

Ethics of Organ Donation

Introduction

The human body has amazing potential to change:

1 Corinthians 15:31-33. “35 But some one will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” 36 You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.”

A person's resurrected body will have continuity with that person's earthly body:

John 20:19-20 “19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.”

A fundamental Christian moral principle: Act so that others may live through you, in imitation of Christ:

1 John 4:9-11. “9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Church teaching

Donation is an act of charity (*vs.* an obligation), a personal gift (*vs.* an act of using unneeded body parts).

Must be done ethically: with consent, preserving “functional integrity” (living donors), without harm or killing (dead donors), with due precaution against conflict of interest, without “profit,”

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John Paul II, “Blood and organ donors,” August 2, 1984 , *The Pope Speaks* 30, no. 1 (1985): 1-2.

“Such a gesture [donation] is the more laudable in that you are motivated, not by a desire for earthly gain or ends, but by a generous impulse of the heart, by human and Christian solidarity--the love of neighbor....”

“[T]he human body is always a personal body, the body of a person. The body cannot be treated as a merely physical or biological entity, nor can its organs and tissues every be used as items for sale or

Grattan Brown

grattanbrown@bac.edu

exchange. Such a reductive materialist conception would lead to a merely instrumental use of the body, and therefore of the person. In such a perspective, organ transplantation and the grafting of tissue would no longer correspond to an act of donation but would amount to the dispossession or plundering of a body.

Furthermore, a person can only donate that of which he can deprive himself without serious danger or harm to his own life or personal identity, and for a just and proportionate reason. It is obvious that vital organs can only be donated after death. But to offer in life a part of one's body, an offering which will become effective only after death, is already in many cases an act of great love, the love which gives life to others. Thus, the progress of the biomedical sciences has made it possible for people to project beyond death their vocation to love. By analogy with Christ's paschal Mystery, in dying death is somehow overcome and life restored.”

Grattan Brown

grattanbrown@bac.edu

Persistent Vegetative State (PVS)

- Coma: a state of deep unconsciousness inevitably resolving itself into either a regaining of consciousness (with or without impairment) or the vegetative state. There is debate about how long a coma lasts before vegetative state is recognized. The American Academy of Neurology [AAN] judges one month; see below.
- Vegetative state: self-unawareness, sleep-wake cycles, brainstem function. “The vegetative state is a clinical condition of complete unawareness of the self and the environment accompanied by sleep-wake cycles with either complete or partial preservation of hypothalamic and brainstem autonomic functions.” (AAN, “Practice Parameters: Assessment and Management of Patients in Persistent Vegetative State, 1994)
- Persistent vegetative state (PVS): vegetative state present for *one month* after acute traumatic or non-traumatic head injury. (Probability for recovery from unlikely after 12 months from traumatic head injury and 3 months from non-traumatic head injury [AAN 1994])
- Permanent vegetative state: vegetative state with irreversible loss of consciousness Brain death: irreversible cessation of whole brain function, including the brain stem

Continuum of life

Awake Sleeping Unconscious Coma/PVS Dead Meets clinical definition of death

Grattan Brown
grattanbrown@bac.edu