

Seifert: Brain death is not true death!

We report here an interview to Professor Josef Seifert, famous Austrian Catholic philosopher and co-founder of the International Academy of Philosophy (IAP). His considerations on the so-called "brain death" are shocking and really make us reflect on the level at which the culture of death has come to the world!

We would like to give our readers some coordinates, since this issue is not so much debated and well-known. You have studied the brain death issue from a philosophical point of view. According to your opinion, what is brain death and how was it born?

The "Brain Death" definition **has been proposed by a Committee of the Harvard Medical School** and is since half a century applied in Hospitals and instituted by many laws all over the world in transplantation medicine. **It serves a legal justification of harvesting hearts and other vital organs from biologically clearly living persons.** The "Brain Death" construct constitutes a radical revolution of the understanding of death and an overthrow of the nature and signs of biological death since the beginning of mankind and since the commencement of the history of medicine.

For instead of declaring dead only persons whose circulatory and respiratory and all basic vital functions have ceased, BD-definitions **now allow to declare dead biologically fully living persons, whose heart beats, whose respiration in the lungs and all body-cells is intact, whose body-temperature is maintained, who fight against infections, have reflexes and can even carry an embryo to terms during many months until his healthy delivery.**

Declaring such persons dead is an insult to common sense and to science and philosophy. It has been driven by pragmatic motives, most of all in order to explant vital organs (that are useless when a person is really dead) without killing the organ donor. After the first heart transplantation in 1967 some law-suits have been filed against physicians accusing them of man-slaughter or murder. To stop this, a BD definition has been introduced by a Harvard Committee in 1968 after deliberations and exchanges of letters between Henry Beecher, head of the Committee and the Dean of the Medical School, Dr. Ebert, between January 1967 and August 1968. In the Harvard Committee's statement as well as in these letters **only the need for organs and to get rid of unconscious people from hospitals were mentioned as motives.** Therefore, some prominent critics of "brain death" such as **Dr. Paul Byrne**, have called the "brain death" definition a medico-legal construction and a lie that served only to secure a multi-billion business of organ transplantations. It is one of the most shameful occurrences in the history of medicine and of mankind, that such a crucial issue as whether human beings are dead or alive has been settled by mere utility, without appeal to truth and rational scientific and philosophical reasons (Only later three or four theoretical and philosophical rationales, all deeply flawed, have been offered).

I consider the "brain death" definition as an evidently false one that defies common sense, medical science and philosophy and had the **fatal consequence of undermining medical ethics and killing thousands of living persons.**

The world-renowned medical and biological researcher **Dr. Cicero Coimbra** has proven, in addition, that the reversal of medical ethics even follows from the *methods of testing for BD*, especially the apnea-test, **in which all ventilation is lifted from the gravely brain-injured person during up to ten minutes**, in order to see whether he is "brain dead" and incapable of spontaneous breathing (which can be replaced by a ventilator and concerns only the muscular pump function of the diaphragm and not the lungs and respiration).

In the process of such a test, comparable to asking a man who suffered a heart attack to run fast for a few minutes, one shows no concern for the organ donor. In fact, **many die the real death because of such a medically counter-indicated test.** Therefore, to administer this test prescribed by medical ethical codes and laws before declaration of “brain death” is irresponsible and even a criminal neglect of the interest of patients.

Which philosophical assumptions, in brief, underlie the brain death concept?

The philosophical arguments which have been offered only later to give the new definition of death a scientific and theoretical basis, are mainly three:

- The brain(stem) is called, in a very unfounded bio-philosophy, the central integrator without whose function the organs of a body are disintegrated and disassociated like cell-units and organs thrown on the street after a deadly accident, or like organs taken from a body and preserved in a refrigerator years after the death and burial of a person.

This disintegrated bunch-of-organs-argument has been thoroughly refuted by a world-renowned pediatric neurologist, **Dr. D. Alan Shewmon, who has shown that the most important integration and admirably structured cooperation between organs is brain-independent** and found in the so-called “brain dead” person in form of a whole “litany” of integrated biological processes, functions, and purposeful interrelation and goal-directed cooperation between organs.

- The second main argument is that the upper brain (the cerebral hemispheres) are decisive for rational human life. Therefore, irreversible dysfunction of the higher brain leads to the “death of the human person” even if he is, speaking from a point of view of vegetative life, still a living human being.

This argument, **which allows some to call even advanced Alzheimer patients “brain dead”** forgets that the rational nature of man is not constituted by the brain but by the rational human soul; it draws also an intolerable division and separation between rational life and biological life and forgets that Man has one single soul that is responsible for his biological as well as for his mental life. **It also forgets that to be a person continues fully even if a living person can no longer act as a person.** We remain human persons when we are sleeping or lose consciousness.

- The third main argument identifies the human body simply with the human brain, as if the brain alone were the body and the rest a mere appendix. Thus the dysfunction of the brain would be death and imply that the soul left the body.

This argument based on reducing the complex body-soul to the brain results from a complete forgetting that, for example, the embryo is a person and has a soul long before his brain is formed. Therefore, it is entirely false and contradicts biological science as well as philosophy to reduce the human body to **the brain that is merely a late product of integrated biological life**, however great its importance is.

Is the distinction between human being and human person the same used for defending abortion? Where does it come from?

For those who admit the true proof that the “brain dead” person is alive (who disagree with the central integrator rationale for BD), yes, it is basically the same distinction between human being and human person that is being used by many mothers, lawyers or physicians who deny the personhood of the embryo and do not recognize abortion as man-slaughter and, when consciously

and knowingly performed, as murder of the unborn. Many claim that the embryo is nothing but a heap of cells.

Some also speak of “brain birth” such that the embryo would only become a person and receive a human soul after the brain is formed.

This erroneous distinction between human being and human person suffers from the same faults as the ones I mentioned in my last answer.

A message you would send to our readers ...

For the rest, I believe that the “brain death definitions” and their application should be abandoned and wiped out of our society and medicine. The good end of saving some human lives cannot justify the bad means of killing others.

The “brain death” definitions and their application to extract organs from living persons is one horrifying example more of the godless *anti-culture of death* that characterizes our society and operates likewise through abortion, euthanasia, contraception, sterilization, withholding nutrition and liquidation to fully living persons such as Vincent Lambert, an uncontrolled and egocentric reduction of the number of children, a homosexual lifestyle that separates sex totally from procreation, and many other phenomena.

We should not allow the horror of this *anti-culture of death*, however, to drive us into passivity and depression, but, never losing hope, undertake every effort to undertake the gigantic battle against evil and to promote the culture of life in all of its forms, in trusting in the help of Him who is *THE WAY, THE TRUTH, and THE LIFE*.

Interview by **Fabio Fuiano**