Dignity of the Other
A Minimal and Common Perspective toward Equal Respect

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Abstract

Two main streams, religious and philosophical, suggest different perceptions of human dignity. Passing through these approaches, my ultimate goal is finding common elements between them and letting them converge towards a minimal common conception of human dignity. I will introduce three principal conceptions of dignity: reason, autonomy, and Godlikeness. These might be called 'grounds' of dignity. Afterwards, I will contemplate human attitudes toward the picture of dignity as expressed by the idea of respect. I will discuss specifically human dignity in relation to other species. I need this in order to obtain a deeper agreement about dignity of human individuals that live in different cultural horizons. I will rely on Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach which can mediate between religious perspectives and modern perspective. Finally I put my ultimate analysis forward: a "minimalist approach" to human dignity as a common approach among these perspectives. "Universality of someoneness" will turn out to be the central idea.

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Introduction

It seems that there is something common in any situation in which we human beings intentionally harm each other. In any intentionally harmful action there is an implicit level of moral degrading which implies that a person is not worthy of moral consideration. He or she is treated as not being worthy of moral consideration. Consider an example from Victor Frankl's experience in Nazi work camps. In this case it is not his body but his dignity that is assaulted. One day in spite of the bad cold weather their group had to keep on working. He worked quite hard and mended a track with gravel. It was the only way to keep warm. After a while he paused to get a breath. He leaned on his shovel for a moment.

Unfortunately the guard turned around just then and thought I was loafing. The pain he caused me was not from any insults or any blows. That guard did not think it worth his while to say anything, not even a swear word, to the ragged, emaciated figure standing before him, which probably reminded him only vaguely of a human form. Instead, he playfully picked up a stone and threw it at me. That, to me, seemed the way to attract the attention of a beast, to call a domestic animal back to its job, a creature with which you have so little in common that you do not even punish it. The most painful part of beatings is the insult which they imply (Frankl 1992, 36).

When the guard abuses Victor (deliberately without any attention to his moral considerability), he places Victor in an inhumane situation in which Victor is treated as an object without any moral standing. Victor cannot even remove himself from this unequal situation: the guard can do whatever he wants (throwing a stone as a sign of disrespect), but Victor is not allowed to react. Now suppose that after a while, the situation changes. Victor gets out from the work camps. Naturally it has upset him; he is absolutely right to

complain. Here he can complain about the abusive attitudes in the camps in two ways. The first one indicates that his basic rights have been violated in the camps, for instance rights to freedom of movement. But there is another reason for complaint as well. Putting aside violated rights, he can complain that he has been treated as a sub-human object that day the guard threw a stone at him. The guard put him in a lower level than equal humanity or equal moral considerability. He forced Victor to endure, without response, a denial of his dignity. He has toyed with him as a beast or a domestic animal. Victor himself has asserted that it causes no pain, but he cannot accept any lower situation in humanity. It seems the second reason for complaining is different than the first. The first complaint is about human rights, and the second one about human dignity.

It seems this complaint about human dignity is common among all other complaints about any intentionally harmful action as well. When one kills someone intentionally, the victim or someone on the victim's behalf can complain in two ways. The first one is the action of killing has violated many rights and deprived the person of future benefits. If he remained alive, he would obtain more benefits enjoying his life; meanwhile the second and deeper reason for complaint is he has been disrespected. They have killed him without attention to his human dignity.

In both examples above, and all other intentional harms, there are at least two categories of complaint. Let me distinguish them as complaint I and complaint II.¹ Complaint I refers to violating established rights. Obviously clusters of effective or realized

¹Someone might say to me you introduced the first complaint as a complaint about losing benefits and violating rights, whereas benefits and rights are two different kinds of things. I definitely agree that benefits and rights are completely different but here I do not deal with benefits. I just want to clarify the differences between violation of rights and disrespect (in particular, denial of moral considerability).

rights differ from society to society, according to different cultural, religious or philosophical backgrounds. Individuals can enjoy only those specific rights which are assumed as right in their social circumstances. For instance, individuals can enjoy free speech and free flow of information in democratic societies but not in traditional religious ones. Complaint II is not as different as complaint I from society to society; nevertheless it is not the same in all societies. Complaining about why someone disrespects the other and denies them moral consideration can be a universal complaint. Every human being is justified to expect to be treated as a morally considerable human.

Respecting people's humanity means morally considering them. One can complain that he was treated as if he is not worthy of moral consideration. In this level of complaint, above and beyond the rights or benefits he has lost, he has lost his moral standing. The others should have treated him like a worthy person. Now my hypothesis is that claiming equal moral consideration among all human beings can be achieved via claiming equal human dignity. In other words having human dignity means having equal worth and therefore deserving equal moral consideration.

Complaint II could be the foundation of complaint I. If we take the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as an example, we recognize that all its articles protect some issues related to complaint I: Right to life, right to recognition, right to freedom, right to a nationality and so on. These are basic rights which every human being must enjoy. All these are rights, but dignity would be something else. As the first article of the Declaration emphasizes, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." This implies that dignity is not a right. It is something else. It is a human trait that supports human rights. It is not a right which a person should have; it is a part of his

existence. Dignity is not a physical thing or a mental thing. There is something real about a person in virtue of which they have dignity, and in virtue of equal dignity they have equal human rights. Since it is a human trait, it does not matter whether this person is Muslim or Jewish; he has dignity just because he is human.

If human dignity plays the role of foundation for human rights, every fragile consensus on universal human rights may need to avoid debate on the meaning of 'dignity'. In any situation where consensus on rights is controversial, any consensus on the meaning of human dignity is likely to be even more deeply controversial. Because of these differences, the founders of the UDHR passed from the concept of "dignity" quickly. They moved on because much disagreement existed about the meaning and grounds of dignity. Focusing too closely on the meaning of 'dignity' would jeopardize their goal of putting forward the Declaration as a universal statement (Hughes 2011, 6-7).

I think they were right in 1948 to pass over the concept of dignity because they were trying to put forward the first universal statement on human rights that potentially can be acceptable for all countries. But later negotiations on it during recent decades showed that some societies cannot accept the UDHR easily. For instance in 1981 Muslim countries strived to create an Islamic alternative to the UDHR, called the *Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights*. I want to say that many people in some societies are unwilling to accept that all human beings have equal rights because they are unwilling to assert that humans have equal dignity. Obviously belief in equal rights depends on belief in equal dignity. Communities with different cultural and religious backgrounds cannot easily reconcile on UDHR. They claim that they have their own grounds for dignity; therefore they

can suggest alternative versions of the Declaration. So just because there are different understandings of dignity, there are different views of human rights.

Therefore, I think that in 1948 leaving dignity aside and focusing on human rights was right, but today we need to rethink human dignity and try to find at least a minimal common agreement on it, in order to reinforce human rights. We see that there are controversial issues around universal rights and values; likewise we see noticeable obstacles in the way of reconciling on a common conception of human dignity. Accordingly some scholars, like Doron Shultziner, have suggested we must still leave it untouched as the founders of UDHR did (Shultziner 2007, 78) because talking about a common definition of dignity might create unsolvable disagreements among different cultures. But I think rethinking the concept to find that minimal common conception of it is necessary. I will try to find this minimal common conception among those philosophical, cultural and religious perspectives that include the majority of the world's population, four dominant perspectives that have influenced humans' lives during history and have important roles in today events: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and modernity.

Four of these perspectives have been combined with religious subjects, and only the last one has a purely philosophical content. Evaluating four religious perspectives and one philosophical approach to "human dignity" does not mean that I will have a religious approach to it. I am engaging in the second-order task of analyzing these different concepts and conceptions of dignity to see what they share with each other and with the secular conceptions of dignity in modernity. Thus the common concept of dignity that I come up with will be neutral between religious and secular conceptions, in that it will be what is central to both. My ultimate goal is providing a minimal and common conception of "human

dignity” which the majority of people accept, regardless of their religious beliefs or their nationality. I think philosophy can provide us with this meta-religious perspective that is more reliable.

As the title of my thesis indicates, I will strive to find whether and how recognizing people’s human dignity demands equal respect for them. Basically, I will need to consider all religious and philosophical ideas of human dignity, but only those related to “equal respect” will be central. The rest will be used only as peripheral supportive materials. As I said above, there are two mainstreams that suggest different perceptions of human dignity. The first one has religious roots (for my thesis this part includes Abrahamic religions and Buddhism). The second one has philosophical, humanistic, or specifically Kantian foundations. Passing through these approaches, my ultimate goal is finding common elements between them and letting them converge towards a minimal common conception of human dignity. If I can find this minimal common conception among them on human dignity, it will be a reliable foundation for individuals’ respectful behavior in relation to each other. Bringing close together these conceptions, I will try to suggest some possible interpretations for “the other” in a way that it encompasses all individuals regardless of their cultures or religions. In a nutshell, my question is, how can we put a minimal common conception of human dignity forward between those aforementioned perspectives to have equal respect among individuals?

In the first chapter, I will introduce three principal conceptions of dignity. Firstly, I will investigate its philology and equivalents of the term in languages related to some of the perspectives. Through this linguistic approach I will try to recognize different conceptions of the term. The main question of the chapter will be what are the properties that give

someone dignity. Historically, the three primary answers that have been given are reason, autonomy, and Godlikeness. These might be called 'grounds' of dignity. Afterwards, I will contemplate human attitudes toward the picture of dignity as expressed by ideas like admiration, awe, and respect.

In the second chapter, I will discuss specifically human dignity in relation to other species. Different perspectives obviously will not be totally different; they have, more or less, similar elements. They can endorse higher dignity for human beings in relation with other species. The crucial and controversial issues will be (a) specific grounds for human dignity, (b) reasons for dignity, (c) whether dignity is intrinsic or bestowed, and (d) God and nature as other worthy things that have dignity in relation to humans. It seems that those perspectives cannot agree on all these issues. Specifically there is a deep gap between revealed religious perspectives and secular philosophical perspectives about the authenticity and originality of human dignity. Modern philosophers (especially Kant) believe that humans have dignity intrinsically and independently, whereas religious perspectives think of it as bestowed from God. Another conflict exists with opponents of human dignity and critics (like Peter Singer) who believe either that the human species does not have dignity or that other species have dignity as well. Therefore, in this chapter I try to discuss the superiority of human dignity in relation to other species. I need this initial agreement between different perspectives in order to obtain a deeper agreement about dignity of human individuals that live in different cultural horizons. In this chapter I will rely on Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach to mediate between religious perspectives and modern perspectives. The theory supports higher dignity for human

beings, while recognizing dignity of non-human beings, and it is useful for supporting the dignity of human individuals.

Then in the third chapter, I put my ultimate analysis forward: a minimal common perspective toward human dignity shared by different traditions in order to have a possible equal respect between individuals. One problem is that, according to religious justifications of human dignity, there is a suspension of belief about dignity of people who do not share their religious belief. If God is the giver of dignity to human beings, accordingly whoever is nearer to God will have more dignity than others. To solve this problem, I will rely on interpretations that let us think of “the other” as an equally dignified person. Although talking about universal rights and values is controversial, accepting dignity as a common equal trait among all individuals can help me to solve the problem. Therefore I will try to show that dignity is not a right; it’s an existential trait on which human rights can be based. Explaining the role of human dignity in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (also other alternative universal declarations such as *Islamic Declaration of Human Rights* and international conventions against discriminations) can help in this process. Obviously I need, in this part, to refer to some more specific cases, some ethical, legal or political examples. Therefore I will discuss the dignity of women, the dignity of wrongdoers, and the dignity of believers in other religions in order to examine the idea of human dignity as a foundation for respecting “the other.” Finally in the conclusion I will suggest that having dignity does not require having specific grounds for it. Being human should be sufficient for it.

