

NATURE OF DIGNITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY¹

VASIL GLUCHMAN

Abstract: This paper argues that the concept of dignity should be understood as a concept that we use to describe an aggregate of values and qualities of a person or thing that deserves esteem and respect. The primary value that creates the right to have dignity is life. The degree of dignity a life form has depends on its place in the evolutionary scale. Human beings are the highest form of life so they possess the highest degree of dignity.

Key words: dignity; life; human life; human dignity.

Introduction

I believe that ethics should contribute to bioethics lies by providing an account of the value of human dignity that is valid for different perceptions of the world of morality, moral values and, at the same time, that respects the requirements of humanity. In the philosophical literature, we often come across terms which seem clear at first sight. However, when we try to study them more closely, we discover to our consternation that they are interpreted differently in various conceptions or by various authors. In my opinion, this is also true of the notion, or value, of human dignity.

I realized this when reading UNESCO documents, such as the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights (1997) and the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005). I can understand that these documents try to formulate generally acceptable viewpoints on issues such as the creation of a global bioethics; however, because they have sought to compromise, the formulations used in these declarations are increasingly vague, or even sterile. One such example is statements relating to an essential value in bioethics, that of human dignity. In Article 1 of the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights (1997) we find the statement: “the human genome underlies the fundamental unity of all members of the human family, as well as the recognition of their inherent dignity and diversity. In a symbolic sense, it is the heritage of humanity”

¹ This article is a part of the VEGA 1/0629/15 *Ethics of Social Consequences in the Context of Contemporary Ethical Theories* project.

(UNESCO, 2000, p. 3). In Article 3 of the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005), we find the even vaguer, “human dignity, rights and fundamental freedoms are to be fully respected” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 6). It seems to me that these formulations may be legally acceptable, but the extent to which they express an agreed opinion on this issue in philosophical bioethics is highly questionable. I am aware that it must be difficult to find complete agreement on human dignity within the various philosophical, religious and cultural traditions; on the other hand, though, I do not think that the law should substitute for the efforts of philosophers and ethicists in searching for an answer and the possibility of reaching a consensus on this issue in bioethics.

Other authors who have dealt with the conception of human dignity in UNESCO documents have also been critical, such as Roberto Andorno who asserts that although the idea of human dignity is fundamental to human rights, it is not explicitly given anywhere in law. International documents state that it is innate to all people, that all people are free and equal in their dignity and that their rights are derived from an inherent human dignity. Despite the ambiguity of these statements, they still understand human dignity to be an inner value, a characteristic feature of something. The characteristic feature of human beings is not accidental. It is also equal for everybody, just like human rights. Andorno states that because the term dignity is somewhat inflated in bioethical discussions, they tend to become mere rhetorical exercise (Andorno, 2009, pp. 228-231). Matti Häyry and Tuija Takala also state that even though the notion of human dignity plays a significant role in UNESCO documents, it is not defined. They believe the document’s composers may have taken it for granted that the term does not need defining, as it is clear to everybody. This, however, is not true. In the context of scientific research this could lead to controversial conclusions. There are also inaccuracies such as the fact that in one place reference is made to the dignity of the person and, in another, to human dignity being innate to all human beings (Häyry & Takala, 2005, p. 232). Harald Schmidt deduces that what the authors probably had in mind was the person as bearer of dignity. The supposition is that the authors later came to the conclusion that it was up to the individual countries to decide whether they consider prenatal forms of human life to be persons. However, it is not up to individual countries to decide whether humans who have been born are considered persons, the bearers of human dignity (Schmidt, 2007, pp. 582-583). Equally, Adam Schulman points out that UNESCO, in its Universal Declaration on Bioethics, has recently referred to human dignity or the dignity of humans; however, it does not explain what human dignity is and why people have it (Schulman, 2008, p. 13).

The literature on human dignity also contains other different approaches to defining the concept. There are legal experts who refer to international documents without analysing the concept further or while making reference to Kant, who emphasize the importance of human dignity in regards to respecting the individual’s human rights (Luban, 2009; Montgomery, 1995; Rosen, 2012). Political scientists also look at human dignity within the context of international legal documents or by adopting a Kantian approach (Bayefsky, 2013; Kateb, 2011). Wairimu Njoya has stated that there are two leading concepts of dignity in contemporary political philosophy—one is used in an existentialist approach to preventing the degradation of human beings and the other in relation to the equal status of democratic citizenship (Njoya, 2017). Although there are authors who discuss the need for sociology to explore definitions of human dignity, modern sociology more or less avoids doing so as it

considers it to be a purely philosophical issue (Hodgkiss, 2013; Misztal, 2012). Experts in research on genetic technology and bioethics reject an absolute understanding of a broader conceptualisation of human dignity as this often negatively interferes with stem cell research and therapeutic use (Cochrane, 2010; Macklin, 2003; Pinker, 2008).

