

Chapter 02

Human Dignity and Nonhuman Agents

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Introduction

Human dignity is a core value in today's political, legal, moral and human rights discourse. I will in this chapter critically examine how it is interpreted. Let us start by considering a current case from Sri Lanka.

After the 2019 election, one of the dramatic decisions taken by Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the now toppled Sri Lankan president, was to forbid the use of chemical fertilizers. This has had a significant or even dramatic impact on the island's harvests. One farmer comment:

"I cannot recall any time in the past when we had to struggle so much to get a decent harvest," said Seneviratne, a lean 65-year-old with a shock of silver hair, who has been farming since he was a child. "Last year, we got 60 bags from these two acres. But this time it was just 10," he added. (Jayasinghe & Ghoshal, 2022)

Productive and rich farming was in a short time reduced to just a small part of its potential production. The sudden ban on chemical fertilizers diminished productivity as the soil was not capable of adapting immediately. According to experts, the transition from chemical fertilizers should have been made more gradually; the abrupt prohibition had a disastrous effect on food production. Sri Lanka has bought fertilizers from India and China,

and my home country, Norway (Norway was a pioneer in developing and producing fertilizers-this it was one of Norway's first great modern industrial adventures). The sudden prohibition of fertilizers in Sri Lanka may have economical causes, but we also see the impact modern food production has on the environment. This chapter does not discuss the science of chemical fertilizers, this is not my competency. What I am interested in is to examine how they can serve as an example for what I want to discuss in this chapter. We see how human activity transforms the soil and the environment that human lives are based on. We could have discussed how other innovations (mobile phones, electricity, etc.) impact on how we act and understand our humanity, as well as how they impact on the planet. Human achievements are celebrated and used as a foundation for human dignity (Kateb, 2011). Dignity is commonly derived from the capacity of humans to form their lives. The literature that holds these views mainly ignores the complexities and downsides of human activity on the planet.

Research Question

The issue for discussion in this chapter is human dignity in the context of science and nature. The 'human' in human dignity theories is mainly understood in terms of human agency in acting on nature. What has become more and more clear is that this understanding of the human is not sustainable. Humans are not outside nature; they are agents of nature, part of nature, and nature is also an agent with an impact on humans. I will in the following reflect on two understandings of human dignity. One of these, that is both classical and modern, is articulated by Alan Gewirth. The notion of human dignity is here used to set humans in a position above other animals, in a position of planetary superiority. (Gewirth, 1992; Kant, 1797/2017). I will then draw upon Jacques Derrida, who opens up the concept, bringing in new elements and dimensions and making it more open and inclusive. Finally, I will set them in dialogue with Bruno Latour's theory, which questions modernity's understanding of, among other issues, the human agent, the split of fact and value, technology, and morality. Human dignity as a core concept in human rights has to address what are the basic issues and threats to the planet and humanity.

The example of the fertilizer challenges how we traditionally separate fields of enquiry. Human technology based on science has an impact on nature: on the one hand it increases food production and farmers' incomes, but on the other it harms the soil and water systems that flow close to land where fertilizers are used. The consequence is that there is too much nitrogen in the sea, and habitats and living conditions are changed and even threatened. Initial optimism and success turn out to be much more complex. The looming catastrophe is not nature herself this time, but nature's response to human intervention. The fertilizers' impact on vegetables and corn is not only a fact but also a matter of value. From science and industry, we hear that scientific facts have no moral value in themselves, they are only means. Value is related to questions about ends, how science is used. This split is problematic, and Latour is one of the thinkers who takes up this issue.

I will start with an introduction to the concept of human dignity and after that move to Latour's theory before concluding the chapter. I will argue that human dignity has to be reconsidered. Human dignity is not only a matter of human freedom and autonomy; it is also a matter of our relationship with nature and nonhuman agents.

Human Dignity

This concept is not very old, but has since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Moyn, 2014) been increasingly used in political, ethical (Donnelly, 2015) and legal (McCrudden, 2013) discourses, not least in those related to the making of modern constitutions (Dupré, 2015). The concept has been thoroughly discussed in recent decades, with several conflicting views (Beitz, 2013; Dworkin, 2011; Goodhart, 2018; Macklin, 2003; Margalit, 2011; Rosen, 2012; Waldron, 2012). I want to base my reflections on human dignity on two philosophers: Alan Gewirth and Jacques Derrida.

I have chosen Gewirth (Gewirth, 1996) because he is clear, influential and holds a view close to popular understandings of human dignity. It is, for him, important to provide a foundation for the idea of human dignity. His approach has similarities to those of other philosophers, such as Ronald

Dworkin (Dworkin, 2011) and James Griffin (Griffin, 2008). Gewirth arrives at his foundation through formal logic. He sums up his view:

“It is indeed true that the attribution of dignity to human beings is supervenient on the “natural fact” of their being actual, prospective, or potential purposive agents. This supervenience, however, is not contingent but, rather, logically necessary, by virtue of the necessary connection between (a) acting for a purpose, (b) regarding that purpose as worth achieving, (c) regarding oneself as worth sustaining or preserving, (d) regarding oneself as having worth or dignity, and (e) extending this judgment to all other purposive agents” (Gewirth, 1992: 27)

It is striking that he thinks that human dignity is based on a “natural fact”. This “fact” has a content and he wants to shed light on this. It is also interesting that he underlines that he is talking about dignity for human beings; other animals or nature are excluded from his notion of dignity. This human exceptionalism is implicit in his argument, and this is consistent with the discourse on dignity since antiquity (Cicero, 2008), long before human dignity became a concept. The human is in a special position, and Gewirth’s arguments lean on this assumption.

