Conference Abstract

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Title: **Indispensability of dignity. The case of research involving humans**

Abstact text:

The idea of human dignity plays an increasingly larger role in bioethical regulations. When understood as empowerment, it is an instrument of protection of autonomy and rights of persons against unwanted intrusions by others. When interpreted as constraint, it grounds ethical limits on the choices and actions of individuals, including their own choices or actions that concern and affect them.

The presentation will begin with a discussion of the claim (made by some prominent bioethicists) that the idea of human dignity is theoretically and normatively unwarranted, by focusing on its role in the ethics of biomedical research involving humans. Next, it will be contended that despite the difficulties associated with attempts at integration of the two interpretations, regulatory appeals to human dignity are the most adequate to date conceptual and normative basis for protection of the human potential for agency. It will be shown, that in order to protect human agency, and so to be as comprehensive as possible, regulations must recognize *both* the human potential for decision and action *and* vulnerability. Finally, it will be argued that other known conceptual and normative candidates for this protective role are unsatisfactory because they separate the capacity to choose and act from vulnerability. When applied to biomedical research involving humans (and, by extension, to many other bioethical issues), the idea of human dignity both integrates the two components of human agency and expresses the irremovable tension between them.

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