Within humanistic psychology, human dignity is understood as a primary value (derived from Kant's concept and the existential-phenomenological philosophy of Max Scheler and Martin Buber), which stems from the ontological dimension of dignity inherent to all human beings based purely on their existence and nature (Robbins, 2016). Following this, many authors have rejected the possibility that human beings could be differentiated on the basis of their mental abilities and have instead emphasized the interpersonal rather than the social context of human beings (Bradford, 2010; Frankl, 2011; Kramer & Buck, 1997; Leitner & Phillips, 2003; Miller, 2000). On the other hand, there are authors in the field of humanistic psychology who claim that dignity is the result of the prosocial behaviour of human beings (Harcum, 1994; Harcum & Rosen, 1990; Skinner, 1971).

My aim is to analyse the nature of dignity, including human dignity, and the role of life, especially human life, in the concepts of dignity and human dignity.

Nature of dignity

The first question to be dealt with is what is dignity?² On what basis can we say something or someone has dignity? The first claim is that dignity is an aggregate of certain valuable qualities and values. To respect dignity, then, means to accept values or qualities that we believe to have value, or worth holding in esteem and having respect for. The second claim is that dignity stems from these values and qualities, as reflected in one's conduct and behavior; that means in the kind of behavior that confirms the values and qualities that we attribute to dignity. What then are these values and qualities that compose dignity? Göran Collste states that the basic attributes of dignity are equality and respect (Collste, 2002, pp. 202-203). However, to what extent these attributes are among the qualities and values that compose dignity? I believe that the values and qualities that create dignity are primary not secondary, just as I believe that dignity is a primary not a secondary value. When he pointed to equality and respect as being the attributes of dignity, Collste certainly meant the equality of all human beings and respect for all human beings. But, in my opinion, we can only accept the idea that all human beings are equal if this equality is based on something. At this point the question arises as to what reason (value or quality) we have for considering all human beings to be equal? They are equal only if we accept human dignity, or, if you like, dignity in general, but equality cannot be the primary value that creates (human) dignity. I have

² I do not intent to review the history of the term human dignity in this article, because it is too broad a topic, but just wish to point out that Martha C. Nussbaum traces the term human dignity back to the Stoics (Nussbaum, 2009, p. 12), while in his historical analysis Michael Rosen considers Cicero to have first used the term, as does Marián Palenčár in his article (Rosen, 2012, p. 11; Palenčár, 2016, pp. 467-474). Yechiel Michael Barilan presents a more detailed review of how human dignity has been conceived of historically. He begins his research by looking at Judaism, Stoicism, Christianity, the Middle Ages and the modern era up to the present day (Barilan, 2012, pp. 23-92).

previously stated that “we have to accept that all members of humankind are morally equal because of the commonality of their being” (Gluchman, 2003b, p. 137). What then is the relation between equality and human dignity? Is equality an attribute of human dignity? My opinion, quoted above, suggests that human dignity is a precondition for moral equality. But what does this mean when juxtaposed with Collste’s position? Do we have human dignity because we are born equal or are we equal because we have human dignity?

Dignity is a body of qualities or values that we believe to be worth having and holding in esteem. However, equality is not something that we can possess at our will; others must confer it on us. This means that equality is not a value that living creatures are born with but a value conferred on them by others who believe them to be equal. But the same question is brought to our attention again and again. On the basis of which qualities and values do others consider these creatures equal? One can answer that it is on the basis of the fact that others attribute (human) dignity to them. But on what basis is human dignity attributed to these creatures? Is it on the basis that they possess qualities and values that inspire a feeling of esteem and respect? But what are they? This is a serious question that needs to be answered.

Another attribute of dignity that Collste presents in his work is respect and esteem. But can we say that respect and esteem inspire respect and esteem? Can we perceive respect as being both a primary and a secondary value? Can we treat respect or esteem as innate qualities? It is only others that can confer both respect and esteem on us since we are not born with them. If we say “to respect human dignity”, we probably mean that it is necessary to respect the value of human beings, which could also mean that we believe that human beings are worth protecting. But again we must surely ask ourselves what is the source of the value of human beings that makes them worth protecting. Does the fact that we use the concept “human dignity” mean that we imply that dignity can be attributed to other life forms as well? Do we use the expression “human” to make the difference clear? I hope that this will be clarified as we further examine the problem. But let us return to the problem of those qualities and values that are worthy of respect and esteem and that create dignity. What qualities and values could they be?