Chapter One

The Picture of Dignity

Over recent decades many books and papers have been written on human dignity explaining different perspectives on it. Suppose that based on philosophical or religious arguments someone can prove that all human individuals have equal dignity. Is it enough to convince people to value others' dignity? Possibly not all such arguments will be easy to grasp. For instance, a utilitarian argument that recognizing equal human dignity will promote human happiness may be difficult to calculate. Arguments from God's will are susceptible to conflicting interpretations. What is needed, therefore, is to point out some aspect of human existence that is clearly shared by all, so that if it bestows dignity on one person, it must bestow dignity on all. In addition, this feature should have some evocative force, so that recognition of people's dignity is not only intellectual but potentially emotional as well. In this chapter I will discuss several aspects of human existence that have been used in this way.

Dignity is one of the issues that directly are connected to practical issues. Its connection to discussions on human rights demonstrates this practical aspect. Saying that humans have equal dignity and trying to enrich this perspective is not sufficient unless we show that how equal dignity can influence human practices. Regardless of any religious or philosophical discussion on equality or inequality of dignities, at first, we need to understand the ways we recognize dignity. Imagine that you – as a human being with all human traits such as reason and emotions – are watching a picture in which human dignity has been delineated.² Illustrating the whole picture of dignity, finding its logic out, and

²It was interesting for me knowing that there is a woodcut called “dignity” depicting the Allegory of Dignity in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*. It depicts a woman richly dressed. She

knowing our reactions to it are my goals in this chapter. Therefore I will divide the chapter into two sections: 1- Different conceptions of dignity and 2- Recognition of dignity. In the first section I begin by exploring the great variety of meanings that have been attached to 'dignity', but then I want to show that, despite this, there are some common patterns, namely, that dignity is often portrayed as arising from some characteristic of human existence, such as reason, autonomy, or Godlikeness. In the second section I focus on what kind of response the recognition of dignity is meant to evoke: one option is reverse identification, the other is object-based respect.

1- Different Conceptions of Dignity

Dignity is one of the oldest human concepts. One can trace it as far back as the Old Testament. Cicero seems to be the first philosopher who has written about dignity in secular terms (Cicero 1913).³ We can find some ideas about the dignity of human beings or other creatures in Christian and Islamic literatures as well. Later some philosophers like Thomas Aquinas (*Commentary on the Sentences*) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the Renaissance humanist philosopher (*Oration on the Dignity of Man*), continued these

carries a stone upon her shoulders which is adorned with valuable things including a crown. Beside her a chair is placed on the summit of a few steps. Her precious dress and valuable things on the stone allude to honors (dignity) by birth. The enormous stone she is supporting indicates to the weight of the important affairs and responsibilities.

³Cicero uses the term "dignity" to refer to some issues like social standing (1.38), general worth (1.42), man's features (1.107), manly good looks (1.130), and a commodious house (1.138). He also associates some virtues with dignity, such as clemency and forgiveness (1.88), decorum (1.94), a refined sense of humor (1.104), gravity (1.137), conviviality (1.144), charity (2.52), and eloquence (2.66). Freeing from emotions (desire, fear, pleasure, and anger) is the other aspect of having dignity (1.67-69).

discussions. In the modern era Immanuel Kant can be regarded as the one who has paid the most attention to the concept. We can reasonably claim that after Kant every discussion about the dignity of human or nonhuman beings must take his ideas into account.

Here I do not want to confine myself to historical transformations of the concept over periods of time in history. There are several resources explaining the history of the concept⁴; rather I want to discuss some common elements that are shared in some of the most prominent historical conceptions of dignity. Before focusing on these common elements, however, I must acknowledge some of the great variety of ways in which the language of dignity has been used.

In Hebrew the word *Kavod* refers to dignity as a kind of honour. The verbal root of *kavod* is *kaved*, which means “make weighty,” i.e., it means that someone recognizes someone else’s weight or importance (Novak 2011, 272). In Arabic, *Karāmah* is the nearest word to “dignity.” In the Qur’an God says “We have bestowed dignity on the children of Adam and conferred upon them special favours above the greater part of Our creation” (The Qur’an 17:70). The origin of “dignity” in English is from Anglo-French *digneté*, from Latin *dignitas* and *dignus*, which can be translated as “worthy.”

In some usages dignity is a quality or state which someone has. In this usage, someone has dignity as a character trait. He or she “has” dignity. Conversely, when we want to blame someone due to a moral mistake we may say, “Have you no dignity?” “Having” dignity indicates that we can consider the trait as a characteristic property people can achieve or lose if they do something bad.

⁴One of the best resources for the history of the concept of dignity is Michael Rosen’s book, *Dignity: its history and meaning*. For detailed information see the bibliography.

In another usage, dignity is a manner of behavior, for example, dying with dignity. In other words, sometimes dignity is a specific form of acting; we may die with dignity or may die without dignity. Nevertheless, despite these variations and differences, many conceptions of dignity also exhibit some common features. In particular, they often identify properties or characteristics of human existence that endow us with dignity. In other words, it is common to ask *why* human beings have dignity – in virtue of what do we have dignity? And there are also a few common answers.

Having Reason

Immanuel Kant considers reason as the ground for human dignity. According to Kant's perspective, the power of rational choice, i.e., the capacity to judge things through rational argument, is the ground of having dignity. He argues that because we have reason, we can calculate the value that other things have for us, and we are thus the sources of value; because we are sources of value, humans cannot have value for others, and they must be treated as ends in themselves.

What has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; what on the other hand is raised above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent has a dignity. What is related to general human inclinations and needs has a market price, that which, even without presupposing a need, conforms with a certain taste, that is, with a delight in the mere purposeless play of our mental powers, has a fancy price; but that which constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself has not merely a relative worth, that is, a price, but an inner worth, that is, dignity (Kant 1998, 42).

Now let me stop here and ask a controversial question: why does reasoning lead things to having dignity? Why is a rational being worthy? If reasoning is a source of dignity and human beings are the only creatures who have this capacity can someone claim that *only* human beings have dignity? Can barking be the source of dignity in a dog world? This is the critique many have put forward about Kant's theory of human dignity (Rosen 2012, 34). When we think of humans as rational beings and the only possessors of dignity, we have implicitly judged that every creature that can use a sort of reason "like us" should have dignity. Is it logically or morally permissible? I will return to these questions in the next chapter, where I discuss human dignity in relation to other species. For the moment, it is just enough for me to show which human traits have been called sources of dignity.

The ability to reason has a related consequence for dignity. When a creature can reason about the causes and effects of events, it may be able to endure unpleasant natural situations more patiently and know that this situation is not endless but transient. This consequence of reasoning, being "calm in suffering" or the capacity to endure suffering without loss of self-control, has been mentioned as a related source of dignity in Friedrich Schiller's essay, *On Grace and Dignity* (Schiller 1985, 376). Distinguishing dignity from *grace*, he refers to a classical sculpture, the Laocoön group. The sculpture depicts a man whose body is full of pain because a snake is biting him. All of his muscles are rigid and full of suffering, but his face is calm and tranquil. Schiller mentions that *grace* consists in doing moral duties without any internal struggle, whereas dignity is "fulfilling moral duties while overcoming internal natural inclinations" (Rosen 2012, 32-36). He compares this with the distinction between human beings and angels. Angels are full of *grace*, perfectly doing their duties without any internal struggle. In contrast, human beings are always struggling with

different inclinations when they want to remain moral. This concept provides us with a psychological foundation for dignity.

Having Autonomy

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), the Italian renaissance philosopher, returns to the concept of human dignity in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. In this oration he refers to the story of creating man as a significant sign of human dignity. By the time God created the super-celestial part of the universe, with all its beauties, and he finished the lower world with its animals as well, the Craftsman thought there needs to be “someone to ponder the meaning of such a magnificent achievement, to love its beauty and to marvel at its vastness.” Finally he “thought to bring forth man” (Pico 2012, 113). He looked in his storehouse to find something special for this new son but he found nothing because everything had already been assigned to all higher and lower creatures, brutes and heavenly beings. Finally he decreed that “the creature to whom he had been unable to give anything wholly his own should share in common whatever belonged to every other being” (Pico 2012, 115). God afterward took man and set him in the middle of the earth and said;

We have given you, Adam, no fixed seat or form of your own, no talent peculiar to you alone. This we have done so that whatever seat, whatever form, whatever talent you may judge describe, these same may you have and possess according to your desire and judgment. Once defined, the nature of all other beings is constrained within the laws We have prescribed for them. But you, constrained by no limits, may determine your nature for yourself, according to your own free will (Pico 2012, 117).

According to this story man is neither from heaven nor earth, neither mortal nor immortal. Human beings have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, brutes, or to be reborn into the higher order, divine beings. This is Pico's view on why human beings have dignity.

This story of giving man a power of choosing whatever he likes as his nature or form begins to recognize autonomy as source of human dignity. Being diverse, multiform and inconstant is the specific power only humans have. They are the only creatures that can be an intermediary between animals and higher beings, lower than brutes or higher than angels. To be autonomous means to be a person that is not simply defined by others. On this view being a person means being an agent who can independently determine what he or she will do, will be, or will become, not limited in a fixed and unchangeable frame of definition.

This view of autonomous being in self-definition does not only belong to Pico. There are similar Christian and Islamic perspectives that endorse this human trait. Kant also has noticeable arguments about human dignity based on human autonomy. Human beings or what Kant calls "rational beings" can create themselves freely. This ability to create oneself in Kant's words finds a new version: an "end in itself." Every creature that is responsible to create itself and acts in order to create itself is indeed pursuing itself as an end. Such a creature, bearing the responsibility of self-creation on its shoulders, feels a sense of dignity (Kant 1998, 42).

Being in the Image of God

If I had decided to limit myself to discussing human dignity in purely secular terms, it would be enough to focus only on these two grounds of dignity, reason and autonomy. But I need to shed light also on religious perspectives concerning human dignity. For many religious thinkers it is not important that reason and autonomy are regarded as dignity's sources because everything has a single ultimate cause, God. The religious perspectives would regard any humanist or secular description of human dignity as incomplete because they do not include God as a source of dignity. Therefore there is more that must be said about the concept of dignity from within religious perspectives.

According to Jewish, Christian, or Islamic traditions, it is God who is the ultimate possessor of everything, proprietor of all beings and all abilities. Being God means having endless abilities and endless life. Everything belongs to him and he is the ultimate cause for everything. Thus dignity, as well, is not out of his dominance. God possesses the true and ideal kind of dignity. Based on this conception of God, no other creature possesses intrinsic dignity unless God has bestowed dignity upon it. Like the many other values and abilities that God has bestowed on creatures, dignity comes from God's generosity.

Therefore, in these traditions, having dignity means being similar to God. Whoever or whatever is more similar to God has the more dignity among others. Dignity has to do with being worthy of respect; God is worthy of respect first and foremost, and humans can be worthy of respect only to the degree that they resemble God. Based on this logic of similarity, the Bible and The Qur'an have verses referring to dignity of human beings because they are the most similar creatures to God. In the first verses of Genesis we read:

“So God created man in his own image” (Genesis, 1:27); and Mohammad says: “verily, God created Adam in his image.”

Intrinsic or Bestowed?

Now we have three representations of dignity on the table, two humanistic and one religious. What they share in common is that each identifies a feature of human existence as a ground or source of dignity. Nevertheless there is also an important difference between the humanistic and religious conceptions: for the former, dignity and its ground are intrinsic to human existence, whereas in the latter dignity was not originally intrinsic to humanity but was bestowed by God.