Gerwirth starts his argument from the notion of the human agent as a purposive agent, with intentions for her actions and plans for what she will do and achieve. The human agent has rational control over her purposes and can plan her future. The starting point for human dignity is this capacity to plan her life.

Secondly, these goals are worth achieving for the human and her life. Any plan that is made is not random but selected because it brings some qualities or beneficial goods into her life that she wants to have. She is able to set goals that give the life direction. Plans are not contingent but based on awareness and intentions as well as reason. Third, Gewirth argues that it is fair and natural that she wants to look after her wellbeing and care for herself; this means that she takes her life seriously and looks after herself.

Fourthly, she has self-perception. This is rooted in her self-worth, which she is aware of as the ground for action and planning.

Human dignity is grounded in these four steps. So far, the argument is based on the isolated human. However, in his fifth argument Gewirth claims that the logical last step is that the human has to transfer her own dignity to other humans because they will, like her, have the same need to arrange their lives, make plans for the future and act for their own purposes.

Human dignity is grounded in the human as a purposive agent. Human qualities fill human dignity with content. These capacities also separate humans from other animals and nature. There are several questions that can be raised. One of them is critical - one can maybe say that Gewirth's argument is based on a dignity that is already in the human in the way she acts out her plans and intentions, in a circular movement. Another critique is that Gewirth ignores or excludes the role of other humans and nonhuman agents in the development of self-respect and the ability to develop plans for the future. His argument is based on an isolated and anthropocentric human. A human is not so isolation what Gewirth calls fact is based on several exclusions, which will be a topic later.

Derrida

Derrida is not commonly associated with discussions of human dignity. However, although he does not dedicate a book or a chapter to this topic, he does analyse it in a number of texts (Derrida, 2002, 2005). The way Derrida frames his reflections on human dignity is very interesting and he brings in a different and wider framework for the understanding of the concept. Derrida's analysis operates with 2 sets of concepts. He refers to the incalculable and the calculable, and to the unconditional and the conditional. He also applies these concepts in his discussions of law and justice (Derrida, 1990), hospitality (Derrida, 2000), and forgiveness (Derrida, 2001).

When he analyses human dignity, Derrida refers to Kant and his famous formulation of dignity. His discussion is based on a deconstruction of Kant:

“whatever relates to general human inclinations and needs has a *market price*. Whatever, irrespective of any such need, is nonetheless in conformity with certain taste, that is, delight in the purposeless play of the powers of our mind, has an *aesthetic price*. But what constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself does not merely have a relative worth or price; rather, it has an inner worth, *dignity*. Now morality is the only condition under which a rational being can be an end in itself, because it is only through this that it is possible to be legislating member of the kingdom of ends. Thus morality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality, is the only thing that has dignity” (Kant, 2019: 48 section 435)

The first two prices relate to market and aesthetic values. Only the human being has a value in herself. But Kant’s notion of dignity, as we see in the quotation, is also rooted in rationality, the human capability for morality. Derrida comments on this: “Morality, and humanity so far as it is capable of morality, is the only thing which has dignity.” (Derrida, 2005: 133).

Derrida has an alternative reading of Kant; for him, human dignity is incalculable: “dignity ... is incalculable and thus transcends the marketplace at all costs” (Derrida, 2005: 133). For Derrida, incalculability means that the human is singular and unique, not equal to others, and not reducible. This uniqueness is a dimension of dignity-its incalculable, priceless value.

Derrida also comments on the paradox that human dignity is both universal and singular-each human being has an immediate value. Human beings have the same dignity but are at the same time different from each other. “The dignity of a reasonable being (the human person, for example, and this is, for Kant, the only example) is incalculable as an end in itself. It is at once universal and exceptional” (Derrida, 2005: 133). With the advent of the singular, something unique and special has arrived. This uniqueness is one side of the paradox. The other is that all human beings are given dignity. There is a mixture of uniqueness and equality, or sameness. The singular, unique, incalculable human being is historical and shaped in interaction with

historical circumstances and relations. Derrida relates dignity to singularity, to the immanent and concrete human; “Without the absolute singularity of the incalculable and the exceptional, no thing and no one, nothing other and thus nothing, arrives or happens” (Derrida, 2005: 148).