There is almost no philosophical work that would elaborate upon the problem and clearly identify the qualities and values based on which it is possible to speak about human dignity. Some philosophers simply state that human dignity is ontologically or metaphysically given, that people are born with it (Gewirth, 1992; Jones, 1994). Others see the essence of human dignity in the qualities that can be possessed only by moral agents (Ossowska, 1980; Pettit, 1989-1990), while still others connect human dignity (*Menschenwürde*) with a certain social minimum of rights (Birnbacher, 1996), etc. The first position enables to avoid considering the problem in greater depth since it falls back on a non-specific and vague statement about certain given qualities. The second position defines human dignity so narrowly that many human beings (for example, infants, mentally immature children and the mentally disabled) cannot be said to possess it, and the third position reduces the concept even further, so that it is merely a problem of allocating rights. None of these positions, however, explains what the basis of human dignity is.

What qualities and values could create dignity? What qualities and values are worthy of esteem and respect? Collste and many other authors put forward the qualities of rationality, (self-)consciousness and free will. If we are to believe that the qualities and values that

create human dignity should be those that are truly worthy of esteem and respect, then we can express doubts about Collste's position because, for example, rationality can also be misused for aims that are in never worthy of esteem and respect. The same can be said about (self-) consciousness and free will. The very fact that they exist does not mean that there is a reason to consider them worthy of respect and esteem. Let us think, then, about some other qualities that could fulfill the criterion better. For example, when Aristotle defines virtues (*aretai*), he numbers among them such qualities as justice, friendship, generosity, temperance, and honesty. If we apply the Aristotelian approach to our problem, then all these virtues (*aretai*) can be seen as truly worthy of esteem and respect. We can then perceive them as composing the values and qualities based on which we can speak about dignity. However, all these virtues (*aretai*) are related to the conduct of such individuals as responsible moral agents. But what are we to do with those who do not fall into this category yet (for example, children) or those who will never have a chance of belonging to this category (for instance, mentally disabled people)? Are we prepared to say that these human beings do not possess (human) dignity? Is it so that they do not have a right to be protected by us? How should we behave toward them? In the same way we behave toward animals or plants? Or should we treat them in the way that the Roman slaves were treated, as speaking tools (if they were capable of speaking at all). Can we be satisfied with the belief that only some human beings (only moral agents) have human dignity and others do not? In that case, the question arises as to how it is possible that those who at first do not have human dignity—infants and children—later possess it. Although the average age of human beings is rising, a significant number of people have not reached the 15 to 18 age group (the age when one is expected to have reached mental or moral maturity), which means that this group of humankind, together with the mentally disabled, would be deprived of the right to be seen as having human dignity. This would effectively amount to moral discrimination and cause great difficulties in bioethics.

This would put us into a problematic position, such as the one adopted by Tibor Machan. He says that the moral priority of human beings is based on their capacity for moral thinking, ignoring the fact that a great number of people lack this capacity, since it is possessed only by moral agents (Machan, 2002, p. 9). However, John Hadley does not agree with Machan and claims that if the capacity for moral thinking is a criterion for a position in the hierarchy of being, then some human beings are not even at the level of certain animals (for example, great apes), and if the criterion for our not harming someone is his capacity to be a moral agent, then we would be allowed to treat some human beings worse than animals (Hadley, 2004, p. 411). Machan is aware that not all human beings fulfill the criteria for being moral agents. Still, he claims that marginal cases are not decisive for taking a general standpoint. Hadley, on the other hand, rejects the generalizations that help Machan avoid the problem of the maltreatment of human beings who are not moral agents, for instance, newborns, mentally disabled people or people in a coma. According to Hadley, if we take Machan's claims to their logical consequences, then moral agents can hurt others or even cause their death, and this maltreatment could be applicable both to animals as well as to people who are not moral agents (Hadley, 2004, p. 412). Kenneth Goodpaster points out in this connection that an incapacity to feel pleasure or pain cannot function as a criterion for moral consideration (nor in my opinion for human dignity, including where issues of bioethics are

concerned) because in such a case it would not be possible to give moral consideration to, for example, persons who, for various medical reasons, cannot feel pleasure or pain (Goodpaster, 1978, pp. 322-323). I also believe that we would not be able to confer human dignity to these human beings.

If we tried to avoid the problem by stating that we would regard mentally fit children as potential bearers of (human) dignity, just as we consider them to be potential moral agents, we would not succeed because such an approach would deprive them of the right (possessed by other human beings) to be protected and respected by other moral agents. The point that I am making here is that the act of conferring human dignity on someone brings with it correlative duties for moral agents in relation to the bearer of (human) dignity.