When someone is responsible for creating his own definition through reasoning, there would be no other worth or criterion that is comparable. It is itself its criterion. The dignity of such a creature should be something intrinsic. If humans or any other rational creatures can think rationally and determine their identity autonomously, then their dignity should be incomparable. But if one says that humans or any other creatures have dignity because God has bestowed this dignity upon them, then this kind of dignity will be bestowed (Rosen 2012, 121).

This distinction is very crucial and important in order to understand the substance of dignity in religious and non-religious contexts. Here a distinction drawn by Charles Taylor is useful. In “Politics of Recognition” he distinguishes honour from dignity. Honour is a worth given to someone, whereas dignity is a worth someone has independently or intrinsically (Taylor 1994, 26-27). A common feature of what I called “achieved” dignity

and what Taylor denominates as “honour” is that honour is a specific kind of dignity that is bestowed by others upon someone.

The issue may be blunted somewhat by observing that being a rational creature or an autonomous one is not totally different from being “in the image of God.” If dignity comes from having reason and autonomy, this means that a rational or autonomous being has dignity, *whether* it is God *or* human. In other words one can say that if God has dignity it exactly is because of his ability for reason and autonomy. On the other hand, if humans or any other creatures have dignity because they are images of God, then it means they have God’s abilities, reason and autonomy. By this argument I can reduce the third component of dignity into the two previous ones. As far as human dignity is concerned, being “in the image of God” means nothing else than “having reason” and “being autonomous.” I am aware that this does not fully solve the problem of bestowed honour vs. intrinsic dignity. Though it approximates the religious perspective to the secular one, the difference between honour and dignity does not disappear.

2- Recognition of Dignity

This part is the most difficult and also most important part of my first chapter. In the previous part I mentioned some aspects of dignity like having reason, autonomy, free will, self-control, and being in the image of God. I did so to open a way to understand what or who has dignity. If you return to the metaphor of the picture of dignity, then the previous part was an explanation of what an observer sees in the picture. I said he can see reason, autonomy, free will, self-controlling, being in the image of God, intrinsic or bestowed

essence of dignity. Now the second question is: does the picture influence him? How does watching or observing dignity impress someone? Generally speaking, how does seeing something dignified oblige us to do something in response? I will not discuss the psychology of how people actually respond. Rather, I wish to discuss some ideas about how people *ought* to respond. I want to show that there are certain responses that are called for by the concept of dignity itself; in other words, it is implied by the idea of dignity that certain kinds of response are appropriate.

Here I want to pose a consideration on dignity which no one has considered before. "Identification" is a psychological term rooted in Freud's writings. Generally speaking it means to be like or to become like another. As an example, a child may assimilate an aspect, or attribute of his parents because he is not capable of making a distinction between himself and them. In this situation the child thinks of his parents' values as his own. Identification can have different functions in different areas. In an artistic sphere one can find another shape of identification. In literature or theatre there can be observed a sort of identification between audiences and characters. A given reader of a novel or a member of the audience in theatre feels himself in the shoes of the characters and then can become happy, angry, or upset, as well as the characters. He is indeed identifying himself as the character of the novel or theatre. This can be called an "artistic identification." Identification can also have different levels. If someone feels himself totally as others it can be a sort of psychological illness, but sometimes people have selective identification in which they share some aspects with others.

Now I want to use the term of "identification" for my purpose, showing how an audience recognizes dignity. In the classical and psychological use of identification the

agent thinks of himself as the others. The child feels he is his mother or at least a part of her, a reader feels himself a hero fighting in great wars. If we reverse this way of identification, we can discover an implicit logic for dignity. Responding or reacting to the picture of dignity means finding something in it that is the same as what we have or what we are. I want to call it "reversed identification." When we transfer our worth and values to others, contrariwise what we do in identification is that we are recognizing their dignity. In some human experiences we find out that the other has a sort of dignity, which is we have found something in him that belongs to us as well. He has those abilities and values which we have, therefore he has the resources of dignity. He is as worthy as us. In a nutshell he is similar to us.

Let me take another step. In the previous part I said that dignity means having reason, autonomy and being in the image of God. According to what I said about "identification in dignity" I can say that we recognize the dignity of someone when we see they are similar to us in having reason or autonomy and in being in the image of God. If others have the same reason and autonomy which we have, then we will be convinced that they have the same dignity as well. Then if I return to the question of this part and ask how dignity impresses someone, the answer should be by creating a sense of reversed identification in him. When we recognize someone's dignity, we are thinking they are just like me, in this way. This idea is connected with the idea that dignity is intrinsic (whether or not it is bestowed), since if it is intrinsic in all human beings, then every other will be like me in that respect.

The next step is that, if the other is just like me with regard to dignity, then I should respect the others for their dignity as much as I should be respected for my own. That would lead nicely to the section on respect.

Different Levels of Respect

So far I have taken two steps in showing what is involved in perceiving or recognizing dignity, according to diverse conceptions, both religious and secular. In the first step I showed that each conception focuses on some ground or source of dignity. In the second stage I discussed the “reversed identification” that comes with recognizing others’ dignity: since dignity is intrinsic in all of us, and I have dignity, I am recognizing that, with respect to dignity, others are just like me. Of course, finding something worthy in common between us and others has different levels as well. Sometimes we find out that they are just as worthy as we are. Sometimes we realize that they are not exactly like us, they are potentially like us and can attain the same level in some situations. Sometimes we find out that they not only have the power of reason, like us, but they exercise it at a higher level. Still, what matters for identification is having the same capacities for reason, autonomy, and Godlikeness, not whether people exercise them.

Although there are different levels of recognizing others as “just like us”, there is a single human response that covers all these levels. *Respect* is a human reaction that can have flexible content according to what we observe in others. If we find the same or potentially the same degree of reason, autonomy, and God’s image in others, we may respect them equally. If we recognize that they have more ability we may respect them

more; we may be awed by them. Therefore in the rest of this chapter I am going to discuss the concept of respect as a human response to dignity. My question is this: if respect is a variable response, what might motivate and justify *equal respect*?

The concept of respect seems inseparable from the concept of dignity. In other words when we recognize someone's dignity, we recognize some ground for respect. It would be difficult to find a text or discussion about dignity in general or human dignity in particular which does not involve the term "respect." It could be argued that all debates and discussions about human dignity are efforts to achieve a reliable foundation for respect.

The origin of the word "respect" is from Latin *respectus*, from the verb *respicere* that means 'look back at' or to 'look again'. This philology is very helpful to explain the connection between dignity and respect. Respecting someone or something means that we have looked back at it. At first glance we have seen something special in it and so we do not pass it inattentively. In other words by force of habit we may look away from a person or something we encounter, but if we see something special we look at it again. Now if respect is looking back, the question is what we have seen in someone or something.

Joel Feinberg distinguishes helpfully between three kinds of respect: *Respekt*, *Observantia* and *Reverentia* (Feinberg, 1975, 1-3). *Respekt* is an uneasy attitude that is related to the element of fear. For instance, a city dweller might respect street gangs or a new sailor might show this fear-based respect for the sea. The second kind of respect, *Observantia*, according to Feinberg, is regarding someone or something that deserves moral consideration in its own right. In this sense, all humans should be equally respected. The third one, *Reverentia*, is a profound feeling of awe we have in the presence of a sublime

object. Kant says, “two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me” (Kant 1996, 268). Admiration and awe are also appropriate reactions to dignity. When we recognize something’s dignity we implicitly accept that it is admirable, valuable, respectable and worthy. Regarding the three conceptions of dignity as having reason, having autonomy, and being in the image of God, we can say that admiration and awe can be appropriate responses to all three. In some situations we may feel, like Kant, how magnificent or glorious it is to be a rational being. Similarly for autonomy: how wonderful to be an independent being who can set moral ends of one’s own. On the other hand from a religious point of view when a believer sees that a prophet can talk face to face with God, he cannot hide his sense of admiration.

But as I explained above the third kind of respect is a special one which we have in response to a sublime moral agent. Humankind as a general concept also can stimulate this feeling in us but we cannot usually expect this feeling of awe between human individuals in social relations. Therefore I think trying to establish the second kind of respect between individuals should be the initial goal of any discussion on human dignity.

Another important aspect of respect is that it is object-generated rather than wholly subject-generated. It means we respect people when something from them obliges us to respect them. We do not respect someone regardless of his personality. On the contrary we recognize something in them that morally obliges us to respect them. On the other hand when we respect someone, we are the agent of respect action. We respect someone actively and not passively (Dillon 2013). It is a useful idea showing that dignity is something that obliges effectively its audience or observer to respect the person and on the other hand the

audience respects it as a sign of agency and freedom. Then dignity can create a special kind of respectful relation between individuals placing the two sides in equal positions. The respected needs the respector for being respected; the respector shows his agency by the act of respect.

To sum up, despite the variance in meaning of 'dignity', there is a common pattern of focusing a feature of human existence as a ground of dignity – what gives us dignity. Three examples are autonomy, rationality, and Godlikeness. The concept of dignity also implies that two responses are appropriate, once we see this in other people. One is that they are just like us, in that way, and we should respect them as we think we deserve respect. The question is: why should this be equal respect? A preliminary answer is: respect should be equal because it is object-generated respect, based on who we and the others are. And if what we are reduces to intrinsic properties of human existence, then the ground for respect is equal in everyone, and so our respect for each other must also be equal. In the next chapter, I am going to consider some obstacles to reaching this conclusion.

Chapter Two

Dignity of the Human Species

In the previous chapter I explained what might be called the “logic” of dignity: its grounds (reason, autonomy, image of God) as well as two responses that are called for: reversed identification and respect. After explaining this “logic” of dignity we need to ask who can have it, which we can explore by seeing which creatures have the grounds of dignity. I will show that the Western traditions (religious and secular) have regarded the concept of dignity as ground for identification and object-based respect for humanity, as a species. In this chapter I will explore these views and deal with some philosophical problems that this approach raises.

Islam and Christianity on Human Beings’ Image of God

Religious texts are among the first in which we can find the concept of dignity. Some ancient texts including the Old Testament and The Qur’an have several statements using “dignity.” Any philosophical investigation needs to pay attention to this religious literature. Let me mention the famous statement in the Old Testament that has been the foundation of Christian-Jewish discussion of human dignity over history. In *Genesis* we read,

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Genesis 1:26&27)

As we see in this quotation man is who has dignity in comparison with all other beings because only he can be “in the image of God.” Being in the image of God means

humans possess the dignity of a person (Catechism, 357).⁵ God wants humans for his own sake not for other purposes (Catechism, 1703). God has created them to be known and loved by them. Man has been called to share in God's own life by knowing and loving Him (Catechism, 356). What does "sharing in God's life" mean? In part it seems to involve the ability of human beings to converse with God. This ability was called "communion with God" in Vatican Council II:

The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being (quoted in Catechism 27).

In the Islamic resource, the Qur'an, we read the same conception of human dignity. Comparing human beings and other creatures Allah says:

Indeed We have honoured the Descendants of Adam and transported them over land and sea, and gave them good things as sustenance, and made them better than most of Our creation. (the Qur'an 17:70).

Referring to these holy texts one can find the first available answer to the question of human beings' dignity in relation to other species. Human beings have more dignity because they are the image of God, or as the Qur'an declares they are the "vicegerent" of God. According to Abrahamic religions' perspective all the creatures are in service of human beings, because only humans can be the most similar creature to God. In response to this ability God also loves human beings more than the other creatures. In the Qur'an God shows his love to man several times and in different ways. The first one is in the story

⁵The number I write within parentheses is the paragraph number in the Catechism.

of creating Adam. God declared his intention to create man. He said he is about “to appoint a vicegerent in the earth.” The angels protested and said why do you want to create a creature that is prone to corruption and bloodshed, whereas we extol and glorify you. God answered “surely I know what you know not” (the Qur’an 2:30-34). What did God know that the angels did not? Islamic thinkers have answered this question referring to this Qur’anic verse: “And God taught Adam the names of all things” (the Qur’an 2:30-34), which treats the foundation of human dignity as knowledge and capacity to learn.

