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Bioethical Controversies and the Language of Rights

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The paper argues that the language of rights is conceptually inadequate for giving precise moral direction to the deliberations that arise over questions in bioethics. It begins with background on the development of the notion of human rights in Western thought, and from this attempts to show in what sense human rights are morally derivative rather than foundational, and how this fact leads to imprecision in 'rights-discourse'. It ends by suggesting that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition of practical reason, first principles and moral norms is a firmer conceptual foundation for addressing bioethical questions.

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