

L'autonomie brisée. Bioéthique et philosophie, PUF, 2009.

The Broken Autonomy. Bioethics and Philosophy.

This book covers a range of questions raised by cloning, decisions to stop or limit treatment, euthanasia and assisted suicide, caring for the very old and the disabled, assisted reproductive technology, and germinal and somatic gene therapies.

Its originality lies in the author's study of bioethics from the perspective of political philosophy. Pelluchon explains the principles guiding medical practices and bases her analysis of biotechnological dilemmas on the societal choices and values underlying our institutions, evaluating proposed legislation according to a description of the key values in a political community. Her goal is to go beyond both religious bioethics and minimalist ethics. To achieve it, she deconstructs the ethics of autonomy, which subordinate dignity to the ability to reason, to self-control and to competitiveness, and represent being old or handicapped in a negative way that is contrary to the ideal of solidarity proclaimed by certain institutions. The ethics of autonomy are the opposite of this author's suggested ethics of vulnerability, inspired by the philosophy of Levinas and by her having accompanied the terminally ill dying of degenerative diseases of the nervous system. Thinking about the foundations of ethics and law has led her to revise the concepts of autonomy and dignity and to add to the anthropology underlying the philosophy of human rights.

The ethics of vulnerability, based on defining subjectivity as sensitivity, does not eliminate the subject but encourages thinking about her/him/it in light of three experiences of otherness: the otherness of one's own body; the otherness related to another person and my responsibility toward that person; and dereliction, which refers not only to loss of self and alienation, but, as in Heidegger's work, it also underscores the importance of social relationships.

The ethics of vulnerability denounces certain treatments inflicted on animals and can inspire political action and promote a humanism that extends our responsibility to non-human living things and future generations.