

## Stem Cell Research vs. Idolatry

*When he lifted the ban on federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, President Obama said, 'As a person of faith...I believe we have been given the capacity and will to pursue this research...and the humanity and conscience to do so responsibly.' Do you agree?*

Yes. I, as also a person of faith, agree.

1.....While the President is an evangelical-liberal Christian, the "faith" his statement specifies is that God the Creator has "given" humanity a gift which we treat "responsibly" when we "pursue this [embryonic stem cell] research" with "humanity and conscience." Negatively put, the executive order he signed today *revoked* a spiritually, morally, intellectually, and politically irresponsible POLICY.

1.1.....Revoked what was spiritually irresponsible. Rightly, Obama's reference to deity was indirect and in the passive voice: he is not a preacher, and does well to avoid sounding like one. I am a preacher, and translate into religious language what he said: God gives humanity gifts, and expects us to use them for the common good. To the extent that government hinders citizens from developing and using God's gifts, government is against the will of God.

1.2.....Revoked what was morally irresponsible. The moral duty of all medics is to be the best health-news they can manage to be. Those in bio-medical research can be good news by using adult stem cells, and better news by using embryonic stem cells capable of morphing (as replacement tissues) into any cells of the body. In specifically excluding from government support most of the categories of embryonic stem cells, the old policy was immoral: good news is an enemy of better news.

1.3.....Revoked what was intellectually irresponsible. Modern methodological and technological extensions of the human brain-mind have made real what before was only possible and, before that, unimaginable. Functionally, we have more "intellect" to be responsible for; and it is irresponsible for society to restrict unduly the freedom to use this expanded intellect for the common good.

1.4.....Revoked what was politically irresponsible. Our country is at a competitive disadvantage if our government imposes on scientific research unnecessary restrictions other governments do not impose on scientific research.

2.....But the developing and expanding field of MEDICAL ETHICS rightly addresses problems old and new in both the practice and the theory of medicine. One of the field's functions is to inform medics and the public of how religion, philosophy, art, and law bear on human health and healing. In hospitals, difficult cases are getting interdisciplinary treatment: the called committee may involve a medical-ethics chair, attending physicians and clergy, hospital chaplains, lawyers, and perhaps others. I know from experience how complex the decision-making can become. Bad listeners, stay away.

2.1.....The most basic difference among medical ethicists is between *materialists* (who see the human being as nothing but a material product of evolution - for example, "mind" as nothing other than "brain" in action), and *totalists*, (who see the human being as an evolutionary emergent from the mind of God and possessed of both mind [or "spirit"] and body).

2.2.....Matter and spirit each should have appropriate respect. While more than an animal, a human being is an animal. My anthropology is binocular: seen from above, we are *creatures*; seen from below, we are *animals*. All medical ethicists, no matter their basic philosophy, face the question of "sacred" (that is, untouchable) limits on the scientific-and-medical treatment of human beings.

3.....While materialists are in danger of treating human beings with disrespect, we totalists are in the opposite danger, namely, over-respecting pre-born human beings. Human life begins at conception: each conceptus and embryo is *a human being*. But the pre-fetal stages of human life should be open to scientific study and medical use. And human beings should be called "*persons*" only as they are born with self-consciousness in the womb of the family. Yes, I am pro-choice; and I see the pro-life (anti-choice, anti-abortion) position as idolatrous.



## Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

Sorry that's so long, below, but consider this as I add more: It's easy for Abrahamics to basically create this whole system, then heap the scorn elsewhere when there's ...something uncomfortable about it.

It's in your book, infertility is a curse, not being a 'breeder' is horrible sin and disfavor, ...no wonder you've got people spending billions to \*breed personally\* and the only thing they care about all the unwanted children that result from their economic and social policies, is to be sure that no queer people look after all the unwanted children...

Or that all of a sudden the extra embryos you \*drove people to make to escape shame you induced, and the effects, I daresay, of pollution and overpopulation \*you defend\* are 'sacrosanct human lives.'

All this is pure denial of your own reproductive culture and agenda, until you can find something 'foreign' to blame.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | MARCH 18, 2009 12:59 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

You know, IVR, you won't get much out of 'idols' if you only treat em as 'straw men.'

