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Often invoked, often trampled upon, human dignity is of paramount importance in all human spheres of life—and death. Whether formulated as law, policy, hope or doctrine, its essence—and even definition—can often seem nebulous. Must dignity be earned and attained? Can it be lost or diminished by time or action? Is it intrinsic and inviolable? Is dignity relevant to the select few or for everyone, at all times and conditions? Do rights stem from dignity or does dignity depend upon the establishment of rights? And even if such dignity is decreed or enshrined in law or commandment, is it not easy prey to the whims of power and violence? Sadly, dignity is no physical shield that inhibits the thrust of injurious, undignified acts, words, or torture. Shouting or claiming its relevance in some contexts can be met with a shrug, a laugh, or another debilitating blow. Reading witness testimony of atrocities and injustice, from foundational classics like Elie Wiesel’s *Night* and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago* to contemporary versions like Liao Yiwu’s *For a Song and a Hundred Songs: A Poet’s Journey Through a Chinese Prison* and Mohamedou Ould Slahi’s *Guantánamo Diaries*, reveals how ubiquitous and also how fragile and defenceless such a notion like dignity can become.

And yet, to succumb to the idea or temptation that the *Einsatzgruppen* or the *Interahamwe* have successfully revealed the impotence, if not meaninglessness, of such a concept can inadvertently support their nefarious aims and ambitions. It is to render their inhumane and barbarous attempts as normative or as reality, instead of seeing them as aberration and atrocity. ‘Human dignity’ is a phrase that the present and future of humanity is and will be built upon. Where it flourishes, so does humanity and the future of this planet; and where it falters or is attacked, nothing less than the meaning and value of our lives and endeavors are exposed and threatened.

Any moral, philosophical, or legal foundation of dignity, whether comprised from theistic or secular arguments or some medley of both, contains great gaps and limitations in its proof and testability. It is a foundation hard-pressed to categorically establish beyond doubt, nor is it universally self-evident that every human being has intrinsic, incomparable, and incommensurate worth. It is a notion that must be taught, legalized, and defended. As detailed in the failures of US terrorism and torture policies post 9/11, there is no guarantee that we will not backslide to the unthinkable.

This painful reality makes it not only imperative to read witness testimonies but to be as fluent and knowledgeable in concepts and formulations of human dignity. It is in the latter case that the 4 editors, 2 assistants, and 56 other contributors of *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (*CHHD* hereafter) have much to be proud of and readers have much to be grateful for. As the book’s subtitle notes, this is an interdisciplinary work, and it is especially rich in legal, philosophical, theological, and historical contributions. The depth and breadth of the work are outstanding.

CHHD is divided into 6 main parts that follow opening essays on the reasons and framework of the book, dignity from a legal standpoint, and philosophical questions, themes, and connections of the concept of dignity. All three opening chapters ably set-up the range of material that follows, though its starting point of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, while sound in one regard, can be challenged if deemed the only foundation.

Part I comprises 10 chapters on the concept of dignity in European culture, ranging from Greco-Roman antiquity to the Renaissance to specific figures such as Rousseau and Martin Luther (oddly without mention of the Peasants' Revolt), to dignity's role in socialism and in the context of early European grappling with the indigenous people of the Americas, especially at the Council of Valladolid in the mid-6th century. In terms of structure, the first part ends with an excellent contribution from Yair Lorberbaum on 'Human Dignity in the Jewish Tradition'. It is ironic that the concept of dignity in the West is so dependent upon a people and tradition the West had periodically and then fanatically oppressed and devalued. The context of the Shoah, of course, was the primary historical and moral impetus for much of the development of the intertwining of human dignity and human rights discourse. That Part I of *CHHD* opens with the Greeks and Romans but closes with Judaism is fitting; but, how deeply dependent is the human dignity platform in the West on Genesis 1:27 with humankind made in God's image and likeness? While *CHHD* gives due value to dignity in the legal realm, to imply that Judaism was just one strand of the development of dignity in the West seems an indignity. I would argue that the chapter should have been coupled with the opening one of *CHHD* on 'Human Dignity from a Legal Perspective'. The Judeo-Christian conception of dignity was foundational to the West's development, articulation, and formulation of the notion of dignity, despite, or even on account of, its historical flaws and limitations. Can we justly envision a robust, timely, and rich universal conception of dignity without biblical foundations (and note such foundations have little to do with whether the metaphysical doctrines, practices and origins, of such beliefs, are true)? While arguing for greater structural pre-eminence given to the contribution of Jewish and Christian ideas and thought to the concept of dignity in *CHHD*, I also am deeply pleased that the work moves beyond Jewish-Christian influence and analysis.

