KANT ON HUMAN DIGNITY: A CONVERSATION AMONG SCHOLARS

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Kant on Human Dignity: A Conversation among Scholars

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to examine the notion of ‘human dignity’ in Kant by means of a conversation with three Kantian scholars.

One cannot understand Kant’s notion of human dignity without placing it in the context of his moral thought. For this reason we look in Chapter One at the philosopher Roger Sullivan. His major work Immanuel Kant’s moral theory includes a highly detailed treatment of human dignity. I shall present an analysis of his understanding within the context of his methodology and his general approach to Kant’s moral philosophy.

We look in Chapter Two at Susan Shell’s ‘Kant on Human Dignity.’ In addition to this, we consider Shell’s methodology and some of her work on the early Kant where we find the roots of Kant’s conception of dignity.

Chapter Three addresses Oliver Sensen’s novel interpretation of Kant’s use of the term ‘dignity.’ Utilizing the tools of Analytical Philosophy, he enters into dialogue with Kantian interpreters, suggesting that their understanding of dignity in Kant harbours elements at odds with Kant’s thought and that they thus fail to grasp the radical nature of Kant’s notion.
In the final and **Fourth Chapter**, I try to bring these scholars into a conversation with each other. First, I show the strengths of each position and then, using insights of Sullivan, Shell and Sensen, I venture to ask whether one could not develop the notion of a *phenomenology* of dignity. I also consider whether in both Shell’s and Sensen’s account there is not an implicit dynamic at work, which suggests the necessity of *transcendence* and the *Good*. 
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accept this as a symbol of my deep gratitude for the example you set and for everything you gave and did for us.

In writing a dissertation one is faced with many ‘demons’ within. Being confronted with ultimate questions as one faces one’s own limitations, and all too many weaknesses, teaches one to receive the completion of this as grace, as pure gift. It is thus in the words of the Psalmist that I wish to express my deepest gratitude. More I cannot say:

‘There is none like thee among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like thine. All the nations thou hast made shall come and bow down before thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy name. For thou art great and doest wondrous things, thou alone art God.

Teach me thy way, O LORD, that I may walk in thy truth; unite my heart to fear thy name. I give thanks to thee, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify thy name for ever.’

Psalm 86: 8-12.
Introduction: Kant and the Question of Dignity

1. The Place and Importance of Dignity

The notion of ‘human dignity’ is not new. It was originally, at least in the religion of the Bible, thought in the context of the Divine. Doron Shultziner shows that the Hebrew concepts ‘human’ (Ha’adam) and ‘dignity’ (Kvod/Kavod) appear throughout the Bible, but the combination Kvod Ha’adam (‘human dignity’) is, as such, absent. In fact, Kavod, which denotes ‘dignity, honor, glory and respect’ is most often used in referring to the God of Israel. As such, the phrase ‘dignity (Kavod) of God’ can be a substitute for ‘the presence or glory of God.’

According to Shultziner the ‘two core pillars’ that ground the Biblical notion of dignity in the Jewish tradition is Psalm 7:6 and the creation story in Genesis 1. The former says: ‘Yet thou hast made him a little less than the Divine, and thou dost crown him with glory and dignity’ [Shultziner’s translation]. Genesis 1:27 recounts how mankind is created in the image of God (Tzelem Elohim), thus expressing ‘an essential and inherent human worth that must not be violated [and which] entails special protection and reverence.’ This prohibition extends even beyond the grave to the dead.

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1 Shultziner 2006, 666 ff. He refers for instance to Ezekiel 3:23; Psalm 24:7-10; Psalm 29:1-3; 1 Samuel 6:5; and Jeremiah 13:17.
2 Shultziner 2006, 666 n 5.
3 Shultziner 2006, 667. Quoting from Genesis 1:27 he adds: ‘So God created Man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.’ And the commandment that flows from this reads ‘whoso sheds man’s blood by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man’ (Genesis 9:6).
the body of a dead person or executed criminal must not be defiled, because that
would be an ‘affront to God.’ Schultziner writes: ‘By this view, God implanted in human
beings a sacred kernel of worth, and demanded that we protect human dignity in us and
in others, and thus damaging human dignity is a direct offence to God.’ This notion of
human dignity develops throughout the Bible (the Torah, Prophets, and Writings) and
the Jewish Law (the Halakhah). In Jewish Law the concept ‘Kvod Habriyot’ is taken as
being synonymous with ‘human dignity.’ Moreover, Schultziner points out that this
concept is in the plural and the meaning points to the dignity of the people i.e., of the
many, revealing the necessarily communal aspect to (individual) dignity in that ‘a person
is an integral part of a collective.’

Schultziner identifies three characteristics of the Jewish conception of dignity.
One, human dignity has an ‘extrinsic divine source’; two, the ‘dignity of the people’
prevails over ‘personal autonomy and liberty’; and three, everything diminishes in the
face of ‘God’s dignity.’ Of the latter he writes, ‘the reliance on God as the ultimate and
only source of human dignity seems to heighten the diminution of personal dignity with

4 Schultziner 2006, 667. He refers to Deuteronomy 21:23. In the case of someone hanged
(executed) from a tree, he writes: ‘his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but
thou shall surely bury him that day. For an impaled body is an affront to God: you shall
not defile the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.’
5 Schultziner 2006, 667.
6 Schultziner 2006, 669.
7 See Schultziner 2006, 672 ff. He writes elsewhere that ‘elevating God’s dignity entails
devotion to his commandments’ and cites from Yairah Amit who says: ‘The idea of
human dignity in the Bible and its implications reveal to us a principle, which is bound by
a cluster of values such as the sanctity of life, basic equality between human beings, and
a demand to get close to God’s sacredness by following his paths and fulfilling his
implicit and explicit commandments, be they universal commandments or those relating
to the Israelites’ [emphasis Shultziner’s]. Ibid., 667 n 7.
regard to God’s dignity.’\(^8\) Having said this, however, he points to the significance of how in the *Talmud*, *(Kvod Habriyot)* was set in the *Halakha* as a theoretical principle that can override biblical commandments [and this] is a significant landmark in establishing the importance of human dignity.’\(^9\) Shultziner summarizes the Jewish conception thus: ‘Human beings have dignity because of an extrinsic entity that bestowed it upon them, with all moral prescriptions that would follow from this status. This means that dignified and undignified conducts are dictated by God’s commandments rather than by an intrinsic autonomous human trait detached from the divine. Thus, for example, apart from the strict prohibition of murder, the issues of abortion and euthanasia are primarily decided upon, and interpreted by, the biblical principle of the sanctity of life and not upon an intrinsic human trait such as a Kantian autonomous reasoning.’\(^10\)

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\(^8\) Shultziner 2006, 674. See also Ibid., 674 n 11, where the beautifully close bond between God’s dignity and human dignity is eloquently expressed by Rabbi Dov Soloveitzik: ‘Dignity is a divine virtue when one respects oneself, and thereby realizes the human being’s greatest mission which stems from the image of God inside oneself. Only then does the dignity of the messanger become like the image of his creator.’

\(^9\) Shultziner 2006, 670. This relates to cases where enforcement of the law would lead to the shaming and humiliation of an individual, which would lead to a violation of one’s dignity. Friedman discusses twenty cases from the Talmud. He quotes the Babylonian Talmud *(Berachot 19b-20a)* which states that ‘[t]he value of human dignity is so great that it supersedes a negative commandment of the Torah.’ See Friedman, Human Dignity in Jewish Law 2005, 16. He discusses a striking case dicussed in the Post-Talmudic Halachic Literature. For instance, in order to remain pure a (*kohen*) priest may not be under the same roof as a dead person. However, if he were to sleep without clothes and someone dies in the house he is not to be awakened or leave immediately because his nakedness will shame him and others (the community) and lead to a violation of dignity. In this case the principle of dignity overrides the negative command not to be in proximity with a dead body. See Friedman, Human Dignity in Jewish Law 2005, 30. There are many other examples as well. See also Friedman, Human Dignity and the Jewish Tradition 2008.

