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**HUMAN EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH:
SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY AND ETHICAL CONTROVERSY**

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Research on human embryonic stem cells (hESC) has provoked considerable controversy that has spilled over from the scientific community into the public arena, generating debate about the legitimacy of such research and about appropriate public policy. Debate has revolved predominantly around philosophical questions regarding the embryo's moral status – doubtless a central issue, because acceptance of the embryo's claim to personhood obviously precludes research which results in its destruction. However, discussion of the embryo's moral status remains highly abstract, too often ignoring the different contexts and ways in which embryos come to exist. Moreover, the restricted framework of ethical debate tends to circumvent crucial questions related to the scientific premises for this research, to the conditions under which it is conducted, and to its ultimate goals. This presentation examines and raises questions about the argumentative framework of controversy over stem cell research. My aim is not to propose novel substantive answers to moral questions, but to suggest that ethically relevant aspects of stem cell research are not receiving appropriate attention.