Afterwards, God created man despite the angels’ objections. When his creation was done God looked at this new creature and declared, “Indeed, We created humankind in the best of forms;” and he continued, “We fashioned you [man] in the best of images.” Then he ordered to all angels to bow down to Adam and they bowed down except one, Iblis (Satan). He asserted his own superiority and said to God “You created Adam from clay and created me from fire!” God became upset with Satan’s claim and said to him, “what prevents thee from prostrating thyself to one whom I created with My Own Hand?” (the Qur’an 38:75-76).

Elements of this story such as bowing down to Adam, creating him by God’s hands, Adam’s best form, and God’s attention to Adam, all imply that humans have greater dignity than other creatures. As we can see among the Islamic Sufis, one result of this specific creation is a deep love between man and God. When God says he created Man by his own hand, he is talking about a sort of intimacy and closeness between himself and humanity. For other creations God commands to angels but he creates man by his own hand, and furthermore, affirms “I breathed into him (Adam) of My Own spirit” (the Qur’an, 38:72).

Thanks to this kind of creation, man can respond to God's love. He is able to love, understand, and participate in God's plan as his true vicegerent.

Mohammad Hashim Kamali, professor of law at the International Islamic University of Malaysia, mentions an interesting point showing that human dignity is more highly regarded even than one of the holiest things in the world for Muslims, the Ka'bah. One day the Prophet Mohammad stood in front of the Ka'bah, and said in a symbolic language: You are most pure and most dignified, but the sanctity and honour of a believer, his life and his property, is far greater in the eyes of God.

Kant: Elevation and Dignity

Immanuel Kant's modern-era discussion of human dignity was unprecedented. In the previous chapter I discussed Kantian grounds for dignity: autonomy and reason. Here I turn to his view that *only* human beings have dignity.

Oliver Sensen, in "Kant's Conception of Human Dignity,"⁶ has distinguished helpfully three paradigms of dignity: contemporary, archaic, and traditional (Sensen 2009, 309). In the contemporary paradigm every individual has equal intrinsic value. Arguably this common unconditional value can be the foundation of human rights (Sensen 2009, 311). On the other hand, the traditional paradigm holds that "human beings have an elevated position in nature in virtue of having reason. As such, being elevated amounts to saying that human beings are special in nature in virtue of certain capacities (e.g. reason) that put

⁶This is his paper on Kant's perspective to human dignity. He also has written a book on this issue called *Kant on Human Dignity*. See bibliography for detailed information.

them, unlike the rest of nature, at a distance from unreflective natural determination” (Sensen 2009, 312).

Sensen believes that Kant’s discussion of human dignity fits with the traditional paradigm. Dignity for Kant is a higher value which human beings possess and others species do not. From this perspective, dignity is a higher rank that human beings occupy because they are the only ones who can be moral agents. Being rational and free enables them to be moral. Morality in itself is the most valuable thing from Kant’s perspective.

Sensen shows that Kant has used the word “dignity” in a variety of contexts, for “royal dignity,” “regents’ dignity,” “dignity of philosophy,” “dignity of mathematic,” “dignity of morality” and above all “dignity of humanity” (Sensen 2009, 319). All of these usages show that dignity for Kant is an elevated level that some things have and the others do not. Among human faculties including inclinations and morality, morality is a sublimely admirable thing:

Morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in itself, since only through this is it possible to be a lawgiving member in the kingdom of ends. Hence morality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality, is that which alone has dignity (Kant 1998, 42).

Kant clearly asserts that only human beings have dignity, but they possess dignity insofar as they commit their moral duties:

Although in thinking the concept of duty we think of subjection to the law, yet at the same time we thereby represent a certain sublimity and dignity in the person who fulfills all his duties. For there is indeed no sublimity in him insofar as he is subject to the moral law, but there certainly is insofar as he is at the same time lawgiving with respect to it and only for that reason subordinated to it (Kant 1998, 46).

Having reason, freedom, and the ability to be a responsible moral agent all are characteristics that only human beings have, and accordingly human beings have an elevated status within nature. This is the essence of Kant's approach to human dignity in relation to other species. Thus the Kantian approach joins the religious perspectives of Judaism, Christianity and Islam) in thinking that human beings have a higher level of dignity than other species.

To speak of a "higher level of dignity" rather than "the only level of dignity" is actually a departure from Kant. The distinction between these is very crucial. Saying "higher level of dignity" implies that some non-human species also have dignity, though human dignity ranks higher. This is more or less what Martha Nussbaum tries to show: there is such a thing as animal dignity, which calls upon us to respect non-human animals, though it does not call upon us to treat them as equals. On the other hand, saying "the only level of dignity" implies that only humans have dignity and all non-human beings have no right to dignity, and that was the view of Kant.

Kant's perspective cannot endorse non-human beings' dignity, because he has drawn a sharp line between rational beings and non-rational beings. In contrast, the Abrahamic religions seem to be able to correspond with "higher level of dignity" approach, because they hold that, although humans are in the image of god, they are not the only image. Humans are the most similar images to God but natural beings are signs of God as well.

Someone might ask why asserting the higher dignity of human species in comparison with other creatures is important for proving the dignity of human individuals.

This is a very noteworthy question. If my ultimate goal in this thesis is providing a reliable and minimal conception of human dignity between different religious and philosophical schools, why must I discuss human dignity in relation to other species?

Here there are actually two issues. The concerns the advantages and disadvantages of attributing higher dignity to human beings. Arguably this view has proven to be very harmful to nature in modern times. The second issue is why we need to affirm the dignity of the human *species* in order to prepare a foundation for dignity of human *individuals*.

Problems with Species-based Conceptions of Dignity

If for a moment we turn back and consider the history of man's relation with nature we must confess that human beings have not treated nature very respectfully over recent centuries. From the beginning of the renaissance and the appearance of modern technologies, humans have not exactly been outstanding and exemplary citizens within nature. In religious terms, we have failed to play our appointed mediating role between God and nature. As some scholars have discussed, like Seyyed Hossien Nasr, in *Man and Nature*, horrific events like polluting oceans, animals' extinction and global warming may have deep philosophical roots. In the traditional world-view humans were a part of nature and had to respect the laws of creation, and although they may have been the most important members of nature, they were not separate from nature or without responsibilities towards it. In that traditional world-view, the original source of dignity was God. Afterwards every creature had a level of being and dignity. In this system everyone and everything, from God to the lowest levels of being, has a role and specific position.

Therefore although humanity has the greatest dignity, still, (1)we have some higher levels above ourselves as well as the lower levels below us; (2)our dignity and our importance is achieved, bestowed from God, not intrinsic. Humans have to respect the law of that system. Although the Bible and the Qur'an say that God has created everything in service of man, this does not mean that humans can do whatever they want with everything else. In this system we can find some people like Thomas Aquinas who believed that all creatures have occupied an appropriate place within God's creation, and they all have dignity (Rosen 2012, 16).

Although some religious philosophers like Aquinas, or traditionalist Muslim philosophers like Seyyed Hossein Nasr have defended the dignity of other parts of nature and have protested against humans' behavior in relation with nature, the protest is not confined within religious area. A famous non-religious complaint about indecent human attitudes toward nature is that of Peter Singer, in defense of animal rights. In his famous paper, "All Animals are Equal," he asserts that all liberation movements over recent decades (such as movements for women, blacks) would also be on a shaky ground if we denied equal consideration to nonhumans (Singer 2014, 173).

Singer uses the term "speciesism" as an equivalent for racism, arguing the racist gives greater weight to the interests of members of his own race, and similarly a speciesist overweighs the interests of his species overriding the interests of members of other species. He argues that "if intelligence does not entitle one human to use another for his own ends, how can it entitle humans to exploit nonhumans?" (Singer 2014, 174). Following Jeremy Bentham, Singer claims that what requires all beings to be equally considered is not

reason; rather it is the ability to suffer. Since all animals can suffer as well as humans, we should not do anything to cause their suffering.

He develops an argument to say that equal consideration might not depend on a physical fact, showing that all people have equal genetic faculties like intelligence, oral capacity, or physical strength; it is not just an assertion of fact. Rather it is “a prescription of how we should treat humans.” Therefore, if equal consideration is not a fact based treatment, we can use it toward nonhuman beings as well. Moreover, he explains that even if we regard any genetic characteristics as the ground of dignity, for instance having reason or freedom, in every case we can find some animals that have more ability in comparison with some humans. For example if reasoning is a condition for having dignity, a gorilla⁷ can be more rational than a human with a brain defect. Perhaps his strongest argument against human dignity is this:

The truth is that the appeal to the intrinsic dignity of human beings appears to solve the egalitarian's problems only as long as it goes unchallenged. Once we ask why it should be that all humans—including infants, mental defectives, psychopaths, Hitler, Stalin, and the rest—have some kind of dignity or worth that no elephant, pig, or chimpanzee can ever achieve, we see that this question is as difficult to answer as our original request for some relevant fact that justifies the inequality of humans and other animals. In fact, these two questions are really one: talk of intrinsic dignity or moral worth only takes the problem back one step, because any satisfactory defense of the claim that all and only humans have intrinsic dignity would need to refer to some relevant capacities or characteristics that all and only humans possess (Singer 2014, 178).

⁷He does not refer to the case of Koko, but I think the intelligent gorilla can speak using 1000 words in sign language would be a good example for his argument.

Defenses in favor of Human Dignity

Peter Singer's position clearly opposes the Kantian approach towards human dignity. Rationalists claim that some intrinsic values like having reason and freedom enable humans to have intrinsic dignity. Also opposed to Singer's position are religious defenders of human dignity who believe that *only* humans have dignity. As I noted above, there is also a "higher dignity" position that differs from the "only humans" position.

Although these two groups disagree with Singer, their positions are difficult to defend against his arguments. He says that every alleged ground for having exclusive dignity (such as I have discussed in the first chapter, *e.g.* reason, freedom and being in the image of God) should be rejected, because with regard to these three characteristics some animals have more abilities than some humans.

One other way to answer Singer's critique would be to find a fourth or fifth characteristic which cannot be found in any animals better than humans. This is what some have tried. In "A Defense of Human Dignity," Mark D. Linville tries to answer Singer. He has a religious point of view on the problem and claims that creation without humans is something less than creation with humans. He claimed that moral agency gives humans an ability to be great-making which the other animals cannot be. "Great-making" means world-enhancing. When a creature adds something to a given world it has a world-enhancing property. He develops the following argument:

For any two possible worlds w and w^* , if w includes moral agents and w^* lacks moral agents, then, all other things being equal, w is of greater value than w^* (Linville 2000, 328).

His argument as a whole is that the world would be a better place if it includes moral agents, and therefore humans have more dignity than the other species. It seems to me that his efforts to defend human dignity finally do not work because his argument about world-enhancing properties can be used for the other species as well. Especially according to religious perspectives, every species have a specific position in the system of nature, and then nature or the world would lose something if it did not include every specific species. If science can show that, if mosquitoes did not exist, the world would lose something, then mosquitoes would have a world-enhancing property as well as humans. I cannot rely on Linville's argument for preparing a reliable ground for dignity of human individuals.

