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President Bush's Stem Cell Theology

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The New York Times editorialized on the stem cell issue again, charging President Bush with pushing a theological agenda. In "The President's Stem Cell Theology," the paper charged that the President's policy on human embryonic stem cell research is "based on strong religious beliefs" that are held by "some conservative Christians, and presumably the president himself."

Consider this statement: "The president's policy is based on the belief that all embryos, even the days-old, microscopic form used to derive stem cells in a laboratory dish, should be treated as emerging human life and protected from harm. This seems an extreme way to view tiny laboratory entities that are no larger than the period at the end of this sentence and are routinely flushed from the body by Mother Nature when created naturally."

The editorial also claimed that these human embryos "bear none of the attributes we associate with humanity and, sitting outside the womb, have no chance of developing into babies." Of course, this is true of all human babies right up to the point of viability. Would the editorial board be satisfied to encourage the use of human fetuses as material for medical research?

This editorial is another example of secular thinking that isn't so secular after all. Indeed, the myth of secular neutrality is one of the secular elite's most cherished intellectual principles. They honestly believe that the conservative Christians are driven by a faith-based ideology, while their own positions are just self-evidently right. As ethicist Gilbert Meilaender reminds, there is no neutral ground when issues of human dignity are concerned. The argument that the human embryo should be protected as fully human is based upon foundational worldview commitments. So also is the belief that the embryo is not deserving of full respect and protection.

The editorial ended by accusing President Bush of trying to "impose his morality on a society with pluralistic views." Just like the editors of The New York Times, we assume.

See my commentary of March 23, 2005: "No Neutrality—Gilbert Meilaender on Bioethics" and Professor Meilaender's article, "Bioethics and the Character of Human Life," published by The New Atlantis.

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