The first aspect of the dual concept is the incalculable; the other is the calculable. Kant’s concept of dignity refers to humans with moral capacity, to what human beings share. Derrida reads this as the calculable. The general is based on calculation, which is in a tension with the unique individual. To explain this more clearly, we can see how Derrida analyses justice. When the judge makes a decision, there is an expectation that the verdict will be right or just for the actual case. Justice is not reducible, it is in itself incalculable, an event, “an experience of the impossible”(Derrida, 1990: 947). The incalculable is related to the singularities of the case, its uniqueness. For justice to happen it has to respond to this singularity.

But at the same time, justice relies on laws. In a way, justice has to be operationalized in and through laws. For people to know what is legal and what is not, they need to have and know these laws. In this way, incalculable justice is transformed and reduced to the necessary calculations and laws. Justice is both incalculable and calculable. It is not reducible and at the same time it needs reductions, but law is not identical with justice. “Law is not justice. Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable; and aporetic experiences are the experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice, that is to say of moments in which the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule” (Derrida, 1990: 947). Derrida stresses the complexity and heterogeneity of the relation between justice as calculable and incalculable. “Justice can never be reduced to law, to calculative reason, to lawful distribution, to the norms and rules that condition law” (Derrida, 2005, p. 149). In Derrida’s ethics, decision has priority over norms, rules and laws.

The calculable dimension of dignity must be transformed to law, politics and ethics. Incalculable dignity will exceed the evaluation and calculation of what dignity means for politics, law and ethics. But without

it being transformed to the practical norms and principles, dignity is not operationalized. As I interpret him, Derrida understands dignity as a concept that needs to be filled with practical content: e.g., people have the right to vote in elections and have freedom of speech. However, on the other hand it is necessary to be sensitive and responsible for the singular—the uniqueness of the other: “How is one to relate this just incalculability of dignity to the indispensable calculation of law?” (Derrida, 2005:133). Derrida is at the same time within and outside of the Kantian understanding of dignity. Dignity, like justice, needs to be estimated and reflected upon and made into laws, norms and politics. It is based on what people can have in common, on general conditions and this will never fully correspond with the singular.

The other pair of concepts Derrida applies in his analysis of complex moral concepts is the unconditional/conditional. He employs these concepts in his discussion of dignity, but they are more strongly stressed in his discussion of hospitality. Derrida locates his notion of hospitality between two extremes. On the one hand, he argues for unconditional openness and welcome towards the guest, the foreigner, the refugee, and the asylum seeker. Hospitality, to deserve the name, must for Derrida mean openness without reservations. One should not even ask for the name or language of the guest. In this concept of hospitality there is a law of unconditional welcoming. From the moment one starts to ask questions and make restrictions, we do not have full hospitality.

Derrida addresses the possible consequences of offering unlimited open hospitality. He cites biblical stories, such as the tale of Lot (Genesis 19), who offered his daughters to the men threatening his guests, to show the devastating possibilities of unlimited hospitality and the death and destruction that may follow. Such limitless hospitality is impossible: “The unconditional law of hospitality needs the laws, it requires them. This demand is constitutive. It wouldn't be effectively unconditional, the law, if it didn't have to become effective, concrete, determined” (Derrida, 2000: 79).

There is a need for conditions to hospitality, a need for structure, norms, rights as well as laws to uphold hospitality. Limitless hospitality is threatening. This means that hospitality does not only require unconditional openness; it is also conditional, which means it must be regulated. There is,

thus, a need for regulations, norms and laws to protect hospitality. There are “two regimes of a law of hospitality: the unconditional or hyperbolic on the one hand, and the conditional and juridico-political, even the ethical, on the other”(Derrida, 2000, p. 135). In Derrida’s deconstruction, he leaves us with an unresolved tension. Between the two poles there is not a rational solution, although reason has to be used to “negotiate the nonnegotiable” (Derrida, 2002: 325)

Human dignity stands in this same heteronomy and tension. Dignity demands an immediate and unconditional respect for the priceless, unique and singular, but in a community, it must be protected by conditional calculations of what dignity means. Shershow comments:

“Dignity in its contemporary deployment must therefor encompass a whole spectrum of senses at once absolutely conditional and absolutely unconditional, inscribing in a single concept a strange relation of calculable and incalculable value and worth. This strange relation cannot be reduced to an opposition of ... neither dignity as something conditional nor dignity as the priceless value inherent in all human beings can finally be understood as the cause, source, or ground of the other” (Shershow, 2014: 34)

Derrida’s deconstruction takes us into an aporetic impasse. He points to the impossibility of justice, hospitality or dignity. These concepts’ demands are always present but, at the same time, they are contaminated. As Bennington says, “ethics, then, is ethical only to the extent that it is originally compromised or contaminated by the non-ethical”(Bennington, 2000: 72). This double bind is also to be found in Derrida’s constructions of the basic value of human dignity. Unconditional and incalculable dignity is impossible without its opposite aspects; the conditional and calculable.

This places the concept of dignity in a different context from that of Gewirth, who puts dignity on a pedestal and fills it with content based on an abstract humanity. Derrida brings the concept into history in a different way; he ends up with a heteronomic concept which increases responsibility and

a need for vigilance. There is no ready formula for how to act and respond to priceless human dignity; it must be filled with content, a content that will never fully do justice to the singular.

