryo. Just as sperm and egg contribute genetic material that becomes a human being, so adult cells, through cloning, can contribute material used to form a new human. However, it's unreasonable to conclude that the genetic material contributed by the adult cell is the same as a whole human embryo. Just as a person who comes into being from the union of sperm and egg was never a sperm or egg, so a person who is brought into being by cloning was never a somatic cell.

The fact that the embryo, like the somatic cell, has a complete genetic code, is part of the proof that he or she is a distinct human, but only part. The other proof is that it is a self-integrated, whole human being (not functionally part of a larger organism) with a genetic code distinct from its mother. Unlike the somatic cell, it has the inherent ability to grow into a mature human organism.

Cloning shows only that human beings can be reproduced asexually–something we already knew from twinning. The facts of science, however, are clear: Human embryos are not mere clumps of cells but are living distinct human organisms, the same as you and I at earlier stages of our lives. The new organism directs its own growth, coordinating from within all of its activities.

To sum up the discussion so far, somatic cells, like sperm and egg, can only contribute "parts" to a process that results in a human being. Embryos already are human beings. They have the epigenetic primordia for internally directed development maturation as distinct, whole, self-integrated human organisms. Somatic cells do not.

Proponents of ESCR, unable to refute the scientific facts, resort to philosophy. They make assertions about the moral status of embryos rather then demonstrate scientifically who is and is not a distinct human being. They argue that although the embryo is a human being, it is not a person. But why should anyone accept the claim that there is such a thing as a human that is not a person? Notice that ESCR proponents are no longer answering the scientific case for the humanity of the embryo, but are dehumanizing it with highly subjective appeals to philosophy.

It will not do to assert that embryos are human beings but not persons because you and I are essentially human, physical organisms. Human person/human being dualism fails to

account for the fact that a human person is a bodily entity, not a mere consciousness using a body. We are intrinsically valuable, not mere carriers of what is truly valuable (consciousness). If we are merely carriers of what is intrinsically valuable–in this case consciousness–it would be morally permissible to kill one child who carries consciousness in order to replace it with two new carriers of consciousness. However, if we are not mere carriers of what is valuable, but are intrinsically valuable ourselves, then we are so from the moment we begin to exist. It makes no sense to say that we came to be at one point, but became valuable only at a later point.

Proponents of ESCR reply with an analogy to brain death. Just as it is morally acceptable to extract organs from brain-dead individuals because (we are told) they are human organisms but not persons, so we can legitimately dismember human embryos for research. To be a "person" (they assert) one must have a brain that can sustain memories and intentions. Since human embryos do not have brains capable of sustaining these functions, they are not "persons" and may be killed for research. In short, those espousing this view propose brain function as the criterion for life, just as collapse of the brain is the criterion for death. However, this argument fails for several reasons. First, under prevailing law and accepted medical practice, the rationale for "brain death" is not that a brain-dead body is a living human organism but not a "person." Rather, brain death is accepted because the irreversible collapse (cessation) of the entire brain destroys the capacity for self-directed integral functioning of human beings who have matured to a stage where brain activity is needed to integrate the organism. What is left is no longer a unitary organism at all. True, the embryo has not yet developed a brain, but an embryo does not need a brain to integrate its systems so it can live. Other bodily functions take care of that task during its early days. More mature human beings, unlike the embryo, need a brain to live. At their more mature age, the brain is takes over the task of integrating their bodily systems. Hence, there is no parallel between a brain dead person and an embryo. The embryo is not dead, but is growing a maturing. The brain dead individual has suffered an irreversible loss of all functions of the entire brain. Put differently, there is difference between "no more" and "not yet." Just because the brain dead person is in the category of "no more" having irreversibly lost the capacity to integrate its systems so it can live, it does not follow from this that embryos that have not yet developed brain function are not living human beings. Unlike the brain dead individual, human embryos have the inherent capacity for brain function. All they lack is merely the current capacity for brain function. Unlike a corps–which is merely the remains of what was once a human organism but is now dead–an embryo is a unified, self-integrating human organism.