In his book *Human Dignity*, George Kateb makes a further attempt at defending human dignity in comparison with other animals. He seems to be completely aware of the difficulties of classic (religious and rationalist) conceptions of human dignity. He noticeably acknowledges that a religious conception is more vulnerable than secular ones. Because "if theology goes down, then in disappointment we might be moved to think that since there is no irrefutable theological system, there can be no idea of human dignity" (Kateb 2011, xi). This is absolutely right. If dignity is something bestowed, then it is not intrinsic. Then we should find a secular conception for human dignity that can stand independently. He distinguishes four types of critique of human dignity:

- 1- Human dignity does not add anything to the theory of human rights.
- 2- Human history is full of horrific crimes and talk about equal dignity among killers and victims is disregarding the rights of victims.
- 3- The theory of human dignity is dangerous because it lets humans do whatever they want with nature.

4- The theory is not only dangerous but it is wrong (Kateb 2011, 4).

One can see that Peter Singer's critique can be placed in the fourth group. Another interesting point in this classification is that it starts with human rights (role of human dignity in individuals' rights) and ends in dignity of human beings in relation to other species. Accordingly Kateb claims that his theory not only "serves to help defend the theory of individual rights but also gives a perspective on the dignity of the human species" (Kateb 2011, 5).

Kateb's argument rests on the idea of human uniqueness as a reliable ground of human dignity. He believes that human beings are not merely natural beings, whereas all the other species are merely natural beings. Humans are the only species who achieve a significant break with nature. According to this, a gorilla is more similar to a worm than to a human. He claims that according to this break humans can perform the specific function which the other species cannot: "keep the record of nature, understand nature, and appreciate it" (Kateb 2011, 114).

But one can ask what kinds of uniqueness matter? Every species is unique in some ways, and so we may wonder what is so especially important about humans' uniqueness. Kateb answers that uniqueness in identity is important. Human individuals are unique. I am (either as a member of human society or as an animal among other animals) unique, and no other individuals can take my individuality "even if in my life I amount to nothing out of the ordinary" (Kateb 2011, 19). Therefore humans are unique and having human dignity means being able to be unique.

Although this argument may seem more reasonable than Linville's, it has a flaw as well. It relies on the concept of uniqueness and claims that human beings either as a species or as an individual are unique; therefore humans have dignity and other species do not. Yet the idea that we are unique as a species because of our uniqueness as individuals could apply to other species as well. In other words, we are not sure that other species do not have the same feeling of uniqueness about themselves. It is possible that in a herd every sheep thinks of itself as a specific and unique creature. When we human beings watch a herd of sheep we say they are all the same, but on the other hand, a certain degree of self-awareness seems necessary for fundamental social relations: a baby sheep must recognize its mother as its mother, and similarly the mother must recognize the baby as its baby, or else nursing will happen only by chance. Moreover, the members of each species can recognize their species as unique and different from others. Therefore emphasizing the concept of uniqueness as the base of human dignity does not work finally to refute Singer's critique of human dignity. What I am going to say in opposing Singer's critique will be explained in the next part.

From Dignity of Human Species to Individuals' Dignity

For a moment suppose that at the end of the discussion on human dignity in relation to other species we could prove that the human species possesses a higher level of dignity among all creatures or they are the only species that has dignity. How can it support our theory about the dignity of every human individual? Suppose that human beings have dignity, how we can prove that Muslims and non-Muslims, Christians and non-Christians,

or civilized and non-civilized people have equal dignity? Here I want to claim that recognizing higher dignity for the human species is a pre-condition for recognizing the equal dignity of human individuals. My argument can be summed up as follows. First, if we follow Singer, we lose sight of something that is morally important, namely that each species flourishes in a different way. Consequently, respecting a creature's good will differ, depending on that creature's species. If we respect the good of a person in the same way we respect the good of a dog, we are not fully respecting the good of that person. Therefore the dignity of humans (which demands that respect) must be more demanding than the dignity of dogs, or in other words, it is a 'higher' dignity. Let me now present this in greater detail, relying on the capability approach of Martha Nussbaum.

If we think of the world as an unarranged structure in which there is no difference in level of dignity and respect between humans and animals, then with respect to moral considerability, there will be no reason to distinguish species at all. On the other hand the other species lose their definition. Dogs are not dogs anymore and bears would not be bears anymore. In this unarranged and unclassified world the concept of species loses its meaning, or at least its moral significance. The concept of human beings as well becomes a morally inconsequential concept because there are no moral reasons to distinguish members of this species from members of any other. However, if we do not distinguish between species but see them all as sentient creatures, we are missing something important about all of them, namely that each species has its own good, its own specific way of flourishing, of having a good life. Surely if they deserve consideration, we should recognize this, for consideration should involve concern about depriving them of what is good for them, not just inflicting suffering. Confining them to cages that are completely

unlike their native habitat does them harm, even if they do not suffer, because it deprives them of their specific way of life.

With Singer's theory, there are dangerous consequences that arise from eliminating the concept of species from moral consideration. If we insist only on sentience, we cannot distinguish many real groups of beings. In this situation an individual from any species group cannot claim its reasonable rights, including recognition of its rights and equal dignity from its fellow species members. Peter Singer correctly emphasizes the criterion of sensibility; he also logically claims that there are always some animals that are better than some humans in specific abilities. But he does not notice that his argument may, by ignoring the concept of species, deprive us of a reliable foundation to claim our human rights. His theory regards every species as equal, therefore human individuals, like non-human individuals, lose their species community, which determines which common basic rights and dignity they should enjoy. To avoid this outcome, we need a theory that allows human individuals to enjoy common and basic rights and dignity but meanwhile does not violate non-human individuals' dignity.

Martha Nussbaum in *Frontiers of Justice* has suggested that this can be done by taking a "capabilities approach" to every individual's dignity. Nussbaum's capabilities approach does not associate one's dignity with reason, autonomy or Godlikeness. Instead of any controversial determining ability, she uses general and universal term of "flourishing" as a ground for dignity.

The general aim of the capabilities approach [...] would be that no sentient animal should be cut off from the chance for a flourishing life, a life with the type of dignity relevant to that species (Nussbaum 2006, 351)

According to Nussbaum, the valuable capabilities are capabilities to function in ways that are part and parcel of flourishing, of living a good life. Since the nature of a good life is different from species to species, the valuable capabilities are also different. She claims that the capabilities approach does not have the problems of Kant's theory or an Abrahamic approach because the theory supposes some goods for every kind of life. Every kind of life seeks a flourishing existence; therefore any harm to any life will violate its specific dignity (Nussbaum 2006, 337). Every kind of life has specific abilities and needs, and therefore we should morally respect it according to these abilities (Nussbaum 2006, 336).

The question is who determines what abilities, needs, and dignity every kind of life has. Nussbaum will answer that every species has its own specific abilities. Accepting Darwin's evolutionary theory, she accepts that there is a hierarchy of capabilities. She accepts that for humans a greater range of capabilities are required for a flourishing life; human dignity is therefore more demanding. She says if we deprive a rabbit of a vote nobody complains but if a human is deprived of this right, everyone feels that it is something wrong. Therefore human beings with maximum abilities, and albeit maximum vulnerability, stand on the top of evolutionary chain (Nussbaum 2006, 360-363).

In *Creating Capabilities* she divides human capabilities into two general groups: internal capabilities that a person has as a human being (like personal traits, intellectual and emotional capacities) and combined capabilities, that are "combination[s] of personal abilities and the political, social and economic environment." In other words they can only be fulfilled by cooperation between individuals and governments. Every human being in every society must be helped by government to be able to fulfill these ten combined

capabilities: life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, connection with other species, play, and control over his environment. This list is very abstract and every nation can interpret and specify it, given its tradition and history; meanwhile she asserts this list of capabilities “belongs first and foremost to individual persons and derivatively to groups” (Nussbaum 2011, 35). In *Frontiers of Justice*, she also says that the capabilities approach is more concerned for individuals than groups; meanwhile the approach keeps the concepts of “species” and “community” because they help us to determine what are the capabilities with which an individual can flourish (Nussbaum 2006, 346).

To sum up, Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach to human dignity offers a way to recognize a higher and more demanding dignity for humans without denying dignity altogether to other species. In such a system human beings have the higher position in nature but they are not allowed to do whatever they want with nature. The key idea is that each species has a specific way of flourishing, which is the basis for the dignity of that species and its members. Therefore if we say that the human species has no higher dignity, we cannot adequately support human individuals’ capabilities to flourish. We need to accept that human beings have higher dignity in relation with the other creatures in order that every human individual can claim to be respected like a human and not, for instance, like a dog.

Chapter Three

Individuals' Dignity in Social Relations

In this chapter I am going to discuss the basic structure of the concept of dignity and that there is always some basis for dignity, which provides an object-generated demand for respect.

So far I have proposed that dignity belongs to all members of the species, and it is more demanding for humans, since our flourishing is more complex than that of other species. In that sense, human dignity is “higher” than that of other species. Now the remaining question is what kind of respect human dignity demands for human individuals. In this chapter I will strive to provide a minimal respect for all individuals that is based on equal dignity. This minimal respect is unexceptional (that it must apply to each human being) and it must be unconditional (not dependent on who a person is or what they do or have done.) Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is showing how this kind of respect can be called for in a number of different traditions.

I believe the most contemporary discussions about human dignity are justified by an implicit need: finding a universal conception of human dignity. I agree with Oliver Sensen (I discussed his argument on Kant in the second chapter) dividing traditional and contemporary paradigms of human dignity. In the traditional world (including all Biblical, the Qur’anic, or even renaissance literatures like Pico’s oration) talking about human dignity was a way to discuss humans’ superiority over the other species; whereas in most contemporary discussions the goal is protecting human dignity in inter-human conflicts. For instance, in 2008 one conference was held in the Netherlands on the occasion of the 140th anniversary of the Netherlands Red Cross. It was called *Protecting Human Dignity in Armed Conflicts* (Boswijk 2008). These discussions do not mean protecting human dignity in relation with other species. Dignity is meant to justify object-generated respect, and in

particular it does so by identifying a particular ground obliging us to pay such respect, and that ground is something that belongs to human nature (reason, autonomy, godlikeness).

At the last part of the previous chapter I discussed that we need the superiority of human beings in order to support individuals' dignity. I claimed that if there is no hierarchy in entities (biological like evolution theory or ontological like religious narratives of creation), we will be unable to recognize human individuals' appropriate dignity. In such chaos the notion of species becomes invalid and talking about humans, dogs, bears, or roses become meaningless. The result of this ambiguity would be a potential egocentrism in which everyone can allow himself to suppose himself as the best and the most elevated one among the others. Now more than seven billion people live in the world. According to statistics the majority of people in the world have a religious style in their life. The religious ontology provides them with a hierarchy of creatures in which humans are on the top. Now suppose that this huge number of people accept that there is no hierarchy. What will be the result of this theory for them? I argued that Peter Singer's theory leads us to such world but Martha Nussbaum with her capabilities approach helps us to find three benefits. (1) Through her theory, human beings remain still on the top; they have higher dignity but not only dignity; (2) non-human beings can enjoy their specific dignity without becoming tools for humans; and (3) human individuals can keep their maximum dignity relying on their membership in the human community.

I would say that every society, every community or every group will suppose themselves as the best group of people and accordingly the best group of creatures. The thing is actual groups are not concerned about the others' rights, as Peter Singer is. They are just real people with different prejudices, religious conflicts, and economical benefits.

At the moment they accept that there is no given level or given species as human being, they will start to divide human society, one part lower than pigs, the other part higher than angels and the third part may be lower than everything. But According to Nussbaum, they cannot do so, because they must respect the others as part of human nature, which obliges us to respect all humans. Here the object-generated ground of respect is human nature that exists in each individual.