In the context of this chapter, it is interesting to see how Derrida relates to nonhuman agents. As we see in the case of Gewirth, the concept of dignity is exclusively human. Derrida also operates in a humanist framework but he problematises this on several occasions, not least in his book “The Animal That Therefore I Am”(Derrida, 2008).

In this work Derrida provides a deep analysis of the animal. He deconstructs the understanding of animals held by key philosophers like Descartes, Kant, Levinas, and Heidegger. He finds that all of them, in different ways, subsume animals as if they were one category-their species-differences and singularities are not recognized. One of the main reasons why the reputation of animals is so low is that they are regarded as unable to respond and use language, and lack the ability to reason. Derrida’s analysis opens for a renewal of our understanding of animals. Is it possible that they have more of the capacities than traditional philosophers recognize and ascribe to humans? Although I do not find that he really applies the concept of dignity to animals, in a way he does; he calls for a rethinking of how we perceive and deal with them. He does not support animals rights (Derrida & Roudinesco, 2004), but the animal within us humans and outside of us should be reevaluated. We should pay more respect for the conditions of animals, but not put them on the same levels as humans (Derrida & Roudinesco, 2004: 67). The title of his book signals that the animal comes first, we cannot do without it.

“I believe-and the stakes are becoming more and more urgent-that none of the conventionally accepted limits between the so-called human living being and the so-called animal one, none of the oppositions, none of the supposedly linear and indivisible boundaries, resist a rational deconstruction-whether we are talking about language, culture, social symbolic networks, technicity or work, even the relationship to death and to mourning, and even the prohibition against or avoidance of incest-so many "capacities" of

which the "animal" (a general singular noun!) is said so dogmatically to be bereft, impoverished. (Derrida, 2005: 151)

Although Derrida does not include animals in his concept of dignity, he raises their status and the obligations we have towards them. He goes further than Gewirth. But if we are looking for an even wider perspective—one raised by the climate crises and environmental issues—we find a gap in Derrida's philosophy. Even though Kirby calls Derrida's philosophy ecological (Kirby, 2018), I do not think this is truly the case. However, Derrida's concepts of 'calculable' and 'conditional' make it possible for wider perspectives to be included in the concept of dignity. It is worth considering Latour if we are looking to bring ecological aspects into the human dignity discourse.

Bruno Latour

Bruno Latour does not discuss human dignity in depth, except for a few comments that we will come back to later. His engagement has been to deconstruct modernity (Latour, 1993) and in particular the understanding of science. Latour widens perspectives and challenges the established borders between facts and values. I find him interesting because his approach broadens perspectives and opens new frames relevant for the understanding of human dignity. The dignity concept as understood in the dominant discourse, as represented by Gewirth, has an exclusively anthropocentric foundation. It posits a human exceptionalism that separates humans from animals and nature—the human is placed above nature. Where Derrida focuses on the conditional and calculable sides of human dignity, I find that Latour offers a deeper understanding of conditionality and what has to be calculated.

Latour: The Cave and the Two Houses

Latour uses the famous allegory by Plato about the cave to illustrate the problem he is dealing with and wants to transform. In this story the human condition is likened to living in chains in the darkness of the cave, only seeing shadows from life outside of the cave. The cave dwellers do not have knowledge about reality outside of the cave, reality is hidden to them. In Plato's story it is the philosopher who manages to release himself from the

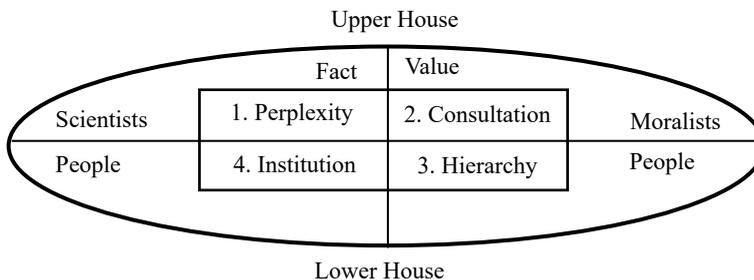
chains and move out to the world outside, the real world, and gain access to real knowledge. In Latour's interpretation of the story he does not only think that it is only the philosopher who is able to move in and out of the cave. In modernity, according to Latour, scientists have the same role as philosophers. When the scientist moves into his laboratory, he isolates himself from ordinary people and, like Plato's philosopher, he comes out and tells the truth about reality, which in itself is silent.