On what basis, then, should we respect human beings who are not fully responsible moral agents and could be useful in bioethics? It seems that the only acceptable answer is that human dignity is based on something they share with other beings and that is life. Let us try to find a solution to our problem by stating that human dignity is conferred on all human beings, on all *Homo sapiens* on the basis of their existence. The fact that they exist is the reason human dignity is accorded to human beings. But then we can ask why dignity should only be conferred on *Homo sapiens*, and not on animals, plants, inanimate nature or everyday objects. One possible answer is that human dignity can only be conferred on human beings. Let us suppose that this is correct. Can we, then, speak about the dignity of animals, the dignity of plants, the dignity of inanimate objects (for example, the dignity of rocks), or the dignity of everyday objects (for instance, the dignity of a table)?³ It seems a bit absurd. So let us try a different line of reasoning. Christianity bases its idea of human dignity on the belief that the value of a human being resides in the fact that his or her life is a gift from God, who created humankind in His image. According to biblical legend, however, God also created animals, plants, rocks and, through human activity, he also created the table. It is true that He did not create these things in His image, but they are also God's creations. And if they are God's creations just as a human being is, why should these things not have dignity? Although they are not created in "God's image", they are often superior to humans. An earthworm, for example, can regenerate a lost body part. Can humans, the lords of creation, do the same? The sea turtle can live for two hundred years, much longer than humans. On what basis, then, do we believe that we possess a dignity that makes us superior to all other creatures, when we are merely one species of God's creatures and in many respects an inferior species at that?

Neither Collste nor any of the other twentieth century Christian authors discussed in his work who regard the intrinsic value of human life to be the source of its sanctity gives a clear answer to the following question: What is the source of the intrinsic value of human life? Is the source to be found in life itself, regardless of its quality? Life is only a primary

³ Martha Nussbaum argues that "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, and that all sentient animals should enjoy certain positive opportunities to flourish. With due respect for a world that contains many forms of life, we attend with ethical concern to each characteristic type of flourishing, and strive that it not be cut off or fruitless" (Nussbaum, 2007, p. 351). Frederico Zuolo considers Nussbaum to be wrong because no approach can justify applying dignity to animals because they all fail to fulfil the formal requirements and do not provide an appropriate basis for animal dignity. He thinks that accepting the moral importance of animals is more acceptable than dignity (Zuolo, 2016).

value, a value on which many other values are conditional; it is more or less only potential of other values that should be realized. Some say that this intrinsic value of life is reason (Aquinas), others that it is the soul (Thomasmia), others that it is God's will, and still others say that it is human relations that give value to human beings (McCormick & Häring). If we exclude the soul and God's will from our considerations (since they belong more to the sphere of theology and religion than to philosophical ethics), then we find that we are left with little that could form the basis for the intrinsic value of human beings, the existence of which would justify assigning human dignity to them.⁴ So what is a possible solution to this problem? Rationality, (self-)consciousness, free will and responsibility are all capacities that can only be exercised by moral agents, so they cannot be used in bioethics as a criterion for human dignity in the case of all human beings. Collste's position that these capacities should be understood as belonging to the whole human race and not just individuals does not provide a solution either. He argues that if a human being lacks certain human capacities due to a defect, it does not mean that other humans also lack these capacities. In contrast to all other animals, the disposition is there (but has not developed as it should) because these capacities are characteristic of human species, but not of animals (Collste, 2002, 169). A similar point is made by Machan, who, as already mentioned, does not take marginal forms of human existence into consideration but looks only at general assumptions about the qualities possessed by humankind (Machan, 2002, p. 9).

Life – nature of dignity

I think that within the ethics of social consequences, which is the starting point of this approach (Dubiel-Zielińska, 2013; 2015; M. Gluchman, 2014, pp. 12-45; Gluchman & Kalajtzidis, 2014; V. Gluchman, 2003b, pp. 7-19, 141-166; V. Gluchman, 2016, pp. 54-60; Gluchmanová, 2013; Grzybek, 2013, pp. 16-22; Kalajtzidis, 2013; 2014; Lešková Blahová, 2009; Misseri, 2014), that the question of whether life or human life has a value, a meaning in itself, is more important for philosophically based bioethics. If we can answer this question, then we may find a reason for conferring dignity on human beings. We can hardly say that we do not care about whether we are alive or not; whether we were born to live our life in this world or not. So the value and the meaning of human life reside in the fact that we exist, that we live, since this fact creates the basis for everything else. I am not sure whether we can speak about the intrinsic value of life, but I am quite positive that the primary value of life lies in its very existence, in the fact of being alive. This is the basic precondition to our living a valuable life, a life that we want to live (although we are not always successful, whether for objective or subjective reasons). We can accept this without connecting it with a mystery or searching for explanations of the "mystery" of life. Life is like a vessel that needs to be filled up and we decide its content. Thus, we can say that the existence of life creates a basis for conferring dignity on the living. It is a value that is worthy of esteem and respect.

⁴ Dieter Birnbacher points out that various authors often use the concept of human dignity in their discussions just to avoid problems in presenting rational arguments (Birnbacher, 1996, p. 108). I think that in many respects this is also true of how the concept of the 'intrinsic value of man' is used—to make a direct connection between the concept and the value of human dignity.

