

Commodification of Human Tissue

A recent publication on the commodification of human tissue has been written by Heather Widdows with two of her current PhD students, Herjeet Marway and Sarah-Louise Johnson.

The paper's abstract is:

Commodification is a broad and crosscutting issue that spans debates in ethics (from prostitution to global market practices) and bioethics (from the sale of body parts to genetic enhancement). There has been disagreement, however, over what constitutes commodification, whether it is happening, and whether it is of ethical import. This chapter focuses on one area of the discussion in bioethics – the commodification of human tissue – and addresses these questions – about the characteristics of commodification, its pervasiveness and ethical significance – in order to clarify and map the commodificatory debate.

The chapter does this in three parts. First it defines commodification as the shift from 'persons' to 'things' and from 'relationships' to services for 'contract'. Second, using examples of kidney and gamete sale and commercial surrogacy, it argues that commodification is rife in bioethics. Third it contends that commodification is an ethical problem for three key reasons: first, because it leads to exploitation; second, because some things should not be for sale; and third, because it damages social goods. The chapter concludes that commodification and commodificatory practices should be resisted.

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Herjeet Marway is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Philosophy, University of Birmingham. Her research explores female political violence (specifically suicide bombers) and models of (liberal and relational) autonomy. She has written on topics such as the agency of violent women, and commercial surrogacy. She is Executive Secretary and co-opted Committee member of the British Philosophical Association. Herjeet can be contacted via email: hxm447@bham.ac.uk (<mailto:hxm447@bham.ac.uk>)

Sarah-Louise Johnson is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Philosophy, University of Birmingham. Her research focuses on the ethical problem of body commodification. In particular, what makes a given market noxious; feminist debates on surrogacy and prostitution; and whether there is property in the body. This research follows on from her MA thesis, which argued against kidney sale. Sarah can be contacted via email: sxj656@bham.ac.uk (<mailto:sxj656@bham.ac.uk>)