In the story there are two houses: one inside the cave where people are living, and one outside the cave. The outside one, which is silent, represents real things and true knowledge. The house inside the cave represents ignorance. Following Latour, this dichotomy is wrong; there is only one reality—"the laws of nature and those of humans have always coexisted" (Latour, 2004: 50). He asks how we can rearrange the two houses and integrate them so that the human and nature come together. I quote a longer text by Latour about the two houses and how they are related. He is often ironic, as we see here:

"In this Constitution dispensed by (political) epistemology, how are the powers in fact distributed? The first house brings together the totality of speaking humans, who find themselves with no power at all save that of being ignorant in common, or of agreeing by convention to create fictions devoid of any external reality. The second house is constituted exclusively of real objects that have the property of defining what exists but that lack the gift of speech. On the one hand, we have the chattering of fictions; on the other, the silence of reality. The subtlety of this organization rests entirely on the power given to those who can move back and forth between the houses. The small number of handpicked experts, for their part, presumably have the ability to speak (since they are humans), the ability to tell the truth (since they escape the social world, thanks to the asceticism of knowledge), and, finally, the ability to bring order to the assembly of humans by keeping its members quiet (since the experts can return to the lower house in order to reform the slaves who lie chained in the room). In short, these few elect, as

they themselves see it, are endowed with the most fabulous political capacity ever invented: They can make the mute world speak, tell the truth without being challenged, put an end to the interminable arguments through an incontestable form of authority that would stem from things themselves” (Latour, 2004: 14)

Latour keeps the allegory of the houses, calling them the upper and lower houses. However, he redefines them. The clear separation in Plato’s story is amended, and the people who inhabit the lower house are no longer without a voice or relevant opinions. The individuals who move out into the upper house are also redefined; they get access to information but are not as unpolluted as the philosophers in Plato’s story. In Latour’s story there is exchange and communication between the two houses, and both have something of importance to offer.



Fact and Values

In a core chapter of his book “Politics of Nature”(Latour, 2004) Latour presents his theory of facts and values. This also involves a transformation of the cave story. Latour is critical of the established understanding of the relation between facts and value, the understanding where facts are on the side of science and values on the side of morality and ends. He does not accept the established understanding of facts, in which they are presented as untouched and true. For Latour, facts are produced-“facts are fabricated” (Latour, 2004 : 95). Facts are traditionally presented as objective and descriptive of the real, of the outside of the cave (upper house). In Latour’s theory this is an illusion; facts are made. “No matter what term we choose later on to replace

‘fact’, it will have to highlight the process of fabrication” (Latour, 2004: 96). He establishes a distance between nature in itself and how we work with and communicate about nature. Nature is contextualized in different theories: “fact always remains meaningless as long as one does not know of what theory it is the example, the manifestation, the prototype, or the expression”(Latour, 2004: 96). Facts are not pure accounts of nature or reality-they must be seen in terms of the external and theoretical frameworks they are interpreted and analyzed in. Humans play an active role in constructing these understandings.

A similar view emerges from his research on science and scientists. When they go into their laboratories they work with aspects of reality, but their production and the projects they run are not nature in itself, but a manipulation of nature. Humans play a significant role in arriving at scientific results or developing products, such as fertilizers. Latour’s point is that scientists are not transparent and honest about their own role in these processes. The road to a final result is often full of failed experiments and the use of different instruments. What comes out of the laboratory is the result of a process in which human creativity and engagement have played a significant part. However, results are often presented as objective and neutral. It is not science as such that is criticized by Latour. What he criticizes is the hiding of human involvement and contribution to the scientific process, as well as the concealment of the moral aspects and responsibilities involved in arriving at results. We commonly hear that there are no bad products, only bad uses that they are put to. Latour does not agree, you cannot split the two.

In his polemical book “On the Modern Cult of the Factish” (Latour, 2010), Latour again attacks modernity’s arrogance and the belief that it is better and different from previous or other cultures. Modernity accuses other, older cultures of fetishism, of endowing nature with qualities that come from humans, without any evidence; “The word ‘fact’ seems to point to external reality, the word ‘fetish’ seems to designate the foolish beliefs of a subject. . . ., both conceal the intense work of construction that allows for both the truth of facts and the truth of minds” (Latour, 2010: 21). Latour also argues that modern facts-the ‘factish’-are produced from and by humans. They are similar to fetishes. While we accept that fetishes are not there objectively and are given

their properties by humans, the same can be said about modernity's facts or scientific productions. They are also produced and given meaning by humans. What are presented as facts of nature are our own facts: "The factish can ... be defined ... as that which allows one to pass from fabrication to reality; as that which gives an autonomy we do not possess to beings that do not possess it either, but that by this very token give it to us. The factish is a fact-maker, a talk-maker" (Latour, 2010: 35).

Latour's concept of 'factish' describes processes and their products. He argues that there are similarities to the constructions of fetishes. Both activities are a mix of the human and nature. Matter and substances-such as fertilizer, smartphones, petrol, electricity-do not become objects of importance without the human contribution, facts that has been naturalized but fabrication.

Latour's model (see above) of the two houses has two axes. The horizontal one lies between "reality" and "the social or cultural". The vertical one lies between "reality" and "the moral". In the upper house he operates with two concepts, the first of which is "perplexity". This shows his sense of irony; the perplexity is due to the surprising number of facts-his point is that there are more facts than those that are presented, so it is important to include all relevant facts. A fact does not come alone, there are many facts within and around it. If we again use the example of the fertilizers, there are more facts about them than chemical formulae and the way to produce them. The implications and consequences of using them are also factual information, and these supplementary and long-term effects are often left out of the equation.

