



Bioethics and Women: Across the Life Span

Mary Briody Mahowald

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All persons, while different from one another, have the same value: this is the author's relatively uncontroversial starting point. Her end point is not uncontroversial: an ideal of justice as human flourishing, based on each person's unique set of capabilities. Because the book's focus is women's health care, gender justice, a necessary component of justice, is central to examination of the issues. Classical pragmatists and feminist standpoint theorists are enlisted in support of a strategy by which gender justice is promoted. Two features of the book are unique: (1) the topics presented cover the entire life span of women, not just those related to reproduction; (2) a range views about moral status are applied not only to fetuses but also to individuals already born. Attention to these features is intended to facilitate ethical consistency or moral integrity and respect for those who hold different moral views. While delineating and defending the book's perspective, the first section provides an overview of bioethics, critiques prevalent approaches to bioethics and models of the physician-patient relationship, and sketches distinguishing aspects of women's health care that are prevalently neglected. Positions about moral status are also presented. The second section identifies topics that are indirectly as well as directly related to women's health, such as domestic violence and caregiving. Brief cases illustrate variables relevant to each topic. Empirical and theoretical considerations follow each set of cases; these are intended to precipitate more expansive and critical examination of the issues raised. The last section is devoted to an egalitarian ideal that may be pursued through an ethic of virtue or supererogation rather than obligation. By embracing this ideal, according to the author, moral agents support a more demanding level of morality than guidelines or laws require.



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