Part II thus includes separate chapters on dignity from the indigenous peoples of the Americas, from the Islamic world, and in Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese Confucianism and Chinese Daoism. Is human dignity a purely Western notion and conception? As hinted in various versions of the golden or silver rule, all the world's faiths have traces of this interconnection of human beings, brought to a concrete and universal sense, for example, in the Buddhist notion of interbeing. It is also the height of hubris to contend that some term of preeminent value to all humans has only been conceived or was first formulated by a certain group. Instead, as Lars Kirkhusmo Pharo, writes in his essay, 'The Concepts of Human Dignity in Moral Philosophies of Indigenous Peoples of the Americas', 'Equivalent moral decrees and ideas existed, however, in the intellectual systems of the indigenous peoples of the Americas long before the arrival of the European invaders' (147). These chapters in Part II are also important because they highlight both congruence and differences with European conceptions of dignity. In his essay on dignity in traditional Chinese Confucianism, Luo An'xian highlights how dignity in Confucian thought resonates most closely with the Stoic tradition in Western thought, and that the key term '*ren*' translated here as benevolence, coupled with the stressing of respect to another in Confucian thought can be linked with Kantian interpretations. What is different is that such dignity is not 'conceived as inalienable', and that it can be lost because of poor moral choices or by acting in an inhuman or animal-like way (181).

Qiao Qing-Ju's chapter on Daoism highlights how Daoism does not limit dignity to human beings, 'but entails a kind of non-anthropocentrism' (185). Contra Kantian or Confucian oaths, dignity in Daoism—'the accumulation of De—is a path of negative virtue or non-action' (185). As highlighted by *wu-wei* (actionless action) there is no universally proscribed program or set of required actions. For Western readers like me who have admired (and at times struggled with) the

meaning of *wu-wei* in the writings of Chuang-Tzu and Lao-Tzu, reflecting on how dignity aligns with such interpretations provides rich potential for thought and nuance. So, too does Qing-Ju's provocative comment that 'from a Daoist perspective, it is not self-evident that all policies aimed to protect human rights in fact protect that on which human rights are often thought to be based' (186). Sadly, history is littered with outside interventions supposedly for the good of local inhabitants with disastrous results (Iraq and Afghanistan being recent examples). At the same time, global inaction in the face of genocidal threats (Rwanda) has also been rightly censured.

Part III consists of 17 essays focusing on key thinkers like Kant, Kierkegaard, Scheler, Hannah Arendt, Levinas, Jacques Maritain, Martha Nussbaum, and Paul Ricoeur, and providing additional perspectives from the ubuntu tradition to Catholic social teaching. Again, the breadth of this work is compelling. Fittingly, Kant is a recurrent figure in *CHHD*, but is presented in a refreshingly balanced way, warts and all, in both Thomas E Hill Jr.'s descriptive essay on Kantian formulations and Samuel J. Kerstein's 'Kantian Dignity: A Critique'. Of particular note is the Jesuit David Hollenbach's contribution 'Human Dignity in Catholic Thought'. He rightly highlights the development in Catholic doctrine of notions of universal dignity and the practice of Catholic participation in defending human rights 'through a sort of back-and-forth movement between Catholic beliefs and lived experience' (256). Often in such interdisciplinary works, I lament the absence of theological voices. That is certainly not the case in *CHHD*. But voices surprisingly missing are the liberation theologians. From their theological and social justice work with the poor and oppressed, they are in 'privileged' positions to speak with and on behalf of the marginalized and have much to say about dignity for all. Consider, for example, Jon Sobrino's concept of primordial holiness, and the poor as manifesting saintliness in their daily struggles for life and survival, and thus, as witnesses and faith beacons for the rest of us.

Part IV explores legal conceptions of dignity in international human rights law and specifically within France, Germany, the U.S., South America (with brief discussion of each South American country), South Africa, the Islamic world, China, Japan, and India. These are all excellent and apt choices, though perhaps one major addition could be Russia.

Part V deals with dignity in conflict and violence such as war, prostitution, and immigration and refugees. While the otherwise lucid essay on dignity and U.S. law (by Carter Snead) in Part IV does not mention Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, torture light, and the infamous torture memo, torture is clearly condemned in David Luban's piece on the treatment of prisoners and torture. However, some further links with those essays would be useful in any further edition of *CHHD*.

Part VI, labeled 'Concepts of Justice', draws in social justice threads looking at social welfare, global justice, people with disabilities, the economy, gender inequalities, and online expression. While I lamented the lack of a liberation theologian's voice in *CHHD* above, the essay by Thomas Pogge brings some of their concerns and suggestions to light. Pogge, for example, writes: 'The eradication of all severe poverty would require a shift of no more than 1.75 percent of global household income—half of what the richest twentieth gained in recent years' (481).

Finally, Part VII closes the book with 6 chapters on biology and bioethics and dignity. An important strand through this section is dignity beyond the human being. Thus, Part VII rightfully concludes with a chapter on human dignity and future generations. Part of that future begins with our

conception and understanding of dignity, both beyond the human and of the unborn and the not yet born. It is a responsibility incumbent upon all of us, and *CHHD* is a key piece in being informed and balanced in undertaking that responsibility.

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