When defenders of ESCR say that human embryos or fetuses are human beings (individuals) but not "persons," they could mean one of two things. First, they could mean that a human person is not a physical organism and thus did not come to be when the physical organism associated with that person came to be. On this view, a "person" is not a bodily entity, but a purely spiritual (immaterial) one. It is merely a subject inhabiting a body the way that water inhabits a glass, or perhaps a sequence of experiences somehow associated with a biological organism. However, this view fails to acknowledge that every living thing (including human embryos) that performs bodily

actions is an organism, a bodily entity. In the case of the human individual, it is clear that "it" is the same thing that perceives, walks, and talks (which are bodily actions), as well as makes choices and understands complex problems. Thus, the "I" that I now am is identical to the bodily organism that can to be at conception. To sum up, "I" am identical to the embryo, fetus, newborn, and toddler I once was. Therefore, since you and I are essentially bodily organisms (with spiritual, non-material capacities), we came to be when our physical bodies came to be–at conception.

Second, when defenders of ESCR say that the embryos are human but not persons they could mean that although you and I were once human embryos, we did not become persons and hence intrinsically valuable until a later stage in our lives. However, this view assumes that human beings are merely carriers of what is intrinsically valuable–in this case, intelligence and self-consciousness–rather than intrinsically valuable themselves. However, human individuals are valuable for what they are, not what they can do. They are intrinsically valuable, not mere carriers of what is valuable. If we are mere carriers of what is valuable, then it would be permissible to kill one's own child if that would allow us to replace one carrier of what is intrinsically valuable (consciousness) with two. But clearly human individuals are not valuable in that way. Hence, human beings (as bodily entities) are intrinsically valuable, not the mental properties they possess. In short, the substantive claim we must reject is that you or I came to be at one point, but became intrinsically valuable only at a later point after we acquired certain functional abilities. If human beings are intrinsically valuable, they must be so from the moment they begin to exist. Nothing can be added to make them so. We are valuable for what we are, not because we are mere carriers of what is truly valuable.

The embryo is intrinsically valuable not because it carries what is valuable, but because it has a rational nature, having the natural inherent capacity for reason and free choice. By virtue of it, he possesses dignity and rights. Clearly, when adults sleep or in a reversible coma, they are persons though they cannot currently function as such. The same is true with fetuses and infants. Because they are human beings, they have radical natural capacities to exercise mental functions. It will take them some time to actualize those capacities, but embryos are nonetheless identical to the mature beings they will someday become.

If proponents of ESCR deny this truth by asserting that embryos cannot have memories or form intentions, it follows (as Peter Singer and Michael Tooley point out) that newborns are not persons and that infanticide is morally permissible. Like the embryo and fetus, newborns do not have the immediate capacity to function this way. Comatose patients would also fail to qualify as persons. The claim that embryos cannot be persons because they lack the brain development necessary to sustain a mind is not a scientific claim. It is a subjective, philosophic assertion. There is nothing scientific about it.

Nonetheless, proponents of ESCR continue to assert that each of our cells is no different in kind from a living, whole human embryo. But if that were true, it would mean that each of our cells is already a distinct human organism, which is absurd. Clearly, something external must be done to generate from a somatic cell a distinct human

organism that is no longer merely part of a larger entity (i.e., change the somatic cell from a "part" of a human organism to a whole, complete organism). The difference in kind is clear: The somatic cell's functions are subordinated to the survival of the larger organism of which it is merely a part. The human embryo is already a whole human entity. Somatic cells are functionally part of a larger human being.

Is Embryo Stem Cell Research Biblical?

Scott Klusendorf challenges the theological case for ESCR as put forth by Ted Peters and Gaymon Bennett in their article, "Theological Support of Stem Cell Research." The article by Peters and Bennett appeared in The Scientist, September 3, 2001.

Note: The authors' original statements are in normal type. Scott Klusendorf's responses are in italics.

