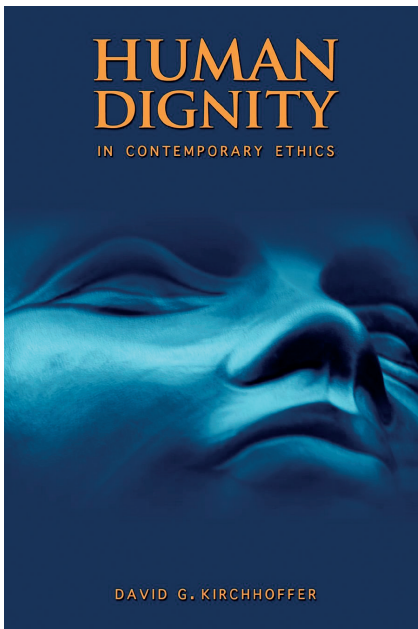


# Human Dignity in Contemporary Ethics

By David G Kirchoffer. Amherst, NY: Teneo Press, 2013. ISBN 978-1-934844-96-0.



In this strictly academic book, David Kirchoffer processes the complex issues surrounding the concept of human dignity through a clearly defined ethical method. At the outset, he questions whether it is possible to use human dignity as a normative criterion, when empirical research has shown there is no evidence that an inherent and inviolable dignity of the person exists. Yet from there,

he artfully demonstrates a multidimensional understanding of human dignity which could be used to refute recent calls for the concept's dismissal. He explains how, when viewed as a multidimensional concept, human dignity serves not only as a valuable descriptive function in ethics, but also as a way in which to understand moral behaviour.

The book begins with a lengthy introduction, followed by six chapters. The introduction explains in detail the primary thesis, associated research claim and key terms, ending with a description of the overall methodological approach, which involves combining a hermeneutic of suspicion with a hermeneutic of generosity.

Chapter 1 describes and analyses the criticisms of the concept of human dignity. Chapter 2 acknowledges the problems with the way in which this concept is used in contemporary discourse, but argues that these issues do not mean that the concept is futile. Kirchoffer criticises the underlying methodological assumptions that underpin the problematic usage of the concept and the calls for their rejection, proposing alternatives that can form the basis of a multidimensional understanding of human dignity. This is carried through into Chapter 3 where these alternatives are used to work

out this multidimensional understanding, which is illustrated in the form of the Component Dimensions of Human Dignity Model. He proposes that this model can serve as a valuable hermeneutical tool during the evaluation of human dignity in ethics.

Chapter 4 uses two case studies to demonstrate the model. In Chapter 5 Kirchoffer attempts to develop an understanding of human dignity that is useful to both believers and non-believers, and hence this chapter focuses on the question of human dignity and God. Chapter 6 summarises how the Component Dimensions of Human Dignity model offers a meaningful response to the criticisms of the concept of human dignity.

This book is most insightful and would serve as a valuable and helpful source for students and graduates alike. It is of high academic quality, using complex and intricate reasoning to consider the conflicts and paradoxes innate in the concept of human dignity.

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