Brave, brave iconoclasts. :)

There's kind of some projection going on there, ...I'm sure that in Christian terms, the Reverend here is right to point out that people treat a fertilized ovum as a substitute for your God in some ways, ...and I'd add, Bibles, or the words therein, are seen as something not-made-by humans.

You quote:

"Abraham would say, "Isn't it pathetic that a man of sixty wants to bow down to a one-day-old idol?" The man would feel ashamed and leave."

Frankly, what your \*book\* teaches you to see in an 'idol' is \*not\* what it is: if you came into my house and smashed up my shrine, it wouldn't be the Gods you were hurting.

(continued below)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | MARCH 18, 2009 12:47 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Trying to pass off the surplus material from fertility clinics as an \*old\* 'idol,' certainly doesn't reflect reality. Such material routinely fails to implant and grow into recognizable human beings. The ancients maybe only knew this poetically, but failure to implant naturally is in fact one of the major reasons people \*go\* to these clinics and create all these cells in the first place.

Bowing down and sacrificing some of the \*future\* in order to obey what you think a book can be made to say, \*that's\* something I think is out of touch with both physical reality and Spirit.

Actual 'idols' that preachers love to backhandedly disparage, are not what you think they mean. Things we make, be they statues rituals, prayers, or books are not the Gods, (more than anything else is) (Or Their Will) ...they're ours.

You can have 'mental idols,' too, like the idea that the blastocyst in your \*mind\* is to be honored like God through the sacrifice of real people's lives.

Actually, the disposition of sacrifices was a major question in the Pagan world, one that perhaps was never suitably-addressed, in the Abrahamic one. I can sympathize with Christian clergy who may see people come into their churches to pray their God will hurt someone else, or reward them over someone less pious. Some, of course, do a lot of trade in playing to these rather juvenile notions, even if others know and will say that's not supposed to be the point.

When people put stone slabs of the Ten Commandments on a trailer and drag it around the country for adoration, is it any less your 'idolatry' because it's an image of \*words?\*

We have the capacity to look at reality and do what's the best we can discern.

Also fully capable of using... or making, an object to make a place for, and welcome, the Gods into our mundane ol' world of thoughts and things and spaces and the like.

Frankly, I find the quoted assumptions in that Bible story below rather revealing.

So much shock and scorn about Pagan 'Fertility rites' ...then you turn around and worship at the altar of some clumps of cells in a freezer as 'Human life and God's Will.'

Frankly, I'm not so sure they ought to be in there in the first place, but they certainly aren't any more respected being shut away as a byproduct until they become nonviable for anything.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | MARCH 18, 2009 12:46 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dear Artistkvip1,

I am glad to see you blogging again on this site as I've always enjoyed reading your posts. I wonder at your self-description as dyslexic. Indeed, I always have. I've known many dyslexics and worked with quite a number of them. I see none of the usual signs in your posts. None. I wonder if you may have been misdiagnosed.

You may, of course, have historically encountered problems with reading and writing. There are any number of possible causes aside from what is classically termed "dyslexia," a kind of catch-all phrase, at all events. A more specific diagnosis could be helpful to you regardless of your age. For example, if you were found to have visual perception difficulties, you could be easily treated.

I don't mean to pry, but I've frequently wondered when you were last tested. If I've made you uncomfortable, in the least, please accept my apologies.

Ivri

POSTED BY: IVRI5768 | MARCH 14, 2009 6:18 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Testing

POSTED BY: IVRI5768 | MARCH 14, 2009 5:24 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dear Willis,

Thank you for your eloquent reply. I cannot honestly say which of your two camps I fit in with. I can say that I eschew idolotry with every sinew, muscle, fiber, bone, and blood cell in my body. Here is a midrash with which you are surely familiar:

Abraham's father, Terach was an idol-manufacturer. Once he had to travel, so he left Abraham to manage the shop. People would come in and ask to buy idols. Abraham would say, "How old are you?" The person would say, "Fifty," or "Sixty". Abraham would say, "Isn't it pathetic that a man of sixty wants to bow down to a one-day-old idol?" The man would feel ashamed and leave.

One time a woman came with a basket of bread. She said to Abraham, "Take this and offer it to the gods".

Abraham got up, took a hammer in his hand, broke all the idols to pieces, and then put the hammer in the hand of the biggest idol among them.