\(^10\) Shultziner 2006, 673.
However, the Judaic-Christian and the Islamic mind-set were not the only provenances of this notion. Ancient Greece and Rome entertained this notion even if it was initially applied only to the ‘aristocratic’ few. Mette Lebech points out that no one Greek word captures the exact meaning of dignity. However, the notion of dignity is present in Aristotle through ‘expressions semantically related to dignity,’ although he proffered no theory about it.\textsuperscript{11} Lebech shows how the Greek \textit{axioma} and \textit{axia} are translated into Latin ‘more or less systematically by \textit{dignitas}.’\textsuperscript{12}

In Aristotle there is no concept of equal dignity shared among all people. He has rather a two-fold notion of dignity that found its way into the Middle Ages. This is the notion that, on the one hand, dignity relates to personal honor or value and, on the other hand, it refers to a ‘non-demonstrable fundamental principle.’\textsuperscript{13} The concept \textit{axioma} has theoretical/scientific significance for Aristotle. It relates for Lebech to the concept of \textit{arche}, ‘axiom,’ or ‘first principle,’ which, as the \textit{Metaphysics} states, is ‘that from which a thing can first be known.’\textsuperscript{14} As she says: ‘From this we may reason, by analogy, that in the same way as axioms are basic to demonstration but cannot be

\textsuperscript{11} Lebech 2009, 32, see 30-45.
\textsuperscript{12} Lebech 2009, 31. She discusses a number of passages from the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} to make her point. One concerns Aristotle’s dicussion of the magnanimous man, who is said to be ‘worthy.’ ‘The magnanimous person, then, seems to be the one who thinks himself worthy of great things and is really worthy of them.’ See Aristotle 1985, 1123b2 ff. See also Irwin 1985, 432 where he translates \textit{axia} with ‘worth’ and sometimes as ‘value’ or ‘desert.’ He refers the reader to the same passages in the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} as does Lebech, to wit 1123b2, 1131a26, 1133b24, 1158b27, 1159a35, 1160b33.
\textsuperscript{13} See Lebech 2009, 30-31 ff.
\textsuperscript{14} Lebech 2009, 43. She refers to Metaphysics V, 1013a14-15. Aristotle writes: ‘Again, “beginning” means the point from which a thing is first comprehensible, this too is called the “beginning” of the thing; e.g. the hypotheses of demonstrations.’ See Aristotle, Aristotle \textit{Metaphysics} 1985-2007.
proven, so dignity (*axia, axioma*) is basic to what follows from it (rights and duties).

Axioms and dignity are also alike in that they must be relied upon, in order that what follows from them may not disintegrate.\(^{15}\) She identifies this ultimately not with an intuition or proposition, but with *rationality*: ‘In this sense rationality can be said to be the principle of principles, the principle, namely, which is an absolute beginning. Hence the fact that human beings are rational animals means for Aristotle that they in this manner reflect the absolute beginning, and thus are beginnings in themselves: that their knowledge as such cannot be any further founded, but must in the last resort rely on itself as rational.’\(^{16}\) This rationality and intuition (*nous*) account for our independence from nature and our ‘super-eminence’, and ‘dignifies’ us. Lebech admits that when it comes to applying this dignity in a social system as in Aristotle’s day, where he disregarded women and upheld slavery, one can only say ‘his understanding of human dignity was but vague.’\(^{17}\)

It was this Greek notion of reason that would later be taken up by the Stoics and especially by Cicero, who applied it to each human being and as such democratized the Greek notion of dignity, stealing its privileges from the aristocrats and rulers. Thus the dignity of human rational nature became the provenance of all of mankind.\(^{18}\) It would be the Church Fathers, preceding the Middle Ages, that would combine the two notions, *Tzelem Elohim / Imago Dei* and the rational principle or *Logos* of the Stoics to

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\(^{15}\) Lebech 2009, 42.  
\(^{16}\) Lebech 2009, 43.  
\(^{17}\) Lebech 2009, 43.  
\(^{18}\) See Lebech 2009, 45-58.
develop a deeper notion of the dignity of humanity. This places dignity in the context of
the divine and brings one to the dawn of the modern period.\textsuperscript{19}

It was humanism, especially in the works of Pico della Mirandola, together with
the optimism of early modernity, that paved the way for the modern view. It was then
that a shift occurred in that man with his rational capacity enabling and safeguarding his
autonomy superseded the traditional religious vision. And thus arose the central and
most decisive philosopher of the modern period, Immanuel Kant. ‘We now move more
squarely to “the central existential claim of modernity – man’s autonomy, his capacity to
be lord of his fate and the shaper of his future.” In the Enlightenment, the dignity of
Man in this sense came to be developed philosophically, and used as the basis, most
famously, of Immanuel Kant’s use of the concept,’ writes Christopher McCrudden.\textsuperscript{20}

Admitting that it would be near impossible to claim a full understanding of Kant’s
notion of dignity ‘since it is notoriously contested territory,’ McCrudden, nonetheless,
identifies three aspects to Kant’s idea of dignity. ‘First,’ he writes, ‘although it is
anything but clear what exactly he intended, a passage in which the term is used in the
\textit{Metaphysics of Morals}\textsuperscript{21} has become the best-known source for the subsequent belief
that Kant’s understanding of human dignity required that individuals should be treated
as ends and not simply as means to an end. Secondly, over time, this connection
between dignity and Kant has become probably the most often cited non-religiously-
based conception of dignity. Some, indeed, regard him as “the father of the modern

\textsuperscript{19} See McCrudden 2008, 658 ff.
\textsuperscript{20} McCrudden 2008, 659; see also 659 n 28. He quotes from Bognetti 2005, 75, 79.
\textsuperscript{21} He refers to Metaphysics of Morals 6:462. See McCrudden 2008, 659 n 27.
concept of human dignity.” Thirdly, whether rightly or wrongly, the conception of
dignity most closely associated with Kant is the idea of dignity as autonomy; that is, the
idea that to treat people with dignity is to treat them as autonomous individuals able to
choose their destiny.’22

The superlative words describing Kant’s account in McCrudden’s brief summary
(above) are, given the brevity of the account, indicative of the esteem and importance
of Kant’s account. We read that Kant’s ideas of dignity are ‘most famously,’ ‘notoriously
contested,’ ‘anything but clear,’ ‘has become the best-known source for the subsequent
belief,’ ‘probably the most often cited non-religiously based conception of dignity.’ And
then we read of the regard for him as ‘the father of the modern concept of human
dignity.’ These speak for themselves and one needs nothing more to justify exploration
of this notion in Kant. Glenn Tinder talks of ‘the most powerful modern affirmation of
human dignity, that found in the moral philosophy of Kant.’23

In fact, at the end of his paper, McCrudden concludes that determining a ‘precise
conception’ of human dignity ‘beyond [...] minimum consent’ proves difficult. He lists
the main (traditional) and cultural-political sources of dignity currently operative and
which might act as resources to determine a conception of dignity that would ground a
legal system and be sufficiently accepted by all to make it applicable. He writes: ‘It could
be, therefore, that the interpretation of dignity within Catholic social doctrine, or within
a social democratic framework, or within an Islamic framework, or within the Jewish

23 Tinder, Facets of Personal Dignity 2003, 240.
tradition, or based on Kant, might fulfil this role.’ 24 My point is not to engage his conclusion. 25 What is striking is that, whereas most candidates refer to either institutional cultural realities or religious traditions, only one carries the name of a singular man and his philosophy – Immanuel Kant. The fact that he is the only philosopher considered comparatively with other lived-cultural realities like religious traditions or liberal democracy speaks volumes for the power and influence of Kant’s ideas.

Indeed it is in this connection that one may say that dignity, today, enjoys unprecedented popularity and status. This is in no small measure the result of Kant’s work, even though it is not solely his doing. His taking up of this thematic and his incorporation of it in his systematic thought succeeded in placing dignity on the map in a secular framework and giving it as such a new status. Kant’s ideas in this regard did reach beyond his moral thought into his political philosophy as well. But in identifying the chief protagonists responsible for the political popularization of dignity McCrudden turns elsewhere.

25 Martin O’Malley follows another approach. See O’Malley 2011, 75-101. He makes the same point, namely, that a consensus regarding the meaning of dignity is lacking, hence his own attempt at providing a performative definition that honors all the dimensions of dignity with the provision that ‘the law is the most apt location for observing the performance of human dignity. […] Human dignity as the recognition of human worthiness is an all-encompassing principle that contains the moral wisdom of the past, and possesses the potential to deal with present and future violations. The law is not the only context in which human dignity can be broached, but it is an essential tool for both protecting and advancing it.’ Ibid., 99. His performative definition, which he unpacks in the course of the article reads: ‘Human dignity is the recognized affirmation that humans, qua humans, have a status of distinctive and exceptional worth expressed and thus discernible in law.’ Ibid., 79.
Pivotal was the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the events of the French Revolution, including the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* in 1789.\(^{26}\) Other figures, statesmen, and authors, mentioned by McCrudden, who used ‘the language of dignity’ are Thomas Paine, the proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, William Wordsworth, and Charles Renouvier. Rousseau’s more communitarian emphasis influenced Latin American notions of human rights. Dignity and the development of Republicanism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seemed to accompany each other. During the struggle for the abolition of slavery this notion was taken up by Simon Bolivar, among others. In Germany the founder of the Social Democratic Party, Ferdinand Lassalle, for instance, argued that it was the responsibility of the state to ‘improve the situation of the lower classes, who had fallen into poverty and starvation, and thus provide a true humane existence for everyone.’\(^{27}\)

McCrudden points out that in developing a response to the social ills at the end of the nineteenth century the Catholic Church built its comprehensive social teaching around the principle of human dignity. Different Popes (especially Popes Leo XIII, Pius XI, John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II) and the Second Vatican Council’s *Gaudium et Spes* did so as well.\(^{28}\)

\(^{26}\) McCrudden quotes from Article 6: ‘[a]ll citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that their virtues and talents.’ One can see how ‘dignities’ reflect and are meant to counter ‘aristocratic privileges.’ McCrudden 2008, 660 incl. n 29.

