

Joerden, J.C., Hilgendorf, E., Petrillo, N., Thiele, F. (eds.): 2011, *Menschenwürde und moderne Medizintechnik*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft. 432 pages. ISBN 978-3-8329-6596-9. Price: € 89.00

There are serious uncertainties about the significance and the intrinsic function of “human dignity” (stated “inviolable” in Art. 1.1 of the German Constitution). Such uncertainties are a source of particular concern (*Düwell*, p. 77), especially if one considers that dignity is a fundamental concept of any legitimate legal and political system. The present volume gathers papers given at two conferences of a research group on human dignity established at the Centre of Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF) of the University of Bielefeld, in Germany. The aim of the book is to generate a critically reflective appraisal and practical exploration on some the issues raised by modern biotechnologies. As the editors point out in the introduction (p. 11), the volume covers a great variety of issues ranging from the controversy about human embryos (including cloning and preimplantation genetic diagnosis, that was recently permitted by law in Germany) to human genetics (in medical diagnosis and therapy), up to the modern procedures of neuro- and nanotechnology, as well as future scenarios of “human-machine” interaction, artificial intelligence and “human-animal-creature“ (chimaeras, hybrids). The fact is that today no topic of bioethics or biolaw can be reasonable discussed without the understanding of the concept, validity and normative implications of the idea of human dignity in the competing horizons of law and ethics (*Rothhaar*, p. 95).

The present volume offers the great advantage, compared to older, primarily constitutional or legal-philosophical works, of reflecting the results of a truly interdisciplinary effort, which includes disciplines such as philosophy, biology and medicine. The conventional interpretation that is still dominated by the “object-formula” proposed by the German constitutionalist Günter Dürig must be regarded for many reasons as unfit. Therefore the inputs of the first chapter (p. 45) are subject of the fundamental analytical preliminary clarifications on the way to a “theory of human dignity”. This meta-theoretical contributions by renowned (legal) philosophers and ethicists open the perspective for new notional and conceptual understandings in which the authors do not agree that the “human dignity” (better to replace with a concept of “human rights”) is at the end only an “empty formula” (*Holówka*, p. 129) which has to be understood exactly reversed as overly rich in content (and therefore not defined) “idea” (*Andorno*, p. 138), or better should be pursued a “middle way” beyond sceptic or euphoric assumptions (*Hörnle*, p. 57 f.). That the personal organising institution of “human dignity” cannot depend on empirical properties as was claimed in the debate on the moral status of embryos seems not to be serious debatable (cf. for one *Wittwer*, p. 181: “unsustainable interpretation”).

The second and third chapter (p. 197 ff. and p. 327 ff. respectively) involve phenomenological, anthropological and evolutionary perspectives and exemplify the search for possible dimension of “human dignity” and the relevance of “people pictures” on the basis of selected bioethical and biolegal fields of application, such as the acceptability of human experiments (*Frewer*), xenotransplantation (*Dietrich*) or the commercialization of the human body (*Kliemt*). Certainly, the many facets of the extensive general theme are not exhausted. But even this first volume, which will be followed by a second one, shows the fertility of a genuine interdisciplinary work. More importantly, it is not the question of winning answers (which in the present context can anyway be given temporarily) but rather of asking the right questions. Finally the questions are those which actually open the door to the answers.

Gunnar Duttge
Göttingen, Germany