When his father came back and saw the broken idols, he was appalled. "Who did this?" he cried. "How can I hide anything from you?" replied Abraham calmly. "A woman came with a basket of bread and told me to offer it to them. I brought it in front of them, and each one said, "I'm going to eat first." Then the biggest one got up, took the hammer and broke all the others to pieces."

"What are you trying to pull on me?" asked Terach, "Do they have minds?"

Said Abraham: "Listen to what your own mouth is saying? They have no power at all! Why worship idols?"

POSTED BY: IVRI5768 | MARCH 14, 2009 5:14 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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TO IVRI5768:

1

I know of no one who imagines that the materialist view can be "vanquished." I affirmed its existence as a stable alternative to my "totalist" view, which affirms the Creator as non-material: behind the Big Bang was neither pre-matter nor nothing.

2

Thank you for quoting one of my favorite poems, "God's Grandeur." ("Grandeur" is in the last sentence of Darwin's "Origin..." My 6th edition still has, in that paragraph, that life was "breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one." Darwin's totalism.)

3

You say, "There is so much more than mind. There are spirit, love." (Then you quote a Baptist preacher, MLKingJr: "We must love one another or die.") You, too, sound like a totalist. / Physiologist Sherwin Nuland sees "spirit" as an evolutionary emergent, but does not deny the possibility of a creator behind-within the evolutionary process. / Robert Wright's just-published "The Evolution of God" does not deny that looked at from above rather than from below, the process can be viewed as God's self-revelation (as in the Bible).

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | MARCH 14, 2009 2:06 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Willis, Here is something people of many faiths and no faith like very much.

God's Grandeur

THE WORLD is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod; 5  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things; 10  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

-Gerard Manley Hopkins

POSTED BY: IVRI5768 | MARCH 14, 2009 1:06 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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It is impossible to vanquish the materialist view. Simply put, humans may be singular in their physicality, but that does not imply a soul or spirit.

Philosophy of mind, notwithstanding, notwithstanding even social theory, with which I am much more at home, peace of mind is possible. That is a good thing.

POSTED BY: IVRI5768 | MARCH 14, 2009 1:02 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dear Willis,

Thanks for your reply. Uriah Heep was unctuous, which I don't think is synonymous with humble, do you? But, you know, there is so much more than mind. There are spirit, love. You can teach in this venue.

Snobbery is a kind of intellectual surrender. You know that of course. Gentle teaching....Openness to others. We must love one another or die. There are amazing moments of glad grace throughout this very troubled world.

POSTED BY: IVRI5768 | MARCH 14, 2009 12:03 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Yes, humility is seldom overdone - even in the case of Dicken's Uriah Heep. Sorry I underdid it.

Yes, pride impedes some from admitting man's animality. Not me, not the Bible.

Yes, "totalism" is not a common word. As antonymic to "materialism," it refers to what of the humanum (the total human reality) is "more than" animal: beyond the other animals, the vast range of human visible & invisible productivity-creativity-potential. A range worthy of being called a difference in KIND (as the Bible represents) rather than only of DEGREE.

Yes, I write heavy (because I think heavy, & write mainly heavy stuff). Thanks for the suggestion that I lighten up in this venue.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | MARCH 13, 2009 11:26 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Willis,

Your post is interesting, but you should give the heavy-handedness a long rest:

"In my opinion, your comment lacks the humility of a mature mind"

Let's face it, Willis, humility isn't your great strength either. And that's an unfortunate lack in a Christian. Really, in anybody.

Still, I like you, quite sincerely. I don't know you, disagree with you half the time, but like you just the same. I'm a cyberspatial intuitive. So let's here it for a kinder, gentler Willis. Set an example, please. We could all use one.

Sincerely,  
Ivri

POSTED BY: IVRI5768 | MARCH 13, 2009 9:39 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Willis Elliott

I am not familiar with your "materialist" versus "totalist" ideas. Therefore, your discussion using these terms seems a little foggy.

You say that Lufrank lacks the humility of a mature mind. But what he said is much more clear, realistic, and understandable than what you said.

One thing that distinguishes man from the animals is pride; in his pride, man does not want to admit that he is an animal.