Pope John Paul II has stated that support of embryonic stem cell research evidences moral corruption. Opponents of embryonic stem cell research have cast the debate surrounding this research as nothing but the next chapter in the abortion controversy. The ethical issues involved with this research, however, are far too complex to be reduced to such a simple assessment. Portraying the stem cell debate as the abortion controversy is at best intellectually misleading, at worst ethically negligent.

The stem cell debate has been framed by the wrong basic question: its moral heart lies not with abortion, but in its potential good. Stem cell research is morally significant first because it promises healing.

[*So if Nazis conduct medical experiments on Jews for the potential good of others, does that make it right?*]

Implanted stem cells, it appears, teach the body to heal itself, rejuvenating failing tissues, from organs to nerves. These therapies promise to ease the suffering of millions inflicted with such debilitating diseases as Parkinson's, heart and liver failure, juvenile diabetes, Alzheimer's, and cancer.

It is our considered judgment that not only is this research morally permissible, there is an ethical and theological mandate to actively support it. To not support stem cell research, we have concluded, is unethical. The principal grounding of our support is beneficence, a bioethical variant of the Christian understanding of agape love. Theological and ethical reflection are at their best when framed by beneficence—a selfless love of one's neighbor that inspires struggle against suffering and death.

[*Is the embryo my neighbor? Does ESCR further his well-being? The authors beg the question here by assuming the embryo is not a human being. But this ignores the core issue in the debate over ESCR, "What is the embryo?"*]

Beneficence asks: Does stem cell research further or hinder the betterment and well being of humanity?

[*As Beckwith points out, You cannot appeal to the fact that ESCR benefits humanity, as the authors argue, when the very question of who is part of the human family—that is, does it include embryos—is itself under dispute. Again, the authors beg the question. Are embryos members of the human family? If so, killing them to benefit others is a serious moral wrong*.]

The answer is yes; this form of scientific research promises enormous leaps in the quality of health care.

For those who follow Jesus of Nazareth, decisive here is the Nazarene's ministry of healing. The Christian doctrine of salvation includes healing of body and soul. We human beings emulate God when we engage in our own ministry of healing. Medical research, in its own way, contributes to God's healing work on Earth.

[*Does killing embryos for research heal them? Again, the authors beg the question here. Moreover, does medical research without the restraints of morality contribute to God's healing work or to the exploitation of those who are weak and defenseless? Consider the Tuskegee experiments of the 1920s in which Black men suffering from Syphilis were promised treatment only to have it denied so scientists could study the disease. Was this immoral or should we applaud these scientists for engaging in a ministry of healing?]*

The destruction of embryos for this research is not irrelevant to our ethical considerations. We must ask a question: when does life begin? Or better, when does morally relevant personhood begin?

[*This is truly remarkable. The authors appeal to science when it suits them, but ignore it when it doesn't. For example, they cite science favorably when touting the potential cures promised by ESCR. However, when the topic is the status of the human embryo, the authors ignore the scientific evidence altogether and assert their own arbitrary claim: The embryo is a human life, but it's not a morally significant person. This is not science, but a personal, metaphysical opinion of the authors. Why should we accept it? What's the difference between a human being and a human person? The authors must show how there can be such a thing as a human being that is not a person. They do no such thing.*]

In Donum Vitae in 1987 the Vatican declared that at conception three components make a full human being: sperm, egg, and a divinely implanted soul. However, with advances in embryology such as nuclear transfer, scientific understanding of what it takes to make a human individual is changing.

**[*The authors are confusing "parts" and 'wholes." The difference in kind between each of our cells and a human embryo is clear: An individual cell's functions are*

subordinated to the survival of the larger organism of which it is merely a part. The human embryo, however, is already a whole human entity. Objection: "Sperm and egg, as well as body cells, contain human DNA and are human life. Do I commit mass murder if I kill cells from my hand?" Reply: Again, this objection confuses "parts" with "wholes." Unlike bodily cells and sperm cells, which are merely parts of a larger human organism, the embryo is already a distinct, whole, self-integrating human being. True, it is small and has yet to fully develop, but it is a whole human being nonetheless. It makes no sense to say that you and I were once a sperm cell. However, the facts of science make clear that you and I were once human embryos. In short, somatic cells are not, and embryonic human beings are, distinct, self-integrating human organisms.