\(^{27}\) As quoted by McCrudden 2008, 661, see also 660 ff.

\(^{28}\) See McCrudden 2008, 662.
The Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain incorporated dignity into his philosophy. He applied the insights dignity brought to Anthropology to his political philosophy and had it govern all personal relationships through utilizing the accompanying notion of human rights. These human rights were meant to serve the furtherance of the common good and were not in the first instance meant to advance a ‘radical ethical individualism.’ McCrudden writes: ‘For Maritain, dignity was a fact (a metaphysical or ontological status, as well as a moral entitlement), and it was he who brought it into practical international politics in the post-Second World War period.’

He was an active man in addition to being a philosopher and was heavily involved in the reconstruction of society after the Second World War. As such he was deeply involved in the founding of the United Nations. His influence with regard to human rights was felt far and wide.

The rise of Marxism and Communism followed by two World Wars with their ‘untold sorrow to mankind’ lead to the founding of the United Nations (UN). Roberto Andorno writes about the formation of this body thus: ‘Former United Nations (UN) Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld often said that the UN was not created to take

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29 McCrudden 2008, 662.
30 William Sweet writes that it is difficult to determine his place in 20th century philosophy. Yet, ‘Maritain's most enduring legacy’ he writes, ‘is undoubtedly his moral and political philosophy, and the influence of his work on human rights can be seen, not only in the United Nations Declaration of 1948 but, it has been claimed, in a number of national declarations, such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the preamble to the Constitution of the Fourth French Republic (1946). [...] Maritain's Christian humanism and personalism have also had a significant influence in the social encyclicals of Pope Paul VI and in the thought of Pope John Paul II. Interestingly, since the end of the Cold War, there has been a revival of Maritain's political ideas in Central and Eastern Europe.’ Sweet 2013.
humanity to heaven but to save it from hell. By this aphorism, he meant that although the UN has its weaknesses and limitations, it has an irreplaceable role in our conflictive world by promoting peace, respect for human rights, and social and economic development. The UN is imperfect because it mirrors the world, with its divisions and disagreements. Nevertheless, it is the only forum where humanity speaks in its entirety and where it is able to express, as best as it can, its collective hopes and convictions.

Sandwiched, as it were, between past horrors and a possible (future) nuclear annihilation, one can understand the sense of mission and urgency attached to this body. This only adds weight to the concept of dignity, which found its way into both the Preamble and the Declaration of Human Rights.

*The Charter of the United Nations* was signed in San Francisco on 26 June 1945; the Preamble reads: ‘We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, *in the dignity and worth of the human person*, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be

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31 Andorno 2007, 150.
32 O’Malley discusses the question of the relationship between dignity and the ‘untold sorrow to mankind’ which are brought to bear upon each other in the Preamble, when he raises the question of the ‘relationship of the “experience” of the war’s inhumanity to the “meaning” of the principle [of dignity].’ O’Malley 2011, 8; for a fuller discussion see also 7-9.
maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, [...’] [Emphasis mine].

Many countries include and build on ‘dignity’ in their Constitutions. A recent example is *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996). The Bill of Rights, 33

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33 See United Nations, Charter of the United Nations (Copyright © United Nations 2013) 1945. Dignity occupied a place of honor. In the final Declaration it was mentioned five times, including Articles 22 and 23, dealing with socio-economic rights. See McCrudden 2008, 677. The Preamble to *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948) reads:

- ‘Whereas recognition of the *inherent dignity* and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,
- Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,
- Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,
- Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,
- Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, *in the dignity and worth of the human person* and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,
- Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,
- Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

(Chapter Two) reads simply: ‘Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their
dignity respected and protected.’ McCrudden lists many countries that included ‘dignity’ in their Constitutions. Among these he mentions Japan (1946), Italy (1948) and West Germany (1949). He mentions the influence of Kant on the German understanding of dignity, alongside the Catholic and social democratic notions. There is a debate as to which entity influenced the UN understanding of dignity most, the Christian or Kantian notion. According to Knoepffler, however, the UN notion brings something new, even though one can identify elements of both Christianity and Kant.

The history of dignity continues and debates are raging. It is interesting to note that a word count in a fairly recent special publication of The UNESCO Courier dedicated

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34 South Africa is an interesting case. This post-Apartheid Constitution was heavily influenced by Germany. See McCrudden 2008, 673. McCrudden points out, however, that in South Africa’s legal system, which is based on Roman-Dutch Law, ‘[i]nfringement of a person’s dignitas constituted a delict and compensation could be claimed with the actio iniuriarum’ (Ibid., 657). In Roman Law dignity was regarded as ‘a right of personality and status’ (Ibid., 657). It is interesting to note that this law was in effect during all of Apartheid and was somehow unable to prevent the injustices and horrors of Apartheid. Another note of interest (which Prof Sensen brought to my attention) is the involvement of the South African General and former Prime Minister, Jan Christian Smuts, who authored the original draft of the Preamble. According to McCrudden it is unclear whether he actually used the word ‘dignity’ or not, but ultimately it was used to express his terminology used in the first draft of the Preamble. See Ibid., 675 ff., and especially 676 n 154.

35 See McCrudden 2008, 664 ff. He adds a host of other countries before the war, for instance, Weimar Germany, 1919; Mexico, 1917; Ireland, 1937; etc. See Ibid., 664-675 for a thorough discussion of the place of dignity in International and National Constitutional and Legal texts.

36 See Knoepffler, Menschenwürde heute – ein wirkmächtiges Prinzip und eine echte Innovation 2011, 16 ff., 21 ff. One difference with Kant is that, whereas Kant relies on duties, the UN relies on a legal framework which embodies human rights. What is new is that its understanding goes beyond the pure regulative function to the real potential of the UN (dignity) notion to resolve conflicts. This explains the references to the horrors of the war and for Knoepffler should be seen especially in the context of the Shoah. See Ibid., 25-28.
to the theme of ‘Humanism: A New Idea’ uses the word Kant sixteen times and the word dignity eighteen times. Kant seems alive and well in the UN – even if the same might not be said for dignity.

2. The Question of Dignity in Kant

Critics of Kant range from Arthur Schopenhauer to Jürgen Habermas. Schopenhauer wrote in 1837: ‘[T]his expression “Human Dignity,” once it was uttered by Kant, became the shibboleth of all perplexed and empty-headed moralists. For behind that imposing formula they concealed their lack, not to say, of a real ethical basis, but of any basis at all which was possessed of an intelligible meaning; supposing cleverly enough that their readers would be so pleased to see themselves invested with such a “dignity” that they would be quite satisfied.’ Habermas, on the other hand, states that, in Kant’s philosophical conception, dignity has found for our times its valid expression. This is echoed by Glenn Tinder, who writes: ‘[W]hat is now usually called “the dignity of the individual,” or, in the terminology of Immanuel Kant, […] the quality by virtue of which every person should be treated as an end and never merely as a means […] I believe to be the primary intuition of Western moral consciousness and indispensable to liberal democracy.’ These critics find themselves on opposite poles of appreciation.

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37 See The UNESCO Courier © UNESCO 2011; and especially Seth 2011, 6-9.
38 As quoted by McCrudden 2008, 661.
40 Tinder, Against Fate: An Essay on Personal Dignity 2003, 11.
Another, perhaps more balanced view, is that of Hardy Jones. In 1971 he wrote: ‘[Kant’s] famous dictum concerning human dignity—the second formulation of the categorical imperative—is widely regarded as one of the most significant of his insights. He refers to it as the principle of humanity: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.” [...] Many readers will perhaps insist that this remark does not provide much insight. But most would surely, upon reflection, find it perplexing. [...] Though Kant evidently believed it to be very important, he devoted a surprisingly small amount of space to its analysis and application. Partly as a consequence of the sparse character of his discussion, the principle has very often been quite badly misunderstood. Another factor which has led to considerable confusion is its evident emotional appeal. In many discussions of moral problems, one finds it treated as little more than a platitude. And it is often reduced to the status of a mere slogan.'

For Jones dignity in Kant forms an integral part of Kant’s moral thought. He continues: ‘What is needed is a sustained examination of the principle within the context of Kant’s whole ethical theory. Kant’s second formula can be understood and explained only when one grasps its relation to certain central doctrines of his moral philosophy.’

It is clear that the notion of dignity in Kant is not only important, but also profound. And this notwithstanding at least two major hurdles that need to be addressed, if not overcome. The first relates to the inherent difficulties in Kant’s own

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41 Jones 1971, 3. According to its cover jacket this book ‘represents the first thorough critique of the of [Kant’s] doctrine [...] of human dignity [...] a significant statement of the absolute value of human beings.’

