

BRAIN DEATH AND ORGAN TRANSPLANT: AN AFRICAN MORAL PERSPECTIVE

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One of the arguments for brain death is that it is anodyne for organ transplant. Numerous strands of this argument are collectively referred to as the 'Pro-brain death.' A fragment of the arguments says that brain death, in enhancing organ transplant, saves life. If this is true, what implication does it have for the concept of death? How do we differentiate between brain death and real death in order to conduct organ transplant? Is it morally right to take organs of a brain death patient to save critically ill patients waiting for organ transplant for survival? Bearing it in mind that the refusal of organ transplant may terminate such a patient's life, should we refuse organ transplant? In short, does saving a life justify organ transplant from a brain death patient?

This paper seeks to examine the consonance and dissonance of brain death and organ transplant in African moral perspective, using the Yoruba traditional belief as a case study. This examination is carried out with the Yoruba philosophy of death (iku) and life after death (aye atun wa). We noted that the Yoruba acknowledged death as the annihilation of consciousness. For them, death is not an end in itself rather it is a transition to ancestral world. Its methodology is critical and comparative. In Yoruba tradition, it is believed that those who died with incomplete body parts are rejected in the ancestral world. Hence, this study will show, firstly, that brain death is not real death and would be alien to the Yoruba. Secondly, that brain death does not bother the Yoruba as their 'metaphysics' foresees and overlaps the pitfalls of brain death. Therefore, the fundamental thesis of this paper is that within the Yoruba cultural milieu, the consonance being established by pro-brain death is insufficient in justifying organ transplant from a brain death patient; and this, in turn, establishes the dissonance explicit, but easily ignored by pro-brain death, in brain death discourse. The paper argues that Yoruba traditional conception of death is normatively

incompatible with organ transplant. It then concludes with a call to quite the pretence of brain death as life saviour mechanism.

Keywords: brain death, organ transplant, Yoruba, morality.