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Ethics of human fetal tissue transplant: Some observations

The concepts of a tissue transplant, autograft, allograft, and the use of redundant material for regeneration existed prior to their scientific discoveries in the West and the formation of terminology to describe them. The issue of bioethics was not raised in the societies where these things were practiced because the culture of these societies saw the cure of diseases and preservation of life as a primary focus of medicine, and their philosophical bases were humanistic and benevolent toward all living beings. Morality and the issue of right and wrong (which may vary from culture to culture and country to country) are at the center of ethical thinking. Bioethics concerns issues that arise from the relationship between medicine and the life sciences and religion, philosophy, law, and also politics. While bioethics as a discipline is relatively new, ethics in medical treatment can be traced back to the earliest religious literature of all ancient civilizations, be it Jewish, Christian, or Hindu. The Talmudic tradition speaks of a “compassionate God,” and there is the parable of the Good Samaritan in the New Testament, both of which imply kindness and care for those suffering from the disease. Medical lore in Hinduism was encased in a philosophy that emphasized the transcendent character of human life, the duty to preserve individual and communal health and the duty to rectify imbalances in nature that threatened the life and well-being of both humans and nonhumans, so much so that an entire Veda was dedicated to medicine as then known. Medical ethics in the ancient world meant if one can draw inferences from the religious texts, care for the sick and cure when possible because life was held in high esteem.

Biography

Sanjukta Bhattacharya, currently retired, was a Professor of International Relations at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India, for over 25 years till June 2016. Prior to that, she taught at Gargi College, Delhi University, and in Delhi University (American History) for 10 years. She has a Master's degree in History from Delhi University and a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University in International Relations, New Delhi (specialization in American Studies). She has received the prestigious Fulbright Award twice (1987-88 and 2004), the first time to do post-doctoral work on a comparison between affirmative action programmes in the US and the reservation system in India, and the second time as a Visiting Scholar, based in Texas College, Tyler, a historically Black college.

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