42 Jones 1971, 3.
texts. As Jones sees it: ‘Kant’s remarks about dignity betray a certain amount of
terminological confusion.’43 The second hurdle concerns the disagreements among
Kantian scholars seeking to interpret Kant despite such ‘terminological confusion.’

2.1 Kant’s ‘Terminological Confusions’?

Toward the end of his book, Jones looks at the question of moral worth and
human value. He analyzes an important passage from the *Groundwork*.44 He starts by
saying that in order to present ‘persons as ends-in-themselves [...] not to be treated
merely as means’ Kant must ‘hold that persons have intrinsic values.’45 The context of
this passage and what follows show that Kant’s real intention is to demonstrate that
moral worth, i.e., virtue, involves dignity. Jones suggests that, if one understands this
with reference to the good will, one might think that Kant’s claims pertain in reality to
persons of good moral character. However, this contradicts Kant’s notion that ‘being an
end-in-itself [which all persons are] is dependent upon the possession of absolute value

43 Jones 1971, 129; see also 131.
44 Kant writes: ‘In the kingdom of ends everything has either a *price* or a *dignity*. If it has
a price, something else can be put in its place as an *equivalent*; if it is exalted above all
price and so admits of no equivalent, then it has a dignity. What is relative to universal
human inclinations and needs has a *market price*; what, even without presupposing a
need, accords with a certain taste—that is, with satisfaction in the mere purposeless
play of our mental powers—has a *fancy price* (*Affektionspreis*); but that which
constitutes the sole condition under which anything can be an end in itself has not
merely a relative value—that is, a price—but has an intrinsic value—that is, *dignity*.’ This
is Jones’ translation of the *Groundwork* (hereafter G) 434 ff. passage. See Jones 1971,
127 ff.
45 Jones 1971, 128.
[or] dignity.’46 So, if absolute value is contingent upon virtue (the good will), not all persons will have it, and if this is the case, not all persons will be ends-in-themselves. Jones writes: ‘These points suggest several important questions. What things, in Kant’s view, have dignity? Do persons have a value which is independent of whatever virtue they may have achieved? If they do, what is this value based upon and which of man’s characteristics give him this quality?’47 Jones says that Kant identifies ‘dignity’ with ‘intrinsic value.’ Presenting his own understanding of ‘[t]his sort of value’ he writes: ‘a thing has intrinsic value if its value is not limited to its usefulness as a means, if it has value in itself’ [Jones’ emphasis].48 He links this with the second formula of the Categorical Imperative, but notes immediately that in the next section Kant seems to present quite ‘another characterization of dignity (Würde).’49 In this passage Kant defines dignity as ‘unconditioned and incomparable worth’ and for Jones it suggests ‘that intrinsic value is not sufficient for dignity.’50

It is not the purpose of this study to evaluate Jones’ attempted resolution of the problems, he sees.51 Jones’ analysis and remarks are presented here as illustrations of the difficulties Kant’s texts can raise for anyone seeking to interpret them.

46 Jones 1971, 128.
47 Jones 1971, 128.
48 Jones 1971, 128.
49 Jones 1971, 129. He refers to G 435 where Kant writes ‘For nothing can have a value other than that determined for it by the law. But the law-making which determines all value must for this reason have a dignity—that is, an unconditional and incomparable worth—for the appreciation of which, as necessarily given by a rational being, the word ‘reverence’ is the only becoming expression. Autonomy is therefore the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature.’ [Jones’ emphasis].
50 Jones 1971, 129.
It is not surprising, then, that Kantians will differ among themselves in their attempts to understand Kant. And their differences have far-reaching implications, touching even upon questions of metaphysics and epistemology, as well as Kant’s moral and political philosophy.

In this study I propose to examine the work of three Kantian scholars: Roger Sullivan, Susan Shell, and Oliver Sensen. They each give differing accounts of Kant’s conception of dignity. I give a fairly detailed analysis of each one’s work, accompanying them, so to speak, in their reading of Kant and his teaching. In the end I place them into conversation with each other.

3. Kant on Dignity: Scholars in Conversation

Taking seriously what Jones (as quoted above) says, namely, that an understanding of Kant’s notion of human dignity cannot be approached without placing it in the context of his moral thought, we look in Chapter One at the philosopher Roger Sullivan. His major work *Immanuel Kant’s moral theory* includes a highly detailed treatment of human dignity. I shall present an analysis of his understanding within the context of his methodology and his general approach to Kant’s moral philosophy.

We look in Chapter Two at Susan Shell’s ‘Kant on Human Dignity.’ In addition to this, we consider Shell’s methodology and some of her work on the early Kant where we find the roots of Kant’s conception of dignity.
Chapter Three addresses Oliver Sensen’s novel interpretation of Kant’s use of the term ‘dignity.’ Utilizing the tools of Analytical Philosophy, he enters into dialogue with Kantian interpreters, suggesting that their understanding of dignity in Kant harbours elements at odds with Kant’s thought and that they thus fail to grasp the radical nature of Kant’s notion.

In the final and Fourth Chapter, I try to bring these scholars into a conversation with each other. First, I show the strengths of each position and then, using insights of both Shell and Sensen I venture to ask whether one could not develop the notion of a phenomenology of dignity. I also consider whether in both Shell’s and Sensen’s account there is not an implicit dynamic at work which suggest the necessity of transcendence and the Good.
Chapter One: The Formula of Respect for the Dignity of Persons:

Roger Sullivan’s take on Human Dignity in Kant

Prelude

Sullivan takes Kant’s articulation of the second formula as the classic expression of human dignity, of what it is, of its place within Kant’s system, especially within his moral philosophy. In this part of the dissertation we shall present Sullivan’s interpretation of Kant. After a short introduction we shall look at what Sullivan envisages to be Kant’s strategy and aim within the Groundwork, where the second formula makes an explicitly argued appearance in relation to the first formula. After this short interlude we shall look at Sullivan’s understanding of the second formula, following for the most part his chapter dedicated to this theme. After this we look at Sullivan’s exposition on the difference between persons and things. This will set the stage for turning to the concept of respect that belongs irrevocably to the concept of the dignity of the human person, and is the required attitude when approaching persons. Within this notion we shall look at respect for persons, then self-respect, our own right to happiness, and finally respect for others.
1. Introduction

In a chapter entitled ‘The Formula of Respect for the Dignity of Persons,’ Sullivan presents his understanding of Kant on dignity. The title of the chapter actually refers to Sullivan’s way of referring to the second formula. After H. J. Paton, most writers have referred to this formula as the ‘Formula of an End in Itself,’ but for Sullivan the more elegant title would be the ‘Formula of Respect for the Dignity of Persons.’

According to Sullivan, Kant tends to present the rather abstract concepts pertaining to our moral abilities (or ‘faculties’) like empirical, practical (that is, prudential) reason and pure practical (that is, moral) reason as concrete realities, resulting in our seldom finding ‘flesh-and-blood people in the pages of [Kant’s] books;’ but Sullivan concedes, with respect to human dignity (especially in the Formula of Respect for the Dignity of Persons), Kant gives voice to his realization that human morality needs an emotional dimension. Kant says as much in the Groundwork, namely that with its emphasis on people (or persons) this Formula ‘would “bring an Idea of reason ... nearer to feeling,” [... and this] subjective foundation of human morality consists of the dispositions of self-respect and respect for others.’

This Formula of Respect for the Dignity of Persons is, however, the second formula and it stands in a symbiotic relationship to the first formula. Before we look at the exact nature of the relationship between these two formulae as Sullivan sees it, it might be helpful to look briefly at Sullivan’s understanding of what Kant is aiming for in

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1 Sullivan 1989, 356 n 1.
the *Groundwork*. It is here that Kant first formulated these systematically and also where dignity gets a treatment and placement within a body of systematic thought. We shall thus make a short detour to this end.

2. **Interlude: Background**

2.1 **The Strategy of the Groundwork I**

As important background, as well as correctly to place the presence of dignity in the second formula within the context of Kant’s aims and argument we will now look at Kant’s strategy especially in the first section of the *Groundwork* as presented by Sullivan.  

In his preface Kant admits that he has one purpose: ‘to seek out and establish [i.e., defend] the supreme principle of morality.’  

What is at stake then is to state and to defend the ‘objective validity of the ultimate moral norm.’ In his first chapter he sets out to identify this principle, which he does through an analysis of the nature of ‘morally good character.’ This Sullivan takes to be the ‘good will’ to which Kant refers and about which he famously says: ‘There is no possibility of thinking of anything at all in the world, or even out of [beyond] it, which can be regarded as good without qualification [limitation], except a good will.’