We should definitely notice that over history people have drawn invidious distinctions and belittled enemies, rivals, betrayers, women, non-Muslims, non-Christians, people with mental illness and etc. In a very recent case the young leader of North Korea, Kim Jong Un, killed his own uncle who was also his traitor and the second authority of the country emphasizing he was “worse than a dog” (Talmadge2014). There are lots of examples that people in the present and in the past have been abusing, killing and belittling each other as if the others are worse than a dog.

The other case that is completely related to the issue of individuals’ dignity goes back to 1991. In a small French town of Morsang-sur-Orge, a local bar had a dwarf-tossing competition. In the bar dwarfs wear protective clothes and participants compete to throw them the farthest. When mayor of the city became aware of the inhumane competition he banned it; afterwards bar’s owner took the case to a court claiming that dwarfs consent with what happens to them during the competition. Finally higher courts ruled the ban on dwarf tossing necessary to protect human dignity (Rosen 2012, 63).

The last case is very recent. In 2013 two Israeli soldiers were killed in a conflict with Palestinians. One of them was a Jewish Israeli citizen and the other was a gentile Israeli

citizen. In the funeral rites the second one's coffin was not covered by Israel's flag because they were not sure about his faith. It caused many complaints by gentile Israeli soldiers who fight for the same country and deserve equal respect. Finally authorities apologized for the offense (Cohen 2014).

All of these examples show how common it is for people to single out and target other groups of human beings for inferior dignity and respect. An important barrier to this is the concept of humanity. If we leave them without a conception of common humanity, I think, they will abuse each other more and more.

Therefore all sorts of arguments, religious as well as philosophical, are needed to persuade people that our shared humanity is worthy of respect, inclusive of all human beings. Accordingly in this chapter I am going to discuss some specific religious or philosophical arguments in favor of the individuals' dignity.

Judaism on Dignity of God's Enemies

In the Jewish tradition, the dignity of others can be very controversial, because that tradition has been very particularist regarding differences between Jews and gentiles. We can see the severity of this particularist tradition in the Jewish marriage tradition in which the children of a mixed marriage will be considered Jewish only if the mother is Jewish, and so, if a gentile mother with a Jewish husband wants their children to be Jewish, she must convert to Judaism. This particularist attitude has been reflected in the versions some rabbis suggest for this noncanonical Talmudic verse:

He who sustains one soul is accounted by Scripture as though he had sustained a whole world.

Namely, some rabbis suggest this version:

He who sustains one soul *of Israel* is accounted by Scripture as though he had sustained a whole world.

Interpretations like these can foster inflexible attitudes towards the dignity of the others. Although there are other precedents within the Jewish tradition for recognizing the dignity of people in other revealed religions, talking about dignity of idolaters and wrongdoers is more difficult. Therefore some scholars like Matthias Morgenstern find it challenging to sustain a humanitarian interpretation of the Jewish tradition (Morgenstern 2011, 43). He mentions that some Rabbis have confined “godlikeness” within an elitist perspective.

As I mentioned above, the case of idolaters and wrongdoers presents special difficulties for the Jewish tradition. In David’s psalms there is a sentence that condones hatred against God’s enemies. David says,

For they speak against thee wickedly,
and thine enemies take thy name in vain.
Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee?
And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?
I hate them with perfect hatred:
I count them mine enemies.

It seems clear that respecting dignity of those who do not respect God is not easy for religious people. How is it possible for those enemies of God to be “the image of God?” If we cannot find an acceptable reason and we have to exclude them from people with equal

dignity, the respect that dignity commands will be conditional and exceptional, rather than unconditional and universal.

One contemporary Jewish philosopher, David Novak, has tried to find a solution for this problem. He knows the problem and asks some related questions. If someone is not aware of his dignity does he have any right to claim it? Moreover does one who has not respected the dignity of the others have a right to claim it for himself? Answering these questions he explains the meaning of *Kavod* as the respect some humans claim from other humans.

Then he asks another important question that refers to two kinds of dignity. He asks, what makes people entitled to claim dignity: what they do or what they are? According to each of them we have respectively two kinds of dignity: distributive and rectifying. He has taken these terms from Aristotle. He explains that in a given society some people do something helpful for the society, accordingly they are right to be respected by the others. Clearly the one who has done nothing for his society cannot claim dignity as much as the former. This is a distributive dignity that is different between societies. But the second kind, rectifying dignity, is not confined within a given society's values; it is natural and covers everyone (Novak 2011, 274-279). According to Talmudic law if someone is damaged, the tort should be redressed (rectified), regardless of his religious or social class. According to Talmudic law everyone who accepts moral laws (prohibition of killing, stealing and incest) and does not blaspheme against God deserves equal dignity, and he must be respected equally.

Therefore what the Talmud calls *kvod ha-beriyot*, universal human status, should be observed for everyone. Novak draws upon the thinking of Ben Azzai (2nd century C.E.) and Rabbi Eliezer (2nd century C.E.) to support his theory. Eliezer has said that “the honor of your fellow person [*kvodhaverakh*] be as precious to you as your own” and as Novak says this is similar to the famous Biblical sentence: “love your neighbor as yourself.”

To sum up, Judaism can accept that although those who are enemies of God, idolaters and wrongdoers, do not have distributive dignity in a Jewish society, still they have a rectifying dignity. I turn now to the concept of neighbor, which, as Novak writes, can have more capacity insofar as it covers all human beings on the world.

Christianity and Neighbor's Dignity

One day Jesus and a teacher of law were talking about two precepts of Mosaic Law: to love God above all else (Deut 6:5) and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev 19:18). The teacher asked, but who is my neighbor? Answering the question, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. On a road two believers encounter a wounded man; they do not help him, but a Samaritan helps him. Then Jesus asks which ones are the real neighbor for wounded man, the believers or the Samaritan.

Throughout the history of Christianity, this concept has been much discussed, and there have been different interpretations. It has been suggested that “neighbor” could mean any one of these options: the son of your people, member of the people of Israel, strangers living in Israel, someone who participates in the love commanded by the precept, or finally

all human beings (Gianotto 2011, 127-132). The version of Matthew suggests the widest interpretation:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:43-48).

Loving enemies is the core of these sentences, and therefore the circle of the concept of neighbor gets as wide as possible. In the history of Christianity, people like Saint Jerome (4th century) have insisted on this wide interpretation. In his commentary *on Ezekiel* 6.18 he clearly says that all human beings are our neighbors: "every person should consider every other person as a neighbor" (quoted in Gianotto 2011, 135). He also uses the law to make a respectful relation between man and woman. Now the question is why we should love our enemies.

One answer lies in Matthew's sentences: I should love my enemies because they are sons of the Father, who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." That is to say, I should love my enemies because we are both similar, we are both son of the Father. It is impossible for someone to be more of a son than his brother in relation to their father; therefore righteous and unrighteous are equal in the father-son relation.

Now let me come back to my concerns about human dignity. The love which is suggested here could be an alternative for respect, and I discussed the relation between respect and dignity in the first chapter. In that case we could understand loving someone as recognizing their dignity and respecting them in an equal sense.

Also interesting is the usage of the concept of “neighbor.” Logically it is possible that we could have any manner of neighbor from the worst to the best with any cultural or religious background. So when the precept says “love your neighbor,” logically speaking it means, “love everyone, even the worst people you can imagine.” The neighbor should be protected from any kind of social or cultural discrimination based on sexual, racial, color or social conditions.

The father/son metaphor is also very interesting. The procreative relation of father and son is reminiscent of the creative relation of God to human beings. So if any and all neighbours can be sons of God the Father, they can also be in the image of God.

In established Catholic doctrine, we can also find this wide interpretation of neighbour. The Catholic Catechism indicates that man is in the image of God, which means that all human beings have this image; “The divine image is present in every man” (Catechism, 1702). Every person is the child of God” and the dignity of every person as a child of God establishes a basic fraternity” between all humans. The Catechism insists that everyone has equal dignity, an equally rational soul, and the same nature because their origin (God) is one (Catechism, 1934).

Like humans’ freedom in comparison with other creatures, humans also are free in relation to each other because each one is an independent image of God and has

independent dignity. Freedom is exercised in relationships between persons. Every image of God should be recognized as free, and everyone is responsible to observe and respect this right: "The right to the exercise of freedom, especially in moral and religious matters, is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person" (Catechism, 1738). Recognizing others' dignity means treating them as "another self" which has an intrinsic dignity (Catechism, 1944).

However, equal dignity within a family is more contentious within Catholic and other Christian contexts. Differences in standing between men and women are a crucial issue in Christianity. Arguably, traditional Christianity has supported some quite unjust approaches towards women. The story of creating woman (Eve) from man's rib in the Old Testament is regarded by some as a root of religious discrimination over the history of Christianity. This inequality continues to 21st century. For example until the 19th century, Christianity has had a hierarchical approach to human dignity. All human beings have had dignity but not equal dignity; their dignity has depended on their role in a social order. Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903) in *Arcanum divine sapientiae* (1880) claimed that because woman is flesh of man's flesh and bone of his bone, she

must be subject to her husband and obey him; not, indeed, as a servant, but as a companion, so that her obedience shall be wanting in neither honour nor dignity (Quoted in Rosen 2012, 49).

Being subject to and obeying another person clearly disadvantages women both in terms of autonomy and, in practice, in terms of human flourishing. However, the Catholic Church has changed its point of view in the 20th century. The Catechism declares that man and woman have inalienable dignity because they are *immediately* from God (Catechism,

369). The adverb “immediately” shows a significant turn away from past judgments. Man and woman should be regarded as the same images of God. God has given man and woman an equal personal dignity and women’s dignity is not derived from that of men (Catechism, 2334). The Catechism regards the unity of family as an endowed fundamental constitution in which members have equal dignity (Catechism, 2203).

It is interesting that any other related problems around sexual issues have been judged by the catechism through the concept of dignity. Fornication is a carnal action because “It is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons” (Catechism, 2353). Pornography injures the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), because they are treated as objects of mere sexual pleasure and economical profit for others (Catechism, 2354). Prostitution is also the same issue; it violates personal dignity of persons who engage in it (Catechism, 2355). Adultery, divorce and free union are also condemned because they damage human dignity.

One might argue here that the concept of dignity being used in a quite repressive fashion, violating the human right of bodily integrity (implying free choice over sexual partners). This suggests that Catholics will respect only those who abide by their morality. However, this would be inconsistent with the Christian understanding that we must respect our neighbors – all of them. The universal Christian concept of neighborhood requires that Christian understanding of dignity must be exceptionless and unconditional.

To sum up, we can see that Christianity lets us easily to enlarge the concept of neighbor, as the other, to all human beings. It covers all examples of otherness such as non-Christians, wrongdoers, God’s enemies and women as well. The issue of women has been

controversial also outside of Christianity's borders. It is one of the most difficult problems over the recent decades in Islamic countries, to which I turn next.

Islam and Women's Dignity

Muslims have for a long time struggled to recognize the equal dignity of two groups in particular. The first group is non-Muslims. In the very first years of appearance of Islam, Muslims had several armed conflicts with non-Muslims. The first wars in the first years of Mohammad's prophecy occurred against Makkah's idolaters. In that time Muslims used the term *Kafir* (one who covers his eyes preventing them from seeing God's signs). The similarity between the verb *Kofr* in Arabic and cover in English is interesting, describing the idolaters who do not want to accept the brilliant signs of prophecy in Mohammad. In these first years Muslims were fighting with *Kafir*(s) with the strongest sense of hatred and aversion. Afterwards, as Islamic civilization developed, the more they encountered other nations. Muslims found beyond Islamic territory people who were not polytheists but Jews, Zoroastrians, and Christians. Although these groups were not idolaters but monotheists (Christianity and Judaism were Abrahamic as well), Muslims still used the term *Kafir* to describe them. Accordingly, that initial hatred and aversion which they practiced toward Makkah's idolaters was transferred toward other people even with theistic religions. This is one source of Islamic hatred toward non-Muslims.