Kenneth Goodpaster, for example, formulates a similar thesis claiming that an important criterion for moral consideration is not the capacity for rationality or capacity to feel pleasure or pain but the criterion of being alive (Goodpaster, 1978, p. 311). Goodpaster distinguishes between the criterion of moral consideration and the criterion of moral significance, which *can* play a role in assigning relative moral “weight” in cases of conflict. In his opinion, if we consider the capacity for being alive to be the criterion for moral consideration, then we are clearly going beyond the category of humankind (Goodpaster, 1978, p. 317). The capacity for being alive can also be perceived as the life principle (Goodpaster, 1978, p. 320).

But this line of reasoning brings us back to the problem that we have already encountered. If the very fact of the existence of human life is enough to confer human dignity on human beings, then other forms of life also deserve to have dignity conferred upon them. We have to accept, then, that animals and plants also have dignity because they are living organisms, and we could continue to endlessly list all life forms that, if we follow the logic of this argument, should have dignity. We will decide later whether this is true, but at this point we can state one important thing. If we accept that the existence of life is the criterion for conferring dignity on living organisms, then we narrow the group of those that have the right to possess dignity because we have excluded inanimate nature and everyday objects. Should we believe that they too should be entitled to animal or plant dignity, simply because they are living things? Can we say, for example, that unicellular organisms such as amoebas have the right to be accorded the same dignity as human beings and should be held in the same esteem and treated with respect?

According to Goodpaster, it is possible to speak, on the one hand, of the moral consideration of all forms of life and, on the other hand, to make a distinction between them based on their moral significance (Goodpaster, 1978, pp. 322-323). There are limits to the extent to which we can respect all living things because we have to eat, which usually (though not always) means that we have to kill as well. We also require knowledge, which sometimes includes the necessity of experimenting with living things and sometimes, though not always, causing their death. We have to protect ourselves against predators and diseases, and this too sometimes leads to killing (although not always). The regulative character of moral consideration means we must be sensitive and aware of the claims of other beings, but we are not required to commit suicide (Goodpaster, 1978, p. 324). Goodpaster’s position is an example of moral biocentrism (with a strong impact on bioethics) which holds that the existence of biological life is sufficient reason for us to pay moral attention to living things.⁵ Consequently in practice moral agents must morally consider both conscious and non-conscious beings. While many holding similar positions emphasize that conscious as well as non-conscious beings have interests and so their rights deserve protecting, Kenneth

⁵ I share Goodpaster’s view that life is of the same normativity as the other possible criteria for recognizing dignity, for instance, being a person or having practical reason. I do not agree that dignity should be founded on intersubjectivity alone, as is the case for instance in Kantian or neo-Kantian ethics. Nussbaum, despite making partial reference to Kant and Kantian ethics, rejects the suggestion that dignity can be radically separated from the natural world and that it reduces dignity to the realm of ends (Nussbaum, 2007, p. 131). She extends her understanding of dignity to include other forms of life (animals), not just human beings (Nussbaum, 2007, pp. 325-407).

Einar Himma states that Goodpaster subordinates the moral value of consciousness to the moral value of being alive (Himma, 2004, p. 25). Leena Vilkkä suggests that Goodpaster's criteria should be extended by adding the concept of moral priority related to comparative views, for example, when we need to decide whether plants should be accepted in moral terms in comparison with other beings. Vilkkä's "ethical extensionism" makes it possible to solve the problem of moral acceptability and moral significance. The essential point is that a variety of entities belong, on different levels, to our moral scale: animals as rational beings (zoocentrism), living organisms striving for their own good (biocentrism) and planet Earth as a whole, on the basis of its unique system of life support (ecocentrism). Ethical extensionism assigns intrinsic value to woods, mountains, and rivers that are to be respected and protected. They are all morally significant. It is necessary to morally accept them (Vilkkä, 1997, pp. 18-19). Leonard Wayne Sumner, however, sees a shortcoming in Goodpaster's position in that it does not provide a criterion for comparison, that is, a definition of the moral significance of different life forms. On what basis, Sumner asks, can we compare the value of the life of a human being with that of lichen, grass, bacteria, or insects? He suggests that the crucial difference is the capacity to be aware or feel; living beings capable of being aware and feeling belong to a higher level than others. From this perspective human beings hold the most significant position (Sumner, 1997, p. 104).

David Schmidtz holds a slightly different position from Goodpaster, because he claims that there are two reasons for respecting other forms of life: having self-respect, as well as self-consciousness. However, he argues that it is pointless claiming that all forms of life have moral standing. For human beings, a particular form of self-reflection would mean attributing moral standing to apes. However, Schmidtz states that we cannot attribute moral standing to viruses. He affirms that life itself accords respect if interpreted in a limited, yet significant, way, especially where self-conscious, reflecting beings who want to act in a meaningful way are concerned (Schmidtz, 1998, pp. 64-65).