Sullivan’s own take on this is that Kant here reflects

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4 See G 392.
5 Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals 1981, 393. Compare also Mary Gregor’s translation on key concepts (provided in square brackets) at Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 4:393.
what he holds to be the ‘reasoned judgment of ordinary people’ that a good moral
class is the only thing ‘intrinsically and unconditionally good.’ Kant continues now
by highlighting in effect three questions relating to the nature of a ‘human morally good
class’ and his answers will become his ‘propositions.’

His first question asks what makes a person morally good (that is, to have a
‘good will’) and his answer is that it is not because of the good things one accomplishes

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6 The expression ‘ordinary people’ should be taken ‘as an honorific title, [and] not a
denigrating expression.’ See Sullivan 1989, 297 n 10. This points to Sullivan’s conviction
that for Kant ‘the ultimate data of moral philosophy – beginning with the inner
experience of moral obligation – must be found in what he called “ordinary moral
consciousness.”’ Sullivan says this does not mean that Kant denied the fact that people
make moral mistakes or even act deliberately in morally wrong ways, but that looking at
the ordinary experience of all we shall find something of the universal in it, and that
even though this consensus is not on its own sufficient to claim validity it ‘still can be a
sign of truth, for “objective validity affords the ground for a necessary universal
agreement” [CPrR 13; CPR A 820-22/B848-50].’ He adds, ‘Kant had great respect for
scientific consensus; in moral matters, with which everyone must be acquainted, he had
even more respect for common convictions.’ One last quote to drive this point home
follows a retort that Kant would not have held that ordinary moral or religious
consciousness would of necessity yield ‘the ground for the apodictic nature of moral
demands’ in an examination of this consciousness and that it required a critique of
practical reason which on its own requires an ‘advanced stage of moral enlightenment.’
To this position Sullivan responds: ‘However, any attempt to understand morality in
terms of or to base it on anything but itself would only destroy morality. Kant’s critique
of practical reason therefore analyzes what the concept of “a moral agent” must mean
and then shows that human agency can be understood (insofar as it can be understood)
only in terms of our actually being moral agents. There is an inevitable circularity here
(as in every moral theory), but the circularity need not be vicious as long as the critique
of practical reason and the analysis of morality are done with sufficient care’ (Sullivan
1989, 279 n 10).

I have quoted this whole section because to me it points to two significant
insights, the first is the importance of the ordinary man and the experience of
consciousness that all share alike. This reveals something of the universal and even
democratic nature of morality and it affects dignity similarly. The second, which
emphasizes the last (democratic) point as well, highlights that the moral law is of
necessity and (with some ambiguity) its own ground, and that one cannot base morality
but because of one’s intentions. ‘It is good only through its willing. i.e., it is good in itself’ says Kant.⁷ Sullivan acknowledges that Kant did not make this first proposition explicit with the unfortunate result that there is among Kant scholars no consensus as to exactly which claim is the ‘first proposition.’⁸

His second question comes after an introduction, which looks at the difference between two types of motives (intentions); one, an action done from a desire for happiness, and the other, performed from the motive of duty. By implication then Kant asks, if the above-mentioned first proposition is correct, what kind of intention would make a person morally good? And the answer is: the intention (motive) to act from duty. Duty, as explained by Sullivan, means to act consistently in accordance with a rule or maxim that determines the action.⁹ The second proposition reads as follows: ‘An

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⁷ Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals 1981, 394
⁸ See for instance James Ellington’s remark in a footnote to Kant’s formulation of the second proposition where he says ‘The first proposition of morality says that an action must be done from duty in order to have any moral worth. It is implicit in the preceding examples but was never explicitly stated.’ Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals 1981, 399 n 12.
⁹ Sullivan notes elsewhere (Sullivan 1989, 309 n 14) that Kant seems to use the term ‘maxim’ in two different ways. Sometimes it refers to ‘any practical rule that is “subjective” in the sense that it is a rule a person (or “subject”) possibly can or in fact does adopt, whatever the moral quality of the action and whatever the person’s motivation may be’ (see CPR 20; MM 398). In this sense then subjective maxims are also ‘objective principles or laws if they are fit to hold for every rational being’ making them thus rules ‘on which any rational agent could act’ (see CPR A 812/B 840, G 400n). Other times ‘maxim’ refers to a rule that is ‘subjective,’ meaning that it is based on ‘subjective factors such as a person’s inclinations and even [...] ignorance so that it holds only for that person, in contrast to objective principles, which ignore all purely subjective considerations and therefore are fit to hold for all rational agents’ (see G 420n; MM 225, 389; CPR 19-20). Sullivan himself uses ‘maxim’ in the first sense ‘[s]ince Kant’s various formulations of the ultimate moral principle uniformly mandate the form that our maxims should have (whether or not they do) [...] and hence as] any rule of conduct which people actually do or possibly can adopt and use and which may or may
action done from duty has its moral worth, not in the purpose that is to be attained by it, but in the maxim according to which the action is determined.\textsuperscript{10}

The third question according to Sullivan is then ‘what does it mean to adopt the maxim to act “from duty”?\textsuperscript{11} To which the answer is that it is the intention ‘to do whatever morality obligates one to do, out of the motive of respect for the ultimate standard or law of morality.’\textsuperscript{12} Finally Kant asks what is this ultimate moral law that can demand (or cause) such respect as to ‘outweigh every other motive?’ As Kant said before, it cannot be a rule relating to one’s effectiveness in fulfilling or achieving some purpose. It is neither oriented nor fed by one’s ‘subjectivity,’ hence it will be identified and found only in reference to its character, which will be purely formal and as such it relates to the maxim of an action, ‘namely that it can be a maxim on which any and every person may rationally act.’ Without much ado, Kant states: ‘I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law.’\textsuperscript{13} This is the first principle, and it is also a formal principle, known as the Categorical Imperative.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10}Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals 1981, 399.
\textsuperscript{11}Sullivan 1989, 296 n 9.
\textsuperscript{12}Sullivan 1989, 296 n 9; or in Kant’s words: ‘The third proposition, which follows from the other two, can be expressed thus: Duty is the necessity of an action done out of respect for the law.’ Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals 1981, 400.
\textsuperscript{13}G 402. See Sullivan 1989, 296 n 9.
\textsuperscript{14}Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals 1981, 402 n 15.
Kant, however, in claiming that the third proposition is ‘an inference from the two proceeding’ unwittingly unleashed distraction and confusion insofar as people assume the second must also be an inference from the first, which leads them to read the first chapter as ‘an enthymematic “argument.”‘¹⁵ This has had the result that many creative suggestions are put forward in order to make the argument ‘explicit and valid.’ But all of this, according to Sullivan, misses the point. Kant is here trying to determine ‘what there is about morally good character that leads people to regard it as uniquely good (if there is such a thing as morally good character).’¹⁶ And again ‘inference’ is not to be confused with logical inference but is Kant’s particular way of argument, starting from his belief that ordinary people can be morally good and that this goodness lies not in great deeds but in one’s moral character. Kant then comes to the point that moral character ‘must be a quality intrinsic to the person [emphasis added].’¹⁷ And according to Sullivan this means simply that ‘A person’s character must depend on that person’s intentions.’¹⁸ And the good person’s intentions are based on the determined decision/commitment to act according to duty. Sullivan notes that Kant’s inclusion of the notion of respect is to show ‘how important moral sentiment is [...] to human

¹⁵ Sullivan 1989, 297 n 9. This means it is read as an argument (with a syllogistic form) with an unstated, albeit assumed, premise.
¹⁶ Sullivan 1989, 297 n 9. In the first part of the *Groundwork* the only thing that can be regarded as ‘good without qualification’ is ‘the good will’ (G 393). Sullivan notes that in Kant’s subsequent discussions here all other ends are limited to subjective and prudential goods. ‘There are no preparation’ he says, ‘for his later claims that personhood and the total final good are absolute goods.’ This confusion leads to differing interpretations among his interpreters. See Sullivan 1989, 323 n 14.
virtue.’\textsuperscript{19} In the end from his analysis of dutifulness or respect for the moral law, Kant ‘elicits the ultimate moral norm by which ordinary moral judgment determines the moral quality of a person’s maxims of conduct.’\textsuperscript{20} Note the emphasis on ordinary human awareness that opens the way to morally good character and that this character is described as being a \textit{quality} that is moreover \textit{intrinsic} to the person. In explicating this ‘intrinsic-ity’ Sullivan equates it with the person’s intentions (that is his/her will). Furthermore, in talking about duty as the explicit, en-acted (or facial) expression of this intrinsic quality, he mentions respect as the humanising sentiment that makes it \textit{human} virtue. But in talking of this he relates duty with respect. Again it is not duty or respect in itself but solely for the moral law, and in all of this we are empowered to judge morally on the \textit{moral quality} of a person’s maxims of conduct, that is, the rule a person adopts that is expressed in action.

