

The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Book Review

The academic examination of the concept of dignity in the theoretical disciplines is certainly one which has not been as thorough as one may have anticipated. Considering the concept's centrality for human existence, it would seem that the exploration of the concept has not materialised to date in a way which covers satisfactorily most of the facets thereof. The reviewer, thus, observes that, whilst the concept is covered to a certain extent in the bibliography, this is done in a rather particularistic way, i.e. vis-à-vis certain very specific aspects of human dignity mostly.

The reviewed publication offers a rather refreshing approach in this respect. Whilst it caters for an interdisciplinary approach, the work making allowance for particular areas of epistemology in the area of its enquiry (see, for instance, Part VII of the work entitled 'Biology and Bioethics'), it seems to overall proceed, quite successfully, with more generalist and universal understandings of the concept of human dignity. In this respect, see, for instance, the excellent contributions of Lindemann, Neuhäuser, Stoecker and Byk in the areas of sociology, philosophy and justice, respectively.

Accordingly, the edited collection seems to provide mostly for the examination of the concept of human dignity as a whole and in an interdisciplinary fashion. It provides the reader with a sufficient initial cognitive base for one's analytical endeavours in the subject area of investigation, the collection clearly coming with a wealth of information. Featuring the equivalent of 62 contributions of various academics from around the world, indeed academics from various disciplines, the work stands as a unique point of reference for one's immersion in the world of academic discourses relating to the idea of dignity.

The work is divided into a number of thematic areas, each one of them comprising a number of specific contributions: one notes here an interesting introductory chapter (Chapter I) as to the origins of the concept in Europe, whereas Chapter II proceeds with certain understandings of the concept in other parts of the world. Chapter III engages itself with the systematic conceptualisation of dignity, whereas Chapter IV proceeds with the legal implementation of the concept. Chapters V and VI analyse situations relating to conflict and violence and how such situations interfere with dignity in addition to addressing issues of dignity and justice. As stated, Chapter VII explores the concept of dignity in matters relating to the disciplines of bioethics and biology.

Whereas the work does not always directly relate to legal discourses *stricto sensu*, academic lawyers, especially human rights lawyers, would benefit from the work in question, as would scholars from the humanities and social sciences as a whole. At other times, the interdisciplinary nature of the work makes it fascinating for legal scholars, in that it offers perspectives which have grown and matured elsewhere, i.e. in different epistemic fields. Furthermore, in addition to offering European and Islamic perceptions of dignity from the historical point of view, the work also provides for excellent comparative legal perspectives (namely, from France, Germany, the United States, South America, South Africa, China and Japan).

The work is well-presented and appropriately structured as a whole. Nevertheless, whilst the work is ambitious enough, it could be somewhat more ambitious. It is understood, of course, that the collection of the minds of dozens of leading scholars in the area is already a titanic academic and editing task in itself, a task for which the editors are certainly to be applauded. For instance, it must be stated that the work effectively covers most of the bases it ought to cover. On the other hand, perhaps, the related brainchildren of the otherwise highly abstract notion of dignity could be

covered, more sufficiently, in a future updated edition of the work: for instance, a future thematic addition in the collection could explore 'Related Notions to Dignity' with such notions as compassion, social justice, humanism, euthanasia (assisted suicide), economic and social rights negotiated, i.e. by way of separate contributions, to name but a few of the related concepts to the idea of dignity.

To conclude, this is a publication which meets, to a considerable extent, its ambitious interdisciplinary aims. This being the case, the edited collection is certainly recommended to the researcher of the concept of human dignity, as an excellent starting point for one's interdisciplinary academic endeavours in the area. The work is thus deemed an indispensable academic tool for one's initial theoretical exploration of the concept of dignity.