Following Nussbaum, Jeremy Bendik-Keymer has also stated that while all forms of life deserve dignity and respect, not all living beings deserve justice. But he disagrees with Nussbaum that some capabilities should be preferred or attributed greater moral value than some others, for instance, practical reason, the ability to sense, in her effort to solve the dilemma of how much respect or attention particular forms of life deserve. Bendik-Keymer favours James Rachels' idea that we need to identify morally relevant attributes in all entities. Bendik-Keymer calls this position radical moral individualism. He later claims that humans can closer to the respect of life in ideal way surveying our moral universe through the relationships implied by morally valuable attributes. Hence, humans are capable of considering the reasons and deciding what to do on that basis (Bendik-Keymer, 2014, p. 190).

Human life and human dignity

Let us think about the similarities and differences between these two life forms. People, animals and plants have different modes of reproduction for example. These differences are undoubtedly biologically significant, but they do not create a sound basis for radically distinguishing between organisms that should be accorded the same level of dignity as humans and those that should not. So we need to take our reasoning further. An important

distinction between that can be made between life forms, for instance, between the life of unicellular organisms, animals (apes and dolphins) and human beings, is the existence of qualitative differences. Life forms can be placed along an evolutionary chain, from acellular and unicellular organisms to vertebrates including mammals—the qualitatively highest life form on earth. Having accepted the existence of life as the initial criterion for assigning dignity to life forms, we also need to make a qualitative distinction between the different kinds of life forms on the one hand and between the degrees of dignity that can be assigned to them on this basis on the other. Living things are assigned a degree of dignity depending on their position on the evolutionary scale. So mammals are assigned a higher degree of dignity than lower life forms and human beings possess a higher degree of dignity than other mammals on account of their awareness, rationality (including the ability of moral thinking) and free will.

In my view, there is no mystery, no secret about the sanctity of human life in the ethics of social consequences. Human life is worthy of esteem and respect and human beings are deserving of human dignity simply because they represent the qualitatively highest life form; regardless of the fact that not all individual human beings fully meet the criteria, with all the consequences that entails for bioethics and other kinds of ethics (Komenská, 2012; Losyk, 2014; Misseri, 2015; Sachdev, 2015; Staňáková, 2014). We can accept this since life is believed to be a primary value worthy of esteem and respect, so it is life that is accorded dignity. The degree of dignity accorded to the various life forms depends on their level of development and position on the evolutionary scale. To express this (at least approximately) in mathematical terms, we can say that the degree of dignity accorded to a life form can be plotted, for example, on a scale of 0.0001 to 1, where 0.0001 reflects the degree of dignity of acellular organisms and 1 the degree of dignity accorded to human beings. The degrees of dignity accorded to other life forms can be placed in between. We can then not only talk about human dignity, but also about the dignity of animals, plants and other life forms. The degree of esteem and respect that we assign to the different life forms depends on the life form's qualitative level. Consequently, this also determines variation in the degree of dignity assigned. In normal circumstances this approach allows us (depending on the possibility, need or necessity) to preserve life on earth and respect the various life forms. But since I do not believe that there exists an absolute value (I mean a value that must be respected absolutely because it is simply inviolable), I think that in some exceptional circumstances (if it is necessary to protect other values) it is possible to violate the dignity of any life form, including the human life form.⁶ This position respects Sumner's requirement that a distinction be made between the value of human life and other life forms, while also developing and quantifying Goodpaster's initial position of moral biocentrism.

⁶ I do not think that deriving the value of (human) dignity from the value of life (i.e. to base it, to certain extent, on biology) means that we degrade humanity, in some way. On the contrary, this approach establishes a real basis for dignity, human dignity included, and also provides clear reasons for protecting, fostering and developing it (V. Gluchman, 2003a).

Conclusion

What are the consequences of this line of reasoning? We can draw a number of important conclusions, including a bioethical one. The first is that all human beings, including infants, mentally or morally immature children and mentally disabled people, have the dignity that belongs to members of the species *Homo sapiens*, and which I expressed mathematically as number 1. This degree of dignity belongs to all human beings simply because they were born as a member of the species *Homo sapiens*, regardless of their future qualities and capacities, conduct, or their successes or failures in life. On this basis we can accord human dignity to all human beings, in reflection of our esteem and respect for human life, and on this basis we can consider all human beings to be morally equal. This has to be the fundamental starting point for ethical and moral reasoning in human bioethics. Unlike Collste, we do not derive human dignity from the equality of people, but we derive their moral equality from their human dignity; that is from the fact that they exist as human beings. This basic degree of human dignity that is assigned to all human beings gives rise to correlative moral duties that apply to all moral agents and reflect the need to protect and respect all human beings (throughout bioethics) because of their moral equality based on their human dignity. In this way we partially solve the problem resulting from Machan's position that only moral agents have rights and that they can abuse all other forms of life (including newborn babies, children and mentally disabled people) for their own benefit.⁷

We can conclude this part of our examination of (human) dignity by summing up. Dignity is a concept that we use to describe an aggregate of the values and qualities of someone or something that deserve esteem and respect. The primary value that composes the right to have dignity is life. The degree of dignity accorded to a particular life form depends on its position on the evolutionary scale. Human beings are the highest life form so they possess the highest degree of dignity. Understood in this way, the value of dignity, including human dignity, is in its basic definition a form or manifestation of moral biocentrism. However, it certainly does not lead to the devaluation of the value of dignity, including human dignity. On the contrary, it broadens its scope, so that it extends beyond the category of humankind.