In addition, women in a Muslim society are as "other" as non-Muslims. A strong patriarchal culture has existed in Middle Eastern countries since ancient times. It has affected Islam as well. In terms of dignity and moral considerability, women's situation is comparable with non-Muslims' situation.

Recently a feminist campaign was launched in Saudi Arabia over a struggle between women who wanted to drive cars and a society and government that disapproved. Women in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to drive individually. They must hire drivers or must ask a male relative to drive them. This limitation has affected women's ability to have an active role in the society. Manal Al Sharif founded *the Saudi Women to Drive Campaign*, which is part of a larger action called *My Right to Dignity*. She has said, "In my country, a man comes of age at 18, a woman never."

The idea that woman *never* comes of age indicates a patriarchal perspective toward women's dignity in countries of the region. Not to come of age means remaining immature in reasoning; and weakness in reasoning affects one's dignity. One of the cases in which women's dignity has been misrecognized significantly comes up from Mulla Sadra's comment.⁸ In one of his crucial comments he has compared women with animals:

God has created different sort of animals, some of them are useful for nutrition [...] some for riding [...] some for carrying things [...] some for enjoying [...] some for marriage and some for preparing garments and furniture (Mulla Sadra 1981, vol. 7, 136).⁹

Many feminist activists have complained about this abusive perspective towards women's position among God's creatures. In response, some people have defended Mulla Sadra by saying that his comment does not indicate women's position, since it can be about men as well. Their defense might be plausible if we did not have his interpreter's comments on it. Mulla Hadi Sabzewari, the famous commentator on Mulla Sadra's work, has explained the "marriage" from the writer's perspective,

⁸Mulla Sadra (1571-1636) is the last prominent philosopher in the history of Islamic philosophy. He is very influential on philosophical currents especially in Shi'a branches.

⁹My translation.

Mulla Sadra has mentioned women as a group of animals since women are weak in reasoning; they are unable to understand details, and always interested in luxury. Therefore, they are rightly and fairly close to animals rather than humans. Although they have a beastly nature, God has given them a human face in order to be desirable and pleasant for men ((Mulla Sadra 1981, vol. 7, 136).¹⁰

This is the top of a discriminatory approach to women's position in an Islamic country. It has been expressed not by an illiterate and uncivilized person, rather by a philosopher. In such societies women have a long way to attain an equal position in dignity and respect. Earlier I suggested that this discriminatory patriarchal culture has deeper roots than Islam. Islam has been affected by this culture, which is to say that the problem is a social issue rather than a religious issue. Patriarchic social systems always have existed in the region whether before or after the appearance of Islam. Meanwhile I cannot deny that Islam has been mixed with this patriarchal paradigm. Indeed, one of the Qur'anic verses seems to endorse the superiority of men over women:

Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that God has preferred in bounty one of them over another, and for that they have expended of their property. Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret for God's guarding. And those you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them. If they then obey you, look not for any way against them; God is All-high, All-great (The Qur'an, 4:34).

Two points about this verse should be noticed. The first one is the superiority of men toward women and the second is the justification of that superiority. According to what I said about the grounds of dignity in the first chapter, men's superiority on women has been bestowed to them by God. God is the giver of dignity.

¹⁰ - My translation.

To solve the problem, my suggestion is that we need to put the case of man-woman relation in a broader Islamic context. We need to put it in the context in which Islam endorses equality of all human beings beyond equality of man and woman. Like other Abrahamic religions, Islamic justification for equal dignity among all humans is rooted in the creation story. The most important verse of the Qur'an supports human dignity is this:

O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female [Adam and Eve], and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. (the Qur'an 9:13).

According to this general view, all human beings have the same starting point; therefore no one is permitted to enjoy a privilege or suffer a disadvantage. All of human beings are children of a man and a woman. In other words it declares that God has created all human being from his single spirit:

And when thy Lord said to the angels, 'See, I am creating a mortal of a clay of mud moulded. When I have shaped him, and breathed My spirit in him, fall you down, bowing before him!' (the Qur'an 15:28-29)

The above verse indicates that everyone has a godly aspect and because of that is morally respectable. Based on this equality in roots, the Universal Islamic Declaration of human rights emphasizes that "every effort shall be made to ensure to everyone security, dignity and liberty." Everyone has equal right to life, freedom, equality, justice, fair trial, protection against abuse of power, protection against torture, protection of honour and reputation, asylum, rights of minorities, right to freedom of belief, thought and speech, and right to freedom of religion.

Drafters of the Islamic Declaration have paid attention deliberately to the problem of women's case. They have tried to remove any religious foundation for this discrimination. The drafters have added explanatory notes to the Declaration emphasizing "the term 'person' refers to both the male and female sexes." This idea clearly opposes the theory of Mulla Hadi Sabzevari and Mulla Sadra. Regarding equally man and woman as "person" seems a humanist revolution in Islamic culture.

Someone may say I have still not solved the problem of obedience and subordination of women, raised by the verse (the Qur'an, 4:34) I quoted above. In other words the question is can we say that the first verse (the Qur'an, 4:34) undermines the second (the Qur'an 9:13) and third one (the Qur'an 15:28-29). The first one says men are superior to women, the second and third one say all people have same roots, common ancestors (Adam and Eve) and common divine spirit. If we accept that there is a contradiction between these verses, we have to decide which one we should rely on. According to a famous theological style of interpreting The Qur'an, its verses are divided into two groups. The Qur'an itself asserts this distinction:

It is He who sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are verses clear that are the Essence of the Book, and others ambiguous (the Qur'an 3:7).

Now we have to ask ourselves which verse is closer to the essence of the Book and which one is ambiguous. I want to claim that the verse that explains the essence of humanity and how god has created Adam (as human) and why he divided people into two sexes and many nations can be closer to the essence of the Book than the other verse which is related to social-historical roles of man and woman. The Islamic feminist scholar, Fatima Mernissi supports my idea. She explains how some patriarchal attitudes were enforced on

the Qur'an by the Arabic patriarchal society in the time of revelation. In *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Islam*, she examines some historical events through which Mohammad had to accept those patriarchal tendencies. Therefore, I think we can solve the problem by disregarding the verse that refers to subordination of women in favour of those verses that generally talk about equality of all human beings.

The other noticeable issue is minorities' rights. The Islamic Declaration has recognized the religious rights of non-Muslim minorities. In a Muslim country "religious minorities shall have the choice to be governed in respect of their civil and personal matters by Islamic Law or by their own laws." One Muslim scholar, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, claims that human dignity is a natural endowment of all human beings. Dignity is established not through being merely human. Hashim names some Islamic thinkers such as Mahmud al-Alusi's (1802 – 1854), Burhan-ud-din al-Marghinani (1135-1197), Ibn 'Abidin (d.1834), Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd al-Qurtubi (Averroes), Ibrahim al-Shatibi, Ibn Taymiyyah and ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, and Javad Mughniyyeh as supporters of equal dignity among all human beings (Kamali, 2014). If minorities have equal dignity compared with their Muslim fellow citizens, it means they are as worthy of being citizens as Muslim members of society. Therefore they deserve equal rights in an Islamic society. Abd Allah Ahmad Na'im has noticed this relation between dignity and citizenship.

According to Na'im's perspectives as well, these Islamic philosophers can provide us a conception of human rights and human dignity that is integral to Islamic culture. He has also tried to draw attention to some further the Qur'anic evidence in support of equal rights for people with different religions. He believes that the Islamic concept of *Dhimma* (Na'im 2008, 130) can be equivalent to the modern political concept of citizenship.

Although he focuses on the concept of citizenship as a potential equal standing for everyone he clearly means “dignity” by it:

Citizenship should signify a shared understanding of equal human *dignity* for all and a fully inclusive and effective political participation to ensure the government accountability for respecting and protecting human rights for all (Na'im, 2008, 127).

Therefore, I believe that the solution of any potential Islamic discriminatory approach toward dignity of women or non-Muslims is found in an Islamic broader context in which every person is to be treated without religious and gender distinction. If the Qur'an as a holy text claims that it contains universal and eternal messages for human beings it should speak beyond gender and racial discrimination. It is clear that in historical situations any holy text cannot remain completely pure. They have been combined with the culture of the first group of people which they have encountered.

Therefore, unity of humanity is possible if we regard the Qur'an in terms of relation between human beings and God, in which there is no religious or sexual difference. All people are people of God. This egalitarian approach has been espoused by some humanitarian interpretations among *Sufi* Muslims. Islamic Mysticism, free from theological argumentations of *Shari'a*, has been able to jump over religious, social or gender distinctions. There are many cases among Muslim *Sufi(s)* who have ignored these distinctions and have tried to attain an equal relation among all human beings. One of these mystical approaches belongs to Abu al-Hassan Kharaghani (963-1033). He believed that if dignity has been given by God equally, nobody is allowed to take it away from anyone. He said,

Whoever comes to my home, I will give him food because if he deserves to have life from God, albeit he deserves having food from Abu al-Hassan.

The important thing is that monotheistic religions including Islam cannot accept that something has not been created by God. God is the only creator of the world, and so everything should be his creature. If they accept that the only single condition of having dignity is to be created by God, then they can endorse that all humans have equal dignity. In other words, to suppose that something exists but is not God's creature (and, in the case of humans, God's image) is an impossible supposition. Therefore human dignity demands minimal respect that is without exception and is unconditional. I will explain what I mean by "minimal" in the conclusion.

Kant and Dignity of people with Mental Disability

In keeping with my methodology in this chapter, I am also going to consider a challenging case for the Kantian conception of dignity. As we saw in Chapter One, the basis for having dignity in a Kantian perspective is having reason or autonomy. If one is to choose between these two, one can say that autonomy could be regarded as a result of having reason, but at the same time these two have a dialectical relation with each other, and we can hardly distinguish them in terms of their connection with dignity.

This raises the question of whether this basis for dignity should also be a criterion for dignity, so that people who are deficient or lacking in autonomy or rationality are for that reason considered to be deficient or lacking in dignity. This would seem to deny dignity to people who are cognitively disabled. Arguably children are in the same position. They may be less able to recognize moral goods or to decide autonomously. Now the

question is: can we say that people with mental disability, children, and non-Europeans must expect lower levels of dignity?

At the first glance, we can see that Kant's problem is more difficult than that of Abrahamic religions. Those religions can somehow accept that the others (God's enemies, neighbor, and women) are God's creatures and God's images; therefore everyone can expect to have equal dignity. By Kantian criteria for having dignity, the case is different. We can easily assume that a group of people do not have powers of reason or autonomy; therefore they remain easily outside the equal dignity zone. How can Kant answer this problem? Looking for a reasonable answer, some scholars have tried to clarify those two Kantian criteria.

They believe we need to rethink Kant's conception of "reason" and "autonomy." For this rethinking, some scholars like Allen Wood have mentioned the distinction between "humanity" and "personality" (Wood 1999). Kant describes humanity as a "rational nature" that is potentially capable to be "person." A person is someone who respects and practices moral laws. According to this interpretation, Kant does not believe that every human being is actually a person. "Personhood" and "humanity" are distinguishable; everyone from the moment of birth is human but it takes time for him to become person. Human beings should improve their reason and autonomy to become person. The distinction helps us to think of "dignity" in two ways; first, dignity can be a *capacity* which we humans potentially have, but we must fulfill it. If dignity is the same as potentiality of reason and autonomy, then everyone has equal dignity. According to this idea every human being can be rationally moral; therefore the above aforementioned challenge is solved.