POSTED BY: DANIELINTHELIONSDEN | MARCH 12, 2009 1:29 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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TO LUFRANK1:

1  
Yes. A human life begins at conception ("human life" in the sense of cells preceding it).

2  
You cannot know that man is more than animal "in degree only." Science cannot tell you. Do you claim some nonscientific (not "unscientific") knowledge for "in degree only"?

3  
"Soul" has many meanings along a minimum-maximum spectrum, each meaning bearing some truth-in-context. But in the column you are responding to, I did not use the word.

4  
All languages have words indicating functions uniquely human, including language itself. All animals have signal systems, but we are the only animal with mind-speech powers worthy of the word LANGUAGE (e.g., syntax/metaphor/abstraction/projection/analysis/synthesis). / Again, many higher animals have self-recognition; only we have self-CONSCIOUSNESS.

5  
We "totalists" see the differences between human beings & other animals as a matter of kind rather than (as do "materialists") only of degree. As I intimated in my section 2.1, we totalists believe that what is unique about the human animal - whatever word we use for it - corresponds to the Consciousness that created (by the Big Bang) the universe: our minds are capable of understanding and using "the world" because of the correspondence of our minds with the Creator's mind (in the Bible's wording, we are made "in the image of God"). Materialists, of course, see the mind/world correspondence as nothing but evidence of emergent continuity. Neither point of view is provable: both are philosophical, not scientific.

Both are matters of faith rather than (in the narrow sense) fact.

6  
In my opinion, your comment lacks the humility of a mature mind.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | MARCH 11, 2009 11:43 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Human life doesn't literally begin at conception. Conception is merely a critical stage of human life. Human life is instead a continuum, the human embryo continuing from a fertilized egg, the egg, per se. continuing from a oocyte in the mother and the activating sperm continuing from a spermatid in the father . . . on and on further back . . . an unbroken continuum through ancestral history.

Like all mammals. Man = more than animal? In degree only. Who is to say that Man, but not Ape has a soul. What exactly is a soul? NO HUMAN KNOWS!

POSTED BY: LUF frank1 | MARCH 11, 2009 1:00 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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TO ARTISTK KVIP1:

Thank you for your story. As a Christian theologian, I approve of your painting's political use of Jesus' Cross. God bless you!

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | MARCH 11, 2009 9:04 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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TO ARTISTK VIP1:

Thank you for your story. I'm a Christian theologian, & congratulate you on the political use of Jesus' Cross in your painting. God bless you!

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | MARCH 11, 2009 8:54 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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censorship should be shamefull when it is done because of opinion....

POSTED BY: ARTISTK VIP1 | MARCH 11, 2009 2:02 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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i wonder about the souls and ethics of human beings that let perfectly treatable human beings die every day in america because they do not have health insurance. or are denied an education so they can compete fairly with the wealthy. i did a large painting i donated to the big bend cares charity auction in tallahassee several years ago . the woman who runs the charity told me two people almost came to blows fighting over who had actually bought it. i wished i had actually seen this this is the highest praise an artist can have lol. although i do not condone violence i understand the things which can fan its flames. my painting was made in the shape of a crucifix and was intitled. WHY ISN'T THERE A CULTURE OF LIFE FOR PEOPLE ALREADY ALIVE, (many of my painting have real life storys or messageges) it had a special message on a little painting connected by a chain that a person had to walk around or step over to get a close look at the painting.. it said i am a human being.... this is how i feel when i get threating letters from the hospital wh o sends me threatening letters to try to collect for the \$30,000 worth of surgery they did on me when I had peritonitis and was ruch from florida states thaggart heath center to thier hospital. they did all that surgery and didn't do the bacterial culture to find out which antibiotic would actually cure my infection. i didn't have insurance. i got my introveineious vancomycin a year later at tmh another hospital who had many times misdiagnosed my problems. i suppose you consider me immoral for thinking i owe these peopel no money because they treated me more like an animal than a human being. why is you don't have to pay a bad car mechanic but you are expected to pay for pathetic health care. please excuse my misspellings iam dyslexic not stupid, i'm actually fairly brightand quite often right in my assertions. truth does not require acknowledgement to be true...

POSTED BY: ARTISTK VIP1 | MARCH 11, 2009 1:58 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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