References

- Andorno, R. (2009). Human dignity and human rights as a common ground for a global bioethics. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 34(3), 223-240.
- Barilan, Y. M. (2012). *Human dignity, human rights, and responsibility: The new language of global bioethics and biolaw*. Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press.
- Bayefsky, R. (2013). Dignity, honour, and human rights: Kant's perspective. *Political Theory*, 41(6), 809-837.
- Bendik-Keymer, J. (2014). From humans to all of life: Nussbaum's transformation of dignity. In F. Comim & M. C. Nussbaum (Eds.), *Capabilities, gender, equality* (pp. 175-191). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁷ Here we are not concerned with the problems that can arise in connection with human dignity, e.g. in relation to abortions, euthanasia, the death penalty, etc., since the scope of this work is limited.

- Birnbacher, D. (1996). Ambiguities in the Concept of Menschenwürde. In K. Bayertz (Ed.), *Sanctity of life and human dignity* (pp. 107-121). Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Bradford, G. K. (2010). Fundamental flaws of the DSM: Re-envisioning diagnosis. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 50(3), 335-350.
- Cochrane, A. (2010). Undignified bioethics. *Bioethics*, 24(5), 234-241.
- Collste, G. (2002). *Is human life special? Religious and philosophical perspectives on the principle of human dignity*. Bern & Berlin: Peter Lang.
- Dubiel-Zielińska, P. (2013). "Ethics of Social Consequences" and "Ethics of Development" as theories belonging to stream of ethics of act. *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)*, 3(3-4), 173-188.
- Dubiel-Zielińska, P. (2015). *Teoria dopełnień. Pomiedzy neutilitarystycznym konsekwencjalizmem a personalizmem i perfekcjonizmem* [Complementary theory: Between non-utilitarian consequentialism, personalism and perfectionism]. Rzeszów: RS Druk.
- Frankl, V. (2011). *The unheard cry for meaning: Psychotherapy and humanism*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Gewirth, A. (1992). Human Dignity as the basis of rights. In M. J. Meyer & W. A. Parent (Eds.), *The Constitution of rights: Human dignity and American values* (pp. 10-28). Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.
- Gluchman, M. (2014). *Problém ľudskej dôstojnosti a humánosti v bioetike* [Issues of human dignity and humanity in bioethics]. Prešov: Grafotlač.
- Gluchman, M., & Kalajtšidis, J. (2014). Ethics of social consequences and issue of the principle of humanity in medical ethics. In *2nd Eurasian multidisciplinary forum, EMF 2014* (pp. 235-243). Tbilisi: ESI.
- Gluchman, V. (2003a). Biologické a sociálne v etike sociálnych dôsledkov (o determinácii a slobode vôle, respektíve mravnej slobode) [The biological and the social in the ethics of social consequences: On determination and free will, or moral freedom]. *Filozofia*, 58(2), 119-137.
- Gluchman, V. (2003b). *Human being and morality in ethics of social consequences*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Gluchman, V. (2016). Disaster issues in non-utilitarian consequentialism (ethics of social consequences). *Human Affairs*, 26(1), 52-62.
- Gluchmanová, M. (2013). The teacher as a moral agent: Humanity and human dignity in the teaching profession. In V. Gluchman (Ed.), *Morality: Reasoning on different approaches* (pp. 141-160). Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi.
- Goodpaster, K. (1978). On being morally considerable. *Journal of Philosophy*, 75(6), 308-325.
- Grzybek, G. (2013). *Etyka rozwoju a pedagogika opiekuńcza* [Development of ethics and protective pedagogy]. Rzeszów: UR.
- Hadley, J. (2004). Using and abusing others: A reply to Machan. *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 38(3), 411-414.
- Harcum, E. R. (1994). *A psychology of freedom and dignity: The last train to survival*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Harcum, E. R., & Rosen, E. F. (1990). Perceived dignity of persons with minimal voluntary control over their own behaviors. *Psychological Reports*, 67, 1275-1282.
- Häyry, M., & Takala, T. (2005). Human Dignity, Bioethics, and Human Rights. *Developing World Bioethics*, 5(3), 225-233.
- Himma, K. E. (2004). Moral biocentrism and the adaptive value of consciousness. *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 42, 25-44.
- Hodgkiss, P. (2013). A moral vision: Human dignity in the eyes of the founders of sociology. *The Sociological Review*, 61(3), 417-439.
- Jones, P. (1994). *Rights*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Kalajtšidis, J. (2014). Ethics of social consequences and the principle of maximization. In V. Gluchman