Before ethical conclusions on the status of the embryo are drawn, theologians and ethicists must study this rapidly advancing science. The embryo is a potential human being, to be sure; respect for the early embryo shows our respect for God's intended future destiny. As such we do not support research that would lead to the wholesale fabrication of embryos for research purposes.

[*Why not? If the embryos in question are not human beings, why not create them solely for destructive research? If they are not human, killing them for research requires no more justification than pulling a tooth*.]

Rather, we support research that uses stem cell lines derived from embryos taken from fertilization labs. In the deep freezes of these clinics are thousands of embryos slated for destruction.

[*This worn out argument, "These embryos are going to die anyway so let's put them to good use," is vacuous. All of us die sometime. Do those of us who are going to die later have the right to kill and exploit those who will die sooner? My we kill death row inmates to harvest their organs?*]

Society has decided to engage in reproductive technology. Excess embryos exist in large numbers. These surplus embryos will never find connection to a mother's womb, never become a human being.

[*Assume that one day soon science allows us to conceive a child in a test-tube and then transplant him or her to an artificial womb. When the child is born nine-months later, would he or she be less than fully human simply because there was "never a connection to a mother's womb?" This clearly follows from the authors' argument*.]

Is it ethically licit to take surplus embryos and press them into the service of life-saving medical research?

**[*The distinction between "surplus" embryos (those left over from fertility clinics) and "research" embryos (those created solely for destructive research). However, this distinction is morally incoherent and practically unworkable. Morally, if it is wrong to*

***create human embryos for destructive research, that is largely because destroying embryos for research purposes is itself an egregious moral wrong. It treats a human being with inestimable moral worth as nothing more than research fodder. Conversely, if one takes the view that human embryos have no inherent moral worth–that their value is purely instrumental–then why not create them solely for destructive research? Last week, two privately funded research labs announced plans to do just that. Leading proponents of ESCR assured the public that federal funds would not (and should not) be used in this way, but on what moral grounds? If the human embryo or fetus has no inherent worth, why not decide in advance that its sole purpose is to treat others?*]**

Armed with the principle of beneficence we want to answer, yes.

[*But armed with science and objective morality, the answer is no. We do not have a right to kill living, distinct human beings to benefit other people*.]

So ethically central is the principle of beneficence that those who ignore its invocation in the stem cell debate owe it to the public to justify opposition to the advance of medical research. We might recall Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. In this story a robbed and beaten man is left on the side of the road to die. Priests pass by on the other side of the road, avoiding offering aid. A Samaritan happens along the road, carries the suffering one to the next town and pays for his health care. Confronted by suffering, the Samaritan chooses agape in the form of beneficence. Reducing the stem cell debate to the abortion controversy, we allow the unnamed suffering man—suffering from heart disease, Alzheimer's, or cancer—to die without aid.

[*This is very sloppy theology that misses the point entirely. The parable of the Good Samaritan does not establish the so-called "principle of beneficence" as defined by the authors, but refutes it. Central to the parable is the fact that an innocent human being was unjustly beaten so that other people (thieves) could benefit from his demise. Only the Samaritan set aside his own self-interest (benefit) to perform his moral duty to one who was vulnerable and defenseless. Clearly, the authors wish to see themselves as good Samaritans by supporting ESCR. However, if the embryo is a human being, a point the authors never entertain much less refute, their place in the story is not that of the Samaritan, but thieves who rob from one human being to benefit another*.]

Ted Peters is professor of theology and director of the science and religion course program at the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, Berkeley Calif. Gaymon Bennett is a theologian at the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences.