

Re-installing ethics into bio-objects. Cultural meanings and aporias of ethical stem cells

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In many countries, stem cell research is embroiled in heated ethical and political debates because the most valued stem cell types are human embryonic stem cells (hESCs) taken from a few-days old human embryo which is destroyed during the harvesting procedure. 'Ethical stem cells' is the label commonly used to denote an array of cellular reprogramming techniques, biological artifacts, and somatic stem cells which make it possible to obtain pluripotent stem cells while avoiding the use of human embryos. These bio-objects (Webster 2012) incorporate in their ontology the social and ethical quandaries raised by stem cell research in order to sidestep them. By exploring the cultural meanings and the political uses of these bio-objects, I shall analyze some aporias emerging from this way to deal with ethical commitments in biosciences. In this way, I would like to explore the more general process of creating normativity and regulatory ordering in regard to biotechnological innovations.