- (Ed.), *Ethical thinking on past & present* (pp. 26-31). Prešov: VPU.
- Kalajtziidis, J. (2013). Ethics of social consequences as a contemporary consequentialist theory. *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)*, 3(3–4), 159-171.
- Kateb, G. (2011). *Human Dignity*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Komenská, K. (2012). Respect for autonomy and human dignity in codes of conduct of health care professionals (in Slovakia). *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)*, 2(3–4), 192-200.
- Kramer, A., & Buck, L. A. (1997). Encountering people labeled “schizophrenic.” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 37(4), 12-29.
- Leitner, L. M., & Phillips, S. N. (2003). The immovable object versus the irresistible force: Problems and opportunities for humanistic psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 43(3), 156-173.
- Lešková Blahová, A. (2009). Possibilities of ethics of social consequences application in bioethics contexts. In V. Gluchman (Ed.), *Bioethics in Central Europe: Methodology and Education* (pp. 87-99). Prešov: FF PU.
- Losyk, O. (2014). Mnemonic paradoxes of human dignity. *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)*, 4(1–2), 15-31.
- Luban, D. (2009). *Legal ethics and human dignity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Machan, T. R. (2002). Why human beings may use animals. *Journal of Value Inquiry* 36(1), 9-14.
- Macklin, R. (2003). *Dignity is a useless concept*. *BMJ*, 327(7429), 1419-1420.
- Miller, R. (2000). Beyond reductionism: The emerging holistic paradigm in education. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 28(1–3), 382-393.
- Misseri, L. (2015). Consequentialism, humankind and dignity: From Renaissance moral philosophy to Gluchman’s ethics of social consequences. *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)*, 5(3–4), 197-203.
- Misseri, L. (2014). Gluchman y su ética socio-consecuencialista. In V. Gluchman, *Dignidad y consecuencias: ensayos de una ética socio-consecuencialista*, 1a ed. (pp. 5-17). Mar del Plata: Kazak Ediciones.
- Misztal, B. A. (2012). The idea of dignity: Its modern significance. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 16(1), 101-121.
- Montgomery, J. W. (1995). *Human rights & human dignity*. Edmonton: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, and Public.
- Njoya, W. (2017). Dignity as non-discrimination: Existential protests and legal claim-making for reproductive rights. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 43(1) 51-82.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2007). *Frontiers of justice: Disability, nationality, species membership*. Cambridge, MA & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2009). *The therapy of desire: Theory and practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (3rd ed.). Princeton, NJ & Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Ossowska, M. (1980). *Moral norms: A tentative systematization*. Amsterdam & Warszawa: North Holland Publishing & PWN.
- Palenčár, M. (2016). Some remarks on the concept and intellectual history of human dignity. *Human Affairs*, 26(4), 462-477.
- Pettit, P. (1989-1990). Consequentialism and respect for persons. *Ethics*, 100(1), 116-126.
- Pinker, S. (2008). The stupidity of dignity. *The New Republic*, 238(9), 28-31.
- Robbins, B. D. (2016). The heart of humanistic psychology: Human dignity disclosed through a hermeneutic of love. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 56(3), 223-237.
- Rosen, M. (2012). *Dignity: Its history and meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sachdev, K. N. (2015). Normative analysis of human dignity among professionals. *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)*, 5(3–4), 205-210.
- Schmidt, H. (2007). Whose dignity? Resolving ambiguities in the scope of “human dignity” in the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 33(10), 578-584.

- Schmidtz, D. (1998). Are all species equal? *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 15(1), 57-67.
- Schulman, A. (2008). Bioethics and the question of human dignity. In *Human Dignity and Bioethics* (pp. 3-18). Washington, DC: President's Council on Bioethics.
- Skinner, B. F. (1971). *Beyond freedom and dignity*. New York, NY: Bantam Vintage.
- Staňáková, Z. (2014). The aspects of life quality in the spectrum of values of human dignity. *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)*, 4(3-4), 123-130.
- Sumner, L. V. (1997). A third way. In S. Dwyer & J. Feinberg (Eds.), *The problem of abortion* (pp. 98-117). Belmont: Wadsworth.
- UNESCO (2000). *The Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights: From Theory to Practice*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2006). *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Vilkkä, L. (1997). *The intrinsic value of nature*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi.
- Zuolo, F. (2016). Dignity and animals: Does it make sense to apply the concept of dignity to all sentient beings? *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 19(5), 1117-1130.

Institute of Ethics and Bioethics,
University of Presov
17. novembra 1
08078 Prešov,
Slovakia
Email: gluchman@unipo.sk