2.2 The doctrine of the two view-points

Sullivan, in his analysis of Kant, will appeal to ordinary moral awareness. This is in his view how Kant approached the subject as well. But Kant’s moral philosophy does not stand on its own. It is embedded and is part of his whole system and cannot be thought apart from it. This is why he warns explicitly: ‘It is difficult – perhaps, finally, impossible – either to conceive of or defend Kant’s philosophy (particularly insofar as it is \textit{critical} in

\textsuperscript{19} Sullivan 1989, 297 n 9.
character) apart from the doctrine of the two viewpoints. This doctrine refers to the noumenal-phenomenal distinction that plays a pivotal role in Kant’s thinking. For Sullivan this results in two different methods, which Kant used in his moral writings, namely the analytic and the synthetic methods. Sullivan follows the analytic method, which studies (analyses and clarifies) the ‘common knowledge’ of the morality of ordinary people. The synthetic method builds on the doctrines and definitions he had previously established concerning the nature of human morality. Kant’s use and meaning of some concepts like ‘freedom’ and ‘heteronomy’ is often contingent on the method he is using. It is thus good to be aware of this distinction. However concerning his own interpretation Sullivan states: ‘I shall refer to that doctrine as sparingly as possible and concentrate instead on Kant’s analytic exposition of ordinary moral consciousness.’ Among the reasons he offers is the fact that there seems neither one way to understand this doctrine, nor anything positive we might legitimately say about the noumenal world. In fact, most Kantian ethicists today adopt the conceptual analysis and set aside the problem of freedom and determinism, which lies partly at the heart of this doctrine. Sullivan warns, however, if one focuses solely on the analysis of ordinary moral language and dismisses this doctrine with its epistemological and metaphysical frames of reference, one runs the risk of ‘the destruction of morality.’ For that would imply ignoring those elements Kant thought indispensible to human morality, like freedom, the postulates of pure practical reason, the importance of the notion of the

final good and ‘the essentially religious nature of his enterprise and of the human race’s ultimate destiny.’

Sullivan’s own take is that the noumenal-phenomenal distinction is an epistemological, rather than a metaphysical distinction. It reflects the limits of our theoretical knowledge. ‘I do not believe’ says Sullivan ‘that Kant ever held that there are two different worlds – the one we experience and another one behind the world we experience.’ We are now ready for a deeper look into Sullivan’s analysis and approach to Kant’s understanding of human dignity. We shall look to his chapter dedicated to this theme.

3. The Formula of Respect for the Dignity of Persons

The beauty of the second formula is that it equates in an explicit manner the ‘class of moral agents’ with the ‘class of all human beings because of [the] “humanity in our person” in contrast to our “animality.”’ Under ‘humanity’ Kant understands ‘that

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24 Sullivan 1989, 307 n 37. For more on this doctrine and its relation to the concepts of freedom, heteronomy and autonomy see Sullivan 1989, 279-86.
25 Sullivan 1989, 193. The first formula is the universal formula of the Categorical Imperative. ‘But one does better always to proceed in moral appraisal by the strict method and put at its basis the universal formula of the categorical imperative: act in accordance with a maxim that can at the same time make itself a universal law.’ Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 4:437.

Sullivan provides a helpful list of Kant’s different formulations of the second formula: ‘Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end’ (G 429); ‘For all rational beings stand under the law that each of them is to treat
functional complex of abilities and characteristics that enables us to set ends and make rational choices.’\textsuperscript{26}

The relationship between these two formulas might be described as being equal, with the first one as the first among equals. It is the first because from it the other will also be determined. The two thus live in a symbiotic relationship towards and off each other. In fact, even without the second formula, we would still have arrived at the recognition of another’s dignity. As Sullivan points out: ‘The imperative that we should act only on maxims capable of being universal laws, Kant writes, inevitably “will lead to” our recognizing that we must respect every human person as having objective and intrinsic worth or dignity (\textit{Würde}).’\textsuperscript{27} This quote is important because in it Sullivan himself and all others \textit{never merely as means but always at the same time as ends in themselves}’ (G 433); ‘A rational being, as by his very nature an end and consequently an end in himself, must serve for every maxim as a condition limiting all merely relative and arbitrary ends’ (G 436); ‘So act in relation to every rational being (both to yourself and to others) that he may at the same time count in your maxim as an end in himself’ (G 437); ‘A subject of ends, namely, a rational being himself, must be made the ground for all maxims of action, never merely as a means, but as a supreme condition restricting the use of every means – that is, always also as an end’ (G 438); ‘Do not make yourself into a mere means for others, but be at the same time an end for them’ (MM 236); ‘Act according to a maxim of \textit{ends} which it can be a universal law for everyone to have’ (MM 395); ‘Man is obligated to regard himself, as well as every other man, as his end’ (MM 410); ‘Man cannot be used merely as a means by any man (either by others or even by himself) but must always be treated at the same time as an end’ (MM 462). See Sullivan 1989, 356 n 1.

\textsuperscript{26} Sullivan 1989, 193. He refers to G 437; Rel 26; MM 392, 447-48. Sullivan explains that for Kant the first formula is an analytic a priori proposition with the second one a synthetic a priori proposition. The first would be a formal determination in that the universality as requirement is given priority while the second one adds something in virtue of its statement that human beings are ‘morally obligatory ends’. See Sullivan 1989, 193.

\textsuperscript{27} Sullivan 1989, 193. Sulllivan refers to G 436, 437-38; MM 382.
describes his understanding of dignity as being both *objective* and *intrinsic*. In addition, dignity conveys something of the *value* or *worth* of the person, which he/she has.²⁸

Designating dignity, moreover, as *objective* seems to fly in the face of what we said if we take objectivity to mean factual actuality or something that does not take subjective feelings into account as the grounding source. That is, if one were to take objective to mean something not being dependent on the (subjective) mind, the fact that the maxim will inevitably lead us to the recognition (arguably a subjective experience/operation) of the objective dignity of all, seems at a first glance contradictory. But this is not the case.

²⁸ *Has* describes something owned but not necessarily something that designates the *being* of a subject. We ask here whether one may on the basis of Sullivan’s use of the word *have* say that dignity is something that one is *in possession of* in the sense that we have it and that we have ownership of it but not in the sense that we are it? In other words does *having dignity* describe a *state of ownership* or a *state of affairs*? Or is it perhaps something of both?

It is really the difference between *being* and *having*: When we talk of someone ‘being good’ and especially of someone ‘being a human being’ we imply a level of depth and meaning by those phrases that is absent when we talk of someone ‘being dignified.’ The phrase ‘she is a human being’ describes her essence. Whatever else she *has or does*, she is above all a human being. That is her defining reality. It seems *having* designates a category that is not of the same foundationally grounding and differentiating power that is conveyed by *is* and *being*.

To put it differently: if we are to think in terms of the concepts of *species* and *genus* we might say ‘having x’ does not distinguish or determine the species in the same way as ‘being x’ does. This might be a helpful way of approaching the subject insofar as it can help us clarify the role and function of dignity and pinpointing whether it belongs indeed to the structure of essentiality of being human. In other words, does dignity pertain to the *form* or *accident* of being human?

One would have to look at the concept of (moral) personhood and also of humanity. Kant often speaks of the humanity in one’s person and dignity is related to our humanity.
In terms of its *intrinsic* nature, dignity might refer to something ontologically within the human person’s being; or, alternatively, it might say that dignity has no need for reference and dependence outside of itself. In other words, if the former meaning refers to something necessarily *given* and found *within*, the latter means a self-consistent, self-reliant dynamic reality or state of affairs, that is intrinsic to itself, but not a depiction of an ontological given. I have raised these possibilities in order to highlight the questions and implications associated with the words used by Kant (and per definition, by Sullivan) in describing the nature of dignity. Mentioning it here will allow us in the course of our summary on Sullivan’s interpretation of Kant on dignity to be attentive to how he uses these concepts and what their use implies.

Earlier Sullivan speaks of objectivity in the context of the grounds (or reasons) for accepting claims as true, which he says ought to be *only* objective grounds, that is ‘grounds that can hold publicly, for all rational beings, which can be sufficient to support the assent of anyone who thinks rationally.’ 29 The following elements are related to objectivity. It has to do with grounds, which Kant understands as sufficient reasons. 30 These reasons must be able to withstand a two-fold test. In the first place they have to pass the test of ‘the Public Square or marketplace’ so to speak, where things are open, transparent and democratic. In fact, these reasons must be so open that they are universal, i.e., valid for all. There is, however, in the second place, also the individual element, where this sufficient reason is tested or assented to by anyone who thinks rationally. This assent is nothing else but individual judgment. And as such it is a process.

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The kernel of this entire public and personal process is that it be rational. If we keep in mind that in this short explication of objectivity Sullivan twice refers to rationality we might even say that objectivity for Sullivan is an open, rationally transparent process, for rational beings, by rational beings, and, through rational means (process). This rationality in its practical application requires, by implication, that we come to recognize and therefore respect our own autonomy and that of other persons (‘whether human or not’).