The second concept we find in the upper house is "consultation"; it lies on the moral side of the vertical axis. This concept refers to the values and norms that are involved in relation to the product and its use. The third step is "hierarchy", which also lies on the moral side of the model. This involves the prioritization of different values. This is a task for the people, the lower house. The final step is the "institutionalization" of the results of the process.

Latour's model describes the steps in a process, and not its moral content. The model has clear weaknesses. Latour argues that in the last stage of institutionalization the end results have to be fixed and should not be re-

opened. That means that the facts and the hierarchy of values in a case are set for all time. However, this is not a solution. There will in time come more facts relevant to cases and new and different moral concerns may also arise. The model is rigid on this point; Latour attempts to avoid relativism, but he ends up on the opposite side. Derrida, with his ethical model of contrasting the impossibilities on both ends of the spectrum, opens for reflection and space, as well as any decisions that may be needed. Latour attempts to close these possibilities. However, in my view he reduces moral responsibility, a responsibility that should not be reduced and hierarchized into fixed priorities. The main moral aspects of Derrida's model, with the incalculable and unique singular on one side and the calculable and conditional on the other, cannot be reduced to a formula. Latour has a very different mission to Derrida. His agenda is to bring fact and value into an intertwined relation. Latour disagrees with modernity's attempt to distinguish facts and values, and this is a stance I agree with; values and facts should not be separated.

“By accepting the value-fact distinction, moralists agree to seek their own legitimacy very far from the scene of the facts, in another land, that of the universal or formal foundations of ethics. In so doing, they risk abandoning all “objective morality,” whereas we, on the contrary, must connect the question of the common world to the question of the common good” (Latour, 2004: 98)

Latour places himself in a context of moral theory that is close to consequentialism. We live in a common world and there is a common good. “The more one distinguishes between facts and values, the more one ends up with the bad common world” (Latour, 2004: 99). The common world and common good are guiding principles. “Whereas the moral question of the common good was separated from the physical and epistemological question of the common world, we maintain, on the contrary, that these questions must be brought together so that the question of the good common world, of the best of possible worlds, of the cosmos, can be raised again from scratch” (Latour, 2004: 93).

To return to our example of the fertilizers, their development is not only a job for the laboratory. Fertilizers have an impact on the environment—they increase food production but new facts show different and more complex impacts, such as the transformation of the soil and the environment, and rivers and waters. We find both positive and negative facts—moral dimensions or challenges are present in the opportunities and the use of the product.

“We can define morality as uncertainty about the proper relation between means and ends, extending Kant’s famous definition of the obligation “not to treat human beings simply as means but always also as ends”—provided that we extend it to nonhumans as well, something that Kantianism, in a typically modernist move, specifically wanted to avoid. Ecological crises, as we have interpreted them, present themselves as generalized revolts of the means: no entity—whale, river, climate, earthworm, tree, calf, cow, pig, brood—agrees any longer to be treated “simply as a means” but insists on being treated “always also as an end.” This in no way entails extending human morality to the natural world, or projecting the law extravagantly onto “mere brute beings,” or taking into account the rights of objects “for themselves”; it is rather the simple consequence of the disappearance of the notion of external nature. There is no longer any space set aside where we can unload simple means in view of ends that have been defined once and for all without proper procedure” (Latour, 2004: 155).

The Actor and the Anthropocene

Latour’s Actor-Network theory expands the concept of actors. He uses an allegory to show what he means. A supermarket is organized with shelves and organized in rows. Goods are put high or low on the shelves, the chocolate just before the cashier, and so on. His point is that the way the supermarket is organized has an impact on how we operate and use the place. The practical layout of the supermarket is an actor. His point is that “anything that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor” (Latour,

2007: 71). The equipment and organizing of the supermarket is in this way an actor, it modifies how we act. In the first part of the discussion of Latour, I was engaged with the role of the human in science; in this section I want to take up Latour's engagement with nonhuman actors.

Latour considers the instruments and tools scientists use in their experiments. These instruments are vital for coming to results and access to tools defines possible outcomes. One example would be the instruments used in developing theories about astronomy. This means that objects, or what Latour calls nonhumans, are actors, as long as they have an influence on the activity or action. A hammer does not by itself have an impact, but it can have a significant impact in efficiently driving nails into wood. And boiling water will not be the same without a kettle, etc. In Latour's words, human and nonhuman are "fused together" (Latour, 2007: 91). The nonhuman tools become actors. To understand society, Latour argues that the instruments and tools must be given a role because they significantly define how we live and how we act. We need the nonhuman; "without the nonhuman, humans would not last a minute" (Latour, 2004: 91). To understand society, nonhuman actors must be included in our calculations and have a place in our theories.

