

Free Trade in Body Parts

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Banning the free trade in human body parts is short-sighted, disgusting, selfish, and misanthropically evil in effect.

Many people are suffering and some people are dying due to lack of human body-parts for transplants. Free trade is a completely voluntary solution that would bring an abundance of body-parts making suffering and death due to the lack of them virtually unknown. It would also release for other purposes the money spent on such expensive items as renal-dialysis machines. This must all seem a good thing to anyone who is not a complete misanthrope.

Not all transplant material need come from living donors; many people would contract to allow transplants after their death. A little financial incentive would quickly solve the problem of the current shortage of card-carrying donors. But where live-donors are preferable, the competition of a legalised open market would soon improve the standards for donors and recipients. Respectable agencies would invite independent tests of their health standards and honesty. It could even be economic (due to the new abundant supply) to guarantee a free replacement to, say, a kidney donor in the unlikely event of trouble with his remaining kidney.

It is certainly an unnecessary evil for the state to bully people into carrying donor cards or to impose cannibalisation after death, as some suggest. If people don't like the idea of being donors there is no good reason to impose it on them given the infinitely superior voluntary alternative. And would you really feel safe in a hospital where doctors might be tempted to (at least) not try too hard to save you if your parts could (without your consent) save several others?

Obviously, a poorer person is more likely to sell his body-parts. He wants what others have and sees this as the best route to

attaining that end. Those who oppose his actions are often much wealthier people motivated more by their own aesthetic distaste than by real moral sentiment or sympathy for the poor man who is trying to improve his lot. They don't offer to improve his life (as those buying his body-parts do) they simply want to stop this 'disgusting' practice. It is this selfish attitude of the wealthier which disgusts me.

But that is not the worst of it. Those, who would ban the sale of your body-parts are thereby to some extent asserting their right to impose partial control over your body. They don't buy your body parts from you honestly, they simply stake a claim in deciding what you can do with them This is replacing voluntary sale with partial slavery. And that is intolerable.

But even that is not the real horror of it. The most important and tragic fact is that some people are being prevented from buying transplants where the foreseeable consequence is their death. If this is not murder then it is at least manslaughter.

Like all civilized people I am completely opposed to using violence - against the innocent. But what must we say of a person effectively sentenced to death in this way if, one dark night, he corners a politician who has voted to criminalize this voluntary trade and relieves him of the appropriate vital organ to save himself? Surely this can be no more than killing in self-defence.

Free Life