



Human Dignity in Bioethics and Law

Charles Foster

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Dignity is often denounced as hopelessly amorphous or incurably theological: as feel-good philosophical window-dressing, or as the name given to whatever principles give you the answer that you think is right. This is wrong, says Charles Foster: dignity is not only an essential principle in bioethics and law; it is really the only principle. In this ambitious, paradigm-shattering but highly readable book, he argues that dignity is the only sustainable Theory of Everything in bioethics. For most problems in contemporary bioethics, existing principles such as autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice and professional probity can do a reasonably workmanlike job if they are all allowed to contribute appropriately. But these are second order principles, each of which traces its origins back to dignity. And when one gets to the frontiers of bioethics (such as human enhancement), dignity is the only conceivable language with which to describe and analyse the strange conceptual creatures found there. Drawing on clinical, anthropological, philosophical and legal insights, Foster provides a new lexicon and grammar of that language which is essential reading for anyone wanting to travel in the outlandish territories of bioethics, and strongly recommended for anyone wanting to travel comfortably anywhere in bioethics or medical law.

'The Beauchamp-Childress medical ethic paradigm has dominated medical ethics for four decades. It never worked very well but it was teachable, flexible, and transparent. Foster gives us a better paradigm - teachable, transparent, and plausible. Better yet a paradigm - human dignity - that is likely to make us better people, better physicians, and better care givers. Foster refocuses us on what is truly common among us as a basis for dealing with the central ethical issues of health care, patient care, and death care. This is a new reconceiving of medical ethics and everyone who cares about these matters needs to get comfortable with thinking in this refreshing new way.'

Stefan Baumrin, Professor of Philosophy, City University of New York, Graduate Center, and Professor of Medical Education, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York

'Wide-ranging and erudite, Foster's book 'Takes Dignity Seriously'. Dignity is shown to be a core value in law and bioethics, foundational, a lens through which to project hard cases. It is a rare book which finds a common thread to questions as disparate as euthanasia, sado-masochism, enhancement, cloning, abortion, refusals of medical treatment by children, and numerous other areas of controversy.

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