The two formulas are thus ‘at bottom the same;’ the second one a different representation of the first –the original and ultimate moral Law of Autonomy. In showing this equivalence between the two formulas, Sullivan states that the second formula (Formula of Respect for the Dignity of Persons) ‘simply restates the requirement that moral actions should conform to the Law of Freedom in both its negative and positive meaning.’ The negative meaning forbids us to act heteronomously to the satisfaction of our sensuous nature, while the positive meaning

31 See also Sullivan’s note that the meaning of objectivity depends also on the context in which Kant uses it. However he states that generally, ‘[p]ractical claims are called “subjective when they are regarded by the subject as valid only for his own will” and “objective” (or laws) when they are “valid for the will of any rational being,” even if they are not recognized as such by every person.’ See Sullivan 1989, 301 n 7. See also CPrR 19.

32 Sullivan 1989, 193. The point being that it is about persons. Personhood here functions like a class and human beings as a set of this class. Personhood is related to reason, responsibility and autonomy.

33 See G 437, 436. The ‘original ultimate moral Law of Autonomy’ as Sullivan calls it is according to his own references the formulation of the Categorical Imperative. ‘But one does better if in the moral judgment he follows the rigorous method and take as his basis the universal formula of the categorical imperative: Act according to that maxim which can at the same time make itself a universal law.’ Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals 1981, 437. See Sullivan 1989, 193.

states that we are subjects (agents) that determine ourselves and must act therefore in autonomy. This Law of Autonomy is ‘a purely rational norm’ and that means it is objective and universally valid for all rational agents. Within and because of this rationality there is a dynamic of reciprocity embedded in the Law of Autonomy insofar as it affects our interpersonal relations with others: ‘[The Law of Autonomy] therefore requires us not only to obey it in our own actions but also to recognize the right and obligation of every other person to do the same.’35

Kant is so concerned to avoid even the merest hint of any motive that might smack of heteronomy that it might seem as if the negative aspect of the formula is overemphasized. And within the formula it applies similarly to the functioning of the concept of the ‘person,’ which is ‘purely formal’ and so ‘must be conceived only negatively.’ This means disregarding any positive, empirical information providing grounds for distinguishing between people and for providing information ‘necessary for acting heteronomously.’36 Indeed Sullivan states that ‘because each person has intrinsic worth just by being a person’37 the formula legislates both positive and negative duties. Keeping only the negative duties that would result in an avoidance of people out of fear of infringing on their dignity is not morally right, as it could mask actual indifference or disdain towards them: ‘We must go beyond negative duties “to make man as such [our]

37 See Sullivan 1989, 194. He also refers the reader to G 437.
end,” both by striving for our own virtue and by acting justly, benevolently, and beneficently towards others.\textsuperscript{38}

Returning then to the relationship between the two, Sullivan states that the first formula (Law of Autonomy) is logically prior to any ends it would generate or identify as having objective moral worth. This is because ‘the ultimate “moral fact” for us is our awareness of the Law of Autonomy in the form of an imperative. […] The Law of Autonomy remains the “sole determining ground [Bestimmungsgrund] of the pure will” and so the ground both for identifying morally obligatory ends and for our obligation to respect, and, when appropriate, to promote them.’\textsuperscript{39} Sullivan emphasizes again that this process is rational and hence purely formal, which means that it abstracts from all subjective ends, which he takes as ends grounded in desires. We have to keep in mind that ends are objects of moral willing and thus not ultimate. Even the notion of ‘person’ that is generated and grounded ‘in a completely a priori way is as formal a notion as the norm of universality itself.’\textsuperscript{40} As he states elsewhere: ‘Persons are “objective ends,” that is, morally necessary ends for everyone, but they are also the “subjective ground” of morality in the sense that they are the self-legislating subjects in whom the moral law resides.’\textsuperscript{41} The second formula is the more attractive expression since it appeals to the

\textsuperscript{38} Sullivan 1989, 194. Here he quotes from the \textit{Metaphysics of Morals} (MM 395): ‘Act according to a maxim of \textit{ends} which it can be a universal law for everyone to have.’ He notes however that legislating respect for persons independent of empirical knowledge limits the moral law in the sense that by itself it is unable to discriminate between persons with regard to ‘wide and positive duties.’

\textsuperscript{39} See Sullivan 1989, 194 (with reference to CPrR 109).

\textsuperscript{40} Sullivan 1989, 195.

\textsuperscript{41} Sullivan 1989, 357 n 3.
‘person’ or ‘humanity.’ It brings, as he said earlier, the human intuition closer to the categorical imperative.

Good as this may be, there is a danger for Kant in that, if we were to take either the notion of persons or our feeling of respect for persons to be both basic to and the motivation for action, we fall prey to sentimentality. It will lead us to judge moral actions in terms of how they make us feel and this is a moral weakness. Moreover, taking account of any feelings or ends of any kind when building the basis for moral judgment condemns the judgment to be prudential and heteronomous. What is clear and non-negotiable for Sullivan’s reading of Kant is that ‘the ontological and epistemological foundation of morality is always and only the Law of Autonomy, appearing to us as a categorical imperative. [As Kant writes:] “The ground for every enactment of practical law lies objectively in the rule and in the form of universality (according to our first principle),” and it is only that rule that identifies which ends are morally obligatory and so provides the ultimate ground for holding in the second formula that persons are such ends [...] That is why the principle that “rational nature exists as an end in itself” can only be a restatement of the first formula.’

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42 ‘It has a majesty that can so fire the moral sensibilities of his readers that whatever problems there may be in using it as a norm, Kant’s second formula seems obviously the right view to most people’ writes Sullivan (1989, 195).
44 Sullivan 1989, 357 n 3. Kant quoted from G 431. See also CPrR 16 and G 428-29 to which he refers.
4. Persons and things

‘Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.’\(^{45}\) Thus, according to Sullivan, reads the best-known version of the second formula.

Behind this lies a profound and radical distinction between persons and things. Things belong to the realm of nature; they are natural objects or products of our own handiwork. As such they have conditional, extrinsic and subjective value. Their relative goodness lies in their value that is determined by the degree of their desirability with regard to their use. In this sense they have a price determined by what one is willing to give in exchange for them, thus determining their equivalent value. In this sense something external (like money) becomes the standard of value and worth. All in all then, such ‘things’ have no unique, absolute intrinsic value or worth.

Man, as a rational being, on the contrary, ‘exists as an end in himself’ and is also ‘necessarily an end for everyone.’\(^{46}\) In itself this is neither a scientific nor a theoretical description of man. Sullivan is also clear that Kant’s claim for the dignity of persons is not a scientific claim and cannot be taken as such. Any grounds as to proofs for it are barred, be they based on empirical information or even anthropological data with regard to human desires or inclination. In fact it ‘admits of no proof’ and is purely ‘an

\(^{45}\) Sullivan 1989, 195 taken from G 429.

\(^{46}\) Sullivan 1989, 195. See G 428, 429. Also HH 114; CPrR 87; MM 383, 394-95, 410, 447.
evaluative claim.’ 47 For Sullivan the concept or ‘Idea’ of persons is ‘a pure practical Idea of reason, already an enunciation of ordinary moral consciousness.’ 48

The intuition of man as an end in himself is historically informed by the ethical ideals present in the Stoics and Plotinus, and to a greater degree in Christianity. Kant could not use the theological surroundings associated with this idea so he invented a new language in which to express this intuition rationally. Hence the lop-sided terminology of ‘person as an end in himself’ and ‘an object of free choice.’ Both ‘end’ and ‘object’ are related and used for goals we aim to achieve through the use of reason or whatever is in our control. Quoting from the Metaphysics of Morals Sullivan writes in support: ‘An end [Zweck] is an object [Gegenstand] of the power of choice (of a rational being), through the thought of which choice is determined to an action to produce this object.’ 49

This however does not relate to persons as objects or ends. With regard to persons he writes: ‘Persons are “self-existent” (selbständig), having intrinsic and

47 Sullivan 1989, 195-96. See also G 430-31 and MM 395.
48 Sullivan 1989, 196. I take this to be very important and that Sullivan in effect takes the notion of personhood as Idea, similar to the regulative Ideas, that has no scientific evidence but yet is of practical importance to such a degree that without it practice (i.e., practical morality) would not be possible. Hence it becomes a condition of possibility as such. It is furthermore significant in that he sees it as an enunciation of our moral consciousness. The question is whether it is our moral consciousness that posits or puts this Idea forward or whether this idea leads to the formation of moral consciousness. My own reading of Sullivan tends to be the former.
49 Quoted from MM 381, see Sullivan 1989, 321 n 10. Sullivan continues to show how the apparent conceptual confusion that surrounds the loose use of these terms is the result of Kant’s failure to ‘begin with a reasonably developed philosophy of action.’ Analysing other instances of Kant’s use of these terms bears this out. In the end however he states that Kant’s ethical theory is coherently related to these concepts, but in order to avoid confusion one needs a careful reading that pays close attention to the context of each use of each concept. See Sullivan 1989, 321-22 n 10.
objective worth simply by the fact that they exist, apart from any and all subjective prudential considerations.\footnote{Sullivan 1989, 196.} This is an important if not loaded description, and just to leave us in no doubt Sullivan repeats that, if things and animals may be ‘contingently desired (or feared)’ and thus ‘possibly valued (or given a negative value)’ by someone, it is different in the case of persons. ‘By contrast, just by their existence, persons necessarily, always, and universally should be regarded as having objective, absolute, and intrinsic worth, whether or not they also happen to be desired because they contribute in some way to anyone’s happiness.’\footnote{Sullivan 1989, 196.} One cannot get more absolutistic language than this.

