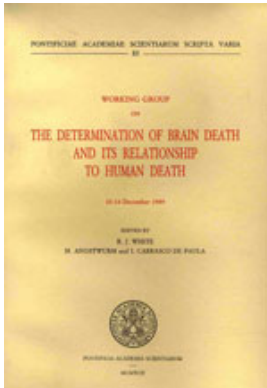




## The Determination of Brain Death and its Relationship to Human Death



Working Group 10-14 December 1989  
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### Preface

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences, in pursuing its mandated aim of promoting the progress of the mathematical, physical and natural sciences, employs various approaches to this end. Thus, in the words of its 1976 Statutes, it "organizes meetings to promote the progress of science and the solution of important scientific problems ..." and "promotes scientific investigations and researches which can contribute, in the appropriate quarters, to the exploration of moral, social and spiritual problems". The Interdisciplinary Working Group which met at the Seat of the Academy in the Vatican Gardens in December 1989 was of a nature to further both these aims. In this it differed from a previous Working Group organized by the Academy in October 1983, "The Artificial Prolongation of Life and the Determination of the Exact Moment of Death," where participating experts were mainly drawn from the scientific community alone. In the 1989 meeting, the context was enlarged to include representatives from the fields of philosophy and theology, as well as a legal expert. This interdisciplinary formula, with its possibilities for fruitful exchange, is one which the Pontifical Academy of Sciences is applying with increasing frequency in the conferences which it organizes. At its inception, this meeting was convoked to consider:

- whether "cerebral death", being the suppression of an essential function of the human person, is a sufficient indication of actual death;
- whether there are other experimental "signs" which might be included, along with "cerebral death", as valid and sure indications of "actual death";
- the present experimental situation: norms involved when "cerebral death" is considered to be, in practice, a valid criterion;
- the need for prompt action in order to avoid possible abuses.

In the course of the Working Group deliberations, there emerged a nearly unanimous agreement that the Definition of Death arrived at in the earlier meeting of 1985 was valid and acceptable (the Proceedings and Conclusions of the 1985 Working Group have been published by the Academy as No. 60 of its *Scripta Varia* series). It should be noted, however, that in publishing the Proceedings of the present Working Group, the Editors have excluded from the title any mention of the concept of the "moment" of death. As they explain below, in the foreword, the "state" of brain death can be clearly ascertained, whereas the determination of the exact moment when it occurs may be more problematic. The papers presented by the scientific participants in the Working Group will be found in the first part of the volume, followed by the Conclusions which they formulated at the end of the conference. Then follow the papers of the participants from other disciplines. These philosophical, theological and legal experts, while not formulating Conclusions as such, did summarize some of the principal aspects of their papers and discussions, and this summary has been incorporated into the Foreword. The Pontifical Academy of Sciences is pleased to be able to make available, by means of this volume, the material presented and discussed at the December 1989 Working Group. The Academy, an autonomous institution

within the Holy See, applies the principle of full freedom of expression. Each author is therefore responsible for his or her expressed opinions, which may not necessarily coincide with the views of the Academy.

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