The actors in Latour's theory are technology or instruments, things that have an impact on agency. But we cannot ignore nature: "Nature has unexpectedly taken on that of the active subject! Such is the frightening meaning of global warming"(Latour, 2014: 12). We are living in the epoch of the Anthropocene

"The point of living in the epoch of the Anthropocene is that all agents share the same shape-changing destiny, a destiny that cannot be followed, documented, told, and represented by using any of the older traits associated with subjectivity or objectivity. Far from trying to "reconcile" or "combine" nature and society, the task, the crucial political task is on contrary to distribute agency as far and in as differentiated a way as possible" (Latour, 2014: 15)

The Anthropocene is defined as the epoch in which the human has a major impact on nature, such an impact that the human meets himself everywhere: a CO₂ level of 415 ppm in the atmosphere in September 2022, due to human caused emissions (the sustainability goal was 399ppm); plastic in the oceans; a reduction of insects and lifeforms, down 69% since measurements began in 1970 (Almond, Grooten, Juffe Bignoli, & Petersen, 2022). This process has been labelled the sixth extinction, one caused by the human activity that has taken away the life conditions of animals, insects and living organisms. “Human action is visible everywhere” (Latour, 2014: 5). Humans meet themselves when they do research or engage with nature.

This leaves us with new challenges. We are now very far from a human dignity discourse that has focused on human capacities and human exceptionalism. Now we understand that this exclusive focus on the moral standing of the human has been a part of the reasoning that has caused the problem of the Anthropocene.

“Everyone knows the simplified version that human morality, all too human, has given to this principle: ‘do not ever treat human beings simply as means, but always as ends as well’. Kant, of course, applied it to human beings alone, and not to the hammer, to oaks or to radioactive uranium atoms. Having reactivated the fable of homo faber, he really imagined human beings in command, putting its categories to work on a raw material without rights. Two hundred years later, such a position appears to us ... indefensible” (Latour, 2002: 256).

Latour does not directly discuss the concept of dignity. However, in an article on morality and technology (Latour, 2002) he applies the concept six times. The task he sets up for himself in this text is to relocalize the relation between morality and technology in a similar way to the fact-value, fetish-factish combinations. Human lives are intertwined with technology, which is in diverse ways integrated in human life. Technology defines the options or the possibilities for how human lives are lived. “Without technologies, human beings would not be as they are” (Latour, 2002: 252). This means that

it is wrong to separate morality and technology. For example, many people live with glasses; they are vital for those who need them. One cannot reflect on human morality without bringing in the technology that is integrated in human lives (Baxi, 2007). For Latour, this means that morality also has to include different actors. “Morality, of course, like science or technology, is an heterogeneous institution constituted from a multiplicity of events, which depends at the same time on all modes of existence-and in part,..., on the arrangement of technical apparatuses, but equally on a good many other forms of organization” (Latour, 2002: 254).

Latour argues that technical objects do not “have an obvious moral dignity in themselves” (Latour, 2002: 254), but are part of basic ontology, the technology and I add nature or the ecological systems are inseparable from human dignity. We should change our understanding – if we “grasp morality as well as technology in its ontological dignity instead of relating them, as usual, solely to what is human, we may see that their relation is not at all that of means to end”. (Latour, 2002: 257). The dignity of the human is interrelated to the dignity of technology, animals, ecological systems and, in short, the surroundings we live in.

I have employed Latour’s actor network theory to challenge the established understandings of the concept of dignity. Latour’s perspectives broaden and give a wider content to the concept; not only human lives have dignity, but humans are integrated in nature and in technology and one cannot separate these from the human. Life in dignity means respect for both the human and the environment that the human is living in and with.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the concept of human dignity in three stages. First of all, I introduced an unusual topic for a chapter on dignity-fertilizers, important for modern food production, but with a problematic impact on the soil, water and the environment and a mixture of benefits and threats. My intention with bringing in this topic was to problematize the concept of dignity. One of my inspirations has been the post-humanist challenge (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2008): “For me it is impossible, both

intellectually and ethically, to disengage the positive elements of Humanism from their problematic counterparts: individualism breeds egotism and self-centredness; self-determination can turn to arrogance and domination; and the science is not free from its own dogmatic tendencies” (Braidotti, 2013: 30).

Braidotti’s comments are relevant for several of the dominant interpretations of human dignity. In this chapter, this interpretation is represented by Gewirth. In his theory the human actor is a purposive agent looking after his own interests, with an exclusively human outlook. Dignity is rooted in the human’s own self-interest, it is anthropocentric and dignity is based on human intentions. This theory is based on human atomism and isolation, and there is no role for the community. Humans need to be able to develop their own self-interest and claim that their dignity be respected. The environment is not part of Gewirth’s theory. Other humans are relevant: the individual must transfer dignity to other humans; this is based on the argument that the other should have the same type of space and opportunity that has been secured for oneself. What is discussed is what qualify for that dignity, not dignity in itself, but the properties and capacities the human hold for dignity. A quality based on human as a self-centred self-interested actor. The human in Gewirth’s theory is rational and his line of argument is based on formal logic rooted in what Gewirth calls “natural fact”. All three models presented in the chapter are based on rationality, but different types of rationality. I will come back to rationality later.