On the other hand, dignity can be a property which we reach if we improve our faculties and become persons. According to this definition only mature persons have dignity, while children and people with mental disabilities have lower levels of dignity. To sum up, if humanity is the criterion of dignity, then every human – who is potentially rational and autonomous – deserves to be respected equally and unconditionally. If personhood is the ground of dignity, then only those who function as persons have equal dignity; therefore neither children nor the cognitively disabled should be regarded as having equal dignity.

Suppose that the criterion of dignity from a Kantian point of view is humanity and not personhood. Through this idea, we should recognize the dignity of everyone who is capable of rationality and autonomy. The problem is still remaining about people who do not have the capacity to be rational and autonomous, humans with cognitive disability. I have no suggestion to solve the problem from Kantian perspective. Kant clearly regards “rationality” and “autonomy” as preconditions of having dignity. He does not say that human beings have dignity per se, he claims that human beings – who are rational and morally autonomous – have dignity. The defining feature of human beings for Kant is “rational nature” and he talks about “dignity of humanity as rational nature;” (Kant 1998, 49); therefore some people such as mental patients are placed out of the equal dignity zone.

Confining the meaning of humanity into such limited definitions as “rational nature” or “morally autonomous,” makes it very hard to find a common minimal conception of human dignity. Although humanity has been almost defined as rational nature, it does not mean that other human aspects should be ignored. When we are to find a universal definition for humanity other aspects should be regarded, for instance the case of

compassion. Rationality is very crucial when we consider the relation between ordinary people and educated people, Europeans and non-Europeans, or the relation between men and women.

In order to solve the problem I intend to consider Kant as a philosopher with a humanistic Enlightenment approach. If we consider Kant as a philosopher with humanistic interests who encourages people "to use your own understanding," we can understand that he indeed is emphasizing the worth of humanity per se. If he talks about "dignity of humanity as rational nature" he indeed does not mean that humanity is absolutely confined in rationality. For Kant rationality conveys pure human understanding that essentially belongs to humans. Through this interpretation of humanity, I would say that Kant insists first and foremost on humanity rather than rationality. Humanity does not need any other external source; it does not take its value from others; therefore it has dignity per se. Responding to the dominant Middle Ages conception of human dignity (Godlikeness), Kant regards humanity as worthy in itself having dignity by itself. Accordingly rationality is not a criterion of dignity; rather it is just a distinguishing human trait that could help Kant as a modern humanist philosopher to manifest the autonomy of humanity.

The important thing related to the Kantian conception of human dignity is that he made human dignity completely independent of any other things. Everyone's humanity itself completely suffices to be respected. Returning to the problem of people with mental illness, I think although Kant has defined humanity as rational nature, he would endorse equal dignity of this group of people because they are human as well.

In other words, I can distinguish rationality/autonomy as "basis" for dignity from its being a "criterion" of dignity. Being rational is basis of dignity not criterion of dignity;

therefore, people with mental disabilities remain still among those who have dignity. Rationality and autonomy are aspects of human flourishing, which is the kind of flourishing that is appropriate for humans, even if they cannot achieve it.

Conclusion

Now it is the time to look back and to recognize what was common among those different conceptions of dignity. In the first chapter I discussed the relevance of dignity to moral considerability. People who have equal dignity deserve equal moral respect. I argued that considering someone as noticeable in this particular sense means there is something in him that obliges us to respect and morally consider him.

In the second chapter, I claimed that human beings have superior dignity compared with other species because they have more abilities for having a flourishing life. I adopted this perspective from Martha Nussbaum whose capabilities approach can satisfy religious perspectives, a Kantian perspective, and Singer's concerns as well. Secondly and from a practical point of view, I claimed that moving toward a common equal dignity among all individuals around the world, we must accept a hierarchical system of dignities between human beings and other species, because if we deny this historical and definitely religious conception of human dignity, we will enter to a world in which the concept of species becomes unused and everyone easily allows himself to regard the others as "worse than a dog."

In the third chapter I discussed specific cases for every conception of dignity. Getting help from the Jewish philosopher David Novak, I suggested a Jewish conception of dignity, rectifying dignity, that covers everyone, even God's enemies. In Christianity the concept of neighbor that can encompass all individuals helped me to near a universal conception of human dignity. The identical point of view in Islam was the idea of common origin; therefore all human beings, including all men and women, should be equally morally considered. Finally I discussed the Kantian conception of dignity regarding his idea of

human autonomy. Now I have four conceptions of human dignity in my hands that are more or less similar.

Perspectives:

Judaism

Christianity

Islam

Kant (modern philosophy)

Grounds of dignity:

Everyone's rectifying dignity

Everyone might be your neighbor, then love everyone

Everyone has a godly spirit

Everyone is potentially rational human

Looking to these grounds for dignity we understand that two important points exist on the way of finding a universal and minimal conception of human dignity. The first point is what I call "minimalist approach." The second point shows itself in "someoneness."

A Minimalist Approach to Human Dignity

In the first chapter I claimed that dignity is something in the object (the other) of our behavior that obliges us to respect him or her. Attributing dignity to another person points to something noteworthy that exists in the other commands me to give my respect and moral consideration. Now these four grounds contain a minimalist approach to that noteworthy thing.

Let me explain it using the case of women and Islam. I observed that women's dignity, alongside non-Muslims' dignity, is the most controversial case for Islamic cultures. Now suppose that a super-Muslim encounters a non-Muslim prostitute. This poor prostitute goes down three times in the hierarchy of dignities. At first, she goes down one level because of her femininity. Secondly, if she was a Muslim, she would have better

position but unfortunately she is non-Muslims then she goes another level down. A super-Muslim man cannot respect her because she does not have two necessary traits, manhood and Muslimhood. Moreover she would have a better situation if she was a faithful non-Muslim woman but unfortunately again she is a prostitute, the symbol of vices; therefore she has no aspect makes a super-Muslim respect her. Look at this hierarchy of dignities:

Muslim man
 Muslim woman
 non-Muslim man
 non-Muslim woman
 non-Muslim prostitute

Now in such a hierarchical atmosphere, I want to say to the Muslim man that he must recognize a non-Muslim prostitute's dignity. I cannot convince him that a non-Muslim prostitute is as respectable as a Muslim man. According to many Islamic-moral arguments non-Muslim prostitute is less respectable than a Muslim man. What I can say to him, convincing him to respect her *minimally*, is that I remind him that she is god's creature as well. She has been created also from that almighty "spirit." Only through this argument I can convince him to recognize her dignity minimally. This explanation clears that dignity is a minimal concept. Everyone has dignity no matter who they are or what they do, they still have the potentiality to become the Buddha, and they are still in the image of God (even if they act immorally).

In a conflict situation between two groups of people, no side finds common cultural, economic, religious reasons to respect others. The only minimal thing for respectful behavior is dignity. Therefore any discussion in an international sphere should be held on

minimal consensus on dignity of the other. All those four conceptions state minimalist respectful approaches toward others, not maximalist approach. They try to find the human minimal property that obliges us to respect the others. The “potentiality” that exists in Buddhist and Kantian conceptions shows exactly this minimal approach. Kant as well suggests *potentiality* to being rational as criterion of dignity not *being* rational.

The idea of “neighborhood” in Christianity also has this minimal approach to respecting the other. The minimal reason to encourage a Christian to respect the other – regardless of any religious unity – is unity in neighborhood. A Christian and his neighbor who might be everyone with every religion have a common region and it is enough to create a respectful relation between them. This minimal unity in Judaism is called rectified dignity, that sort of dignity that everyone has it equally. The minimal unity between the Muslim and the prostitute in the abovementioned example is the godly spirit which both have equally. In Kant’s theory the minimal shared trait between a moral and rational agent and someone with mental illness who has no rationality and no moral agency is that both are human.

Therefore we should notice that considering the other’s dignity is the lowest level of respect. It is not the most amount of respect which someone can show. Therefore we can advise the two sides of any sort of conflict to minimally and morally consider each other. If we remind each side that they ascribe greater worth to fellow members of their own groups but are not allowed to ignore the others’ minimal moral considerability, we will be better able to create reconciliation between sides of any aggressive conflict.

In other words, no matter how highly or lowly we think of another, no matter whether we hold them in esteem or contempt, we must respect them in a way that does not

depend on all that, and that does not vary with who they are or what they have done. So what the concept of dignity does is to find some ground for giving people unconditional respect. This is a respect that all people deserve no matter what they have done, no matter who they are in society, no matter how much or how little prestige they have. This also means that when a tradition identifies some basis for dignity (like reason, autonomy, Godlikeness), this should not be used as a criterion for discriminating between those who deserve this respect and those who do not.

Universality of Humanity

The second common aspect between those four conceptions of human dignity is that in all four, humanity is the common idea. I tried to convey this common humanity with the word “everyone.” As I mentioned in earlier chapters, many criteria have been discussed over centuries to identify who is a real human being. In the first place, are human beings the creatures of God or they are rational animals? What are the differences between human beings and persons? Can we define human beings as those who have a human genome?

I think any answer to these questions definitely divides human society at least into two groups, and any sort of division is the first step toward discrimination in dignity and respect. Alongside this problem we still feel that we have an image of humanity in our mind that universally covers all human beings around the world. Perhaps avoiding any categorical division, we can think of any human being as someone. “Someoneness” is the most neutral term I could find so far for what I mean. It does not convey any religious or nonreligious, rational or non-rational description of humanity. It just states that we are talking about someone who is member of the human community; being someone in this

sense should be sufficient for enjoying equal dignity. Consider the following example. Imagine being on a flat long road. The road goes so far it disappears at the horizon. It is flat; accordingly you can see everything moving toward you. Now suppose that you see something coming towards you, but it is so far that you cannot recognize what it is. It might be a car, a gorilla, or a human. It is something that is nearing. After a while, you find out that it is not an inanimate thing. It seems to be an animal, but you are not sure yet whether it is a gorilla or a human. A few moments later, you can recognize that it is a human, yet you cannot make out whether it is male or female. A little later you understand that he is a man, but who he is, you do not know yet. Finally when he comes nearer, you see that he is your brother. Now my question is: at what point must you recognize equal dignity between yourself and whatever or whoever is approaching you on the road? In that moment you found out he is your brother? I want to say no. In the very moment you saw that someone, a human being, is coming, you are obliged to show equal respect and acknowledge the other's equal moral considerability.

My example corresponds to what Daniel P. Sulmasy says in his paper, "Human dignity and Human Worth." His approach to some extent is similar to Martha Nussbaum's, in that both make strategic use of the most universal terms. Nussbaum's "flourishing" and "capabilities" are sufficiently abstract and generic to apply to every kind of life. Similarly Sulmasy suggests that if any specific ground is controversial we must accept that we human beings have equal dignity because we all simply are human (Sulmasy 2007, 14). Human dignity is universal if we set the bar at someoneness. If we set the bar any higher, say at reason, autonomy or Godlikeness, then a large part of humanity is excluded from enjoying equal dignity. In other words the basis for dignity should not be regarded as a criterion for

dignity. We need to set the bar low enough to include everyone, whether we hold them in contempt or esteem. I think those traditional perspectives also can accept this new criterion. We must just leave them to interpret it according to their backgrounds. Setting the bar at someoneness is the notion Martin Luther King learned from his grandmother:

“Martin, don’t let anyone ever tell you that you’re not a somebody.”

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