Sullivan does acknowledge our ability to use ourselves and others as instruments towards achieving a purpose and in this sense to have utilitarian value. In itself this is not all bad as it is part of living life as human beings. In many ways this is part of the political process required for creating life together. This reflects our dependent reality.\footnote{Sullivan 1989, 196. In support of his position Sullivan refers to CPrR 76-77; CJ 172; G 416n, 435; MM 434; Anthr 292 and Collins 343.} And according to Sullivan Kant does not regard this as morally wrong. What he does hold as wrong, however, is ‘thinking of our ability to set our own ends only in terms of greater utilitarian advantages’ as this implies that we ‘[regard] ourselves only as having extrinsic value.’\footnote{Sullivan 1989, 196. ‘What the second formula stipulates is that we may not treat others or allow ourselves to be treated only as instrumentally valuable, merely as a means to satisfy someone else’s desires, merely as a source of pleasure that is in other respects morally permissible.’ See Sullivan 1989, 196-97; with references to CPrR 83; MM 434-35, 450, 462-64.}
In contrast to things, which are essentially valuable as instruments, persons have a status that Kant identifies with our ‘humanity.’ And humanity is tied to and defined in terms of (our) moral personality.\(^{54}\) Moral personality is distinguished from psychological or empirical personality. As the concept indicates, the latter is something we might access empirically, that is, psychologically. According to Kant this refers to the ‘power to become self-conscious of our self-identity.’\(^{55}\) This process happens in conjunction with temporal and other changes. Moral personality again indicates the sphere of morality, which in Kantian terms implies the moral agent as rational agent in his ability to act freely, i.e., independent of the empirical mechanisms of nature where there is no freedom—only mechanistic determinism, which seems to be a condition for the possibility of the laws of nature. These agents are ‘persons’ because they are rational. As we have seen, inherent to rationality is the ability, and therefore obligation,\(^{56}\) to set ends or goals. This process requires, furthermore, the recognition of ‘the existence of objective ends’ and the ability to make genuine choices towards these ends. Genuine choices imply freedom. All of this unites in the ability to ‘enact and act on genuinely universal laws of conduct for themselves and all others.’\(^{57}\)

\(^{54}\) Sullivan 1989, 197. Sullivan refers to CPrR 85, 162 as well as CPR A 365.

\(^{55}\) Sullivan 1989, 197.

\(^{56}\) According to Sullivan ‘Kant is usually interpreted as holding that “should” (sollen) implies “can” (können). Although he nowhere makes this claim in so many words, this is clearly his doctrine’ (Sullivan 1989, 320 n 6). This is seen in numerous passages throughout his writing. Sullivan lists a few, among them the following ‘since reason commands that such actions should take place, it must be possible for them to take place’ (CPR A 807 / B 835) and again ‘for reason will not command the impossible’ (Anthr 148).

This brings Sullivan to dignity: ‘It is because of being under the moral law,’ he says, ‘that each and every person has an intrinsic, inalienable, unconditional, objective worth or dignity (Würde) as a person. [...] By virtue of that law we are elevated above being merely part of the natural world. [...] We have an absolute and irreplaceable worth, for our value is not dependent on our usefulness or desirability.’\(^{58}\) In fact, quoting Kant, he writes, ‘[i]t has no price or no equivalent for which the object of esteem could be exchanged.’\(^{59}\)

The corollary of this for Sullivan is the required respect that comes as command and therefore as right: ‘We may never renounce our right to respect, and we ought never act in such a way as to reduce either ourselves or others to the status of mere things.’\(^{60}\) Kant’s entire moral project can, for Sullivan, be described as a protest against distinctions—whether religious, political, economic or social. His ethics is an ‘ethics of the people, of moral egalitarianism.’\(^{61}\) This is shown forth in the second formula that epitomises ‘respect,’ and which is different from ‘honor,’ in that the latter is based on societal roles and distinctions. Respect is defined by Sullivan as ‘an attitude due equally to every person, simply because each is a person, a rational being capable of moral self-determination, regardless of social position, occupational role, learning, wealth, or any other special qualities or talents he or she may or may not possess.’\(^{62}\) The one thing every person does possess is moral reason and therefore the ability to achieve the

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\(^{58}\) Sullivan 1989, 197. See also G 435-36; Anthr 292; CPrR 86-87; CJ 442-43.  
\(^{59}\) Sullivan 1989, 197. Quoted from MM 462. See also MM 434; G 428, 435-36.  
\(^{60}\) Sullivan 1989, 197.  
\(^{61}\) Sullivan 1989, 197.  
\(^{62}\) Sullivan 1989, 197. See also Collins 407-12; HH 114; CPrR 76-77; MM 434-35; Collins 349, 461-63.
‘highest achievable good, a good will.’ He adds: ‘To be “a man of principle,” that is, an autonomous agent, is possible to a person with “the most ordinary human reason” and is of greater worth than having the greatest talent.’ Sullivan concludes by drawing the conclusion that ‘consequently, everyone should respect everyone else’ and this he elucidates by saying ‘everyone should “value himself on a footage of equality with” everyone else.’63

Dignity, in other words, is tied to respect, which is defined in terms of one’s worth. One may thus say that dignity (here defined in terms of one’s worth) and respect live in a necessarily reciprocal, symbiotic relationship with each other. Implied in this is also the radical equality without reference to the political and religious worlds and what they represent.

5. Respect for Persons

If the first formula as the Law of Freedom and Autonomy addresses itself to the nature (and possibility) of morality, which requires that moral agents be free and autonomous, the second formula addresses itself to ‘the self-awareness of moral agents.’64 In addressing self-awareness one enters the phenomenal realm, where we are limited to the world given in and through our experience. It is thus not for nothing that Sullivan feels the need to refer to the Kantian distinction between the phenomenal and

63 Sullivan 1989, 197. He quotes from MM 435 and refers also to CPrR 81n.
64 Sullivan 1989, 198.
noumenal worlds. We have already referred to this doctrine in the Interlude above. In the phenomenal world of experience we are under the laws that govern this (mechanical) world.\(^{65}\) In such a world it is impossible to find (empirically) that freedom which is a necessary requirement for morality. As he says, ‘when we think practically, we must regard ourselves as noumenal agents, free from the domination of causal laws, both able and obligated to act autonomously, on the basis of our own reason.’\(^{66}\) As noumenal agents we assume certain things about ourselves (like our freedom) even though we have no direct evidence for it in our experiential world. The evidence is provided, however, by our reason.

Referring to a paragraph in *The Metaphysics of Morals*\(^ {67}\) Sullivan states: ‘The second formula therefore requires each of us to regard ourselves and every other

\(^{65}\) Contemporary physics holds that there are areas of indeterminacy in the world thus altering the perceived threats to the possibility of morality, which Kant thought was implied by the Newtonian world-view. This has implications for Kantian moral philosophers too. See Sullivan 1989, 307 n 37.


\(^{67}\) Sullivan refers to the two introductory passages (paragraphs 37 and 38), but without providing any exegesis or analysis, from a section in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Section II) entitled, ‘On duties of virtue toward other human beings arising from the respect due them.’ There in the wider context of modesty as the restriction of self-love for the sake of others, Kant introduces dignity in the more immediate context of (and more pointedly: relationship to) respect; he says: ‘The respect that I have for others or that another can require from me (observantia aliis praestanda) is therefore recognition of a dignity (dignitas) in other human beings, that is, of a worth that has no price, no equivalent for which the object evaluated (aestimii) could be exchanged.’ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* 1996, 6:462. Pivotal in this whole paragraph (according to my understanding) is the notion of a recognition that exhibits a mirror-effect in that it allows a dynamic through which I ‘project’ some process within me onto another, expecting the other to suffer the same process and mirror-like recognition. Kant first discusses one’s self-love, which if healthy, will allow for self-restriction ‘in view of the self-love of others’ (and this is called modesty). ‘Lack of such moderation (lack of modesty)’ says Kant, ‘as regards one’s worthiness to be loved by others is called egotism
person as having a dignity that provides the ground for