Gewirth grounds his argument on what he calls “natural fact”. Based on Latour’s logic of the cave, the moral philosopher has left the cave and come back with the moral fact of human dignity. Latour does not accept this understanding of the morality which the expert has access to. From Latour’s point of view, moral considerations are rooted in the common good, which involves people’s contribution to whatever that that might mean. The upper house is not separated from the lower house.

Another aspect of Latour’s critique is also relevant in a critique of Gewirth’s concept of “natural fact”. From Latour’s argument the fact Gewirth applied can be an example on his critique of science. Latour criticizes

scientists' use of the concept of "fact". He argues that they ignore their own role in the production and consequences of the results they present. One can thus argue that Gewirth's "natural fact" is reductive and ignores several facts relevant for human dignity.

Derrida approaches the concept of human dignity in a different way than Gewirth; his project is deconstruction. He both breaks down and gives new meaning, opening up for new interpretations and giving a space that in the next round requests decisions. He gives contradictions and tensions to the notion of human dignity. He operates with human dignity in a four-concept construction. On the one hand it is unconditional and incalculable. It involves the priceless singular and the unique human. It demands an immediate imperative. These interpretations are relevant, the human has a special position. On the other hand, Derrida says it is conditional and calculable. Dignity, like justice, has to be transformed into laws and norms. These are based on conditional calculations. These evaluations are based on the third person, if the unconditional comes from the singular, the calculations have to do with the other-with communities. These calculations have to protect the host, the family, and the community. Such conditionality is necessary. Derrida opens up the concept of dignity and leaves it in a tension where it can never settle. On one side we have the demands of the unique singular; on the other we have the demands of the community. The concept expresses something immediate and a kind of command, to deal with it one has to negotiate between different aspects, as in the discussion of hospitality considered above.

Derrida gives new dimensions to the concept of dignity. However, the concept is still human-centric. He does not include animals in the dignity concept, although he asks for more respect and a change in our understanding of animals and their role and importance for humans. Derrida's concept of calculations and conditionality was, for me, a reason to move to Latour's actor network theory, my third step. Here, the non-human actor is given a new meaning and role for morality. I feel that Derrida's discussions lack this moral aspect.

Latour redefines and challenges basic relations and perceptions established in modernity, such as the separation of fact and value, science

and morality. Humans are more integrated and embedded in nature and technologies and in their coexistence with animals. This means that human dignity must be redefined and based on the new positionality of the human and the role of the environment that shapes human lives. The conditionality and calculations Derrida operates with must take more aspects into account. The common world and the common good-not only for humans but also for the world, animals and ecological systems-have a place and role that in the end are also vital for the human itself.

As we move into ecology, it is natural that questions about anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism must also be addressed when it comes to understanding human dignity. The notion of the embedded human does not only involve inherently human purposiveness, characteristics, agency, rationalism, autonomy singularity, and uniqueness. We must also see the human in relation to other animals and plants, water, and matter-to nonhuman actors. The traditional understanding of human dignity sets the human above and outside nonhuman factors. However, there is a need for a decentering of the isolated independent human. The human is relational and it is not only human relations, rationality or cultural factors like language that define the human. We are also defined by matter, bacteria, plants and animals - “the animals that therefore we are”.

The issue in this chapter is how to bridge human dignity as the core value in traditional humanism with an understanding of the human as embedded in nature, matter and technology. To respond by respecting the imperative of human dignity means to respond by respecting not only the unique singular, but also the environment and ecology humans are embedded in. This means calculating with non-humans.

It is common to criticize Descartes, and this is something that both Derrida and Latour do. There are several reasons for this critique. Descartes has contributed to anthropocentrism and an exceptionalism based on human rationality. Such an understanding is problematic, given the current ecological and climate crises. Humans must stop seeing themselves outside and above the system. Kirby, in her discussion of Derrida, argues that there is a need

for a redefinition of the human that is more ecological; however, humans still have an exclusive role to play in this transformation. Humans must take responsibility and use their rationality to bring about change and make the decisions that are needed.

“An unpalatable fact of Cartesianism is that its questionable logic remains necessary to our sense of self, our belief that we exist as a unique site of reflexive inquiry, comprehension, and intentional action. The very notion of decision, that it is an act that requires forethought and responsibility presumes this self-possession. Why and how would we undercut our specific ontological significance, our sense of self-control, even if we wanted to?”
(Kirby, 2018: 122f)

Human dignity must be redefined, and the human task to transform the meaning of human dignity is a human obligation where human reasoning has a key role. The exclusive rationality we see in Gewirth’s project is not sustainable. The traditional view of human dignity must be redefined, but that does not mean we give up reason or the priceless human. Rationality is needed, but it is not the sole foundation for human dignity. What brings dignity to human lives is more than human rationality-nonhuman actors must also have a place in the dignity concept and project. Human dignity should not be a concept that marginalizes non-human actors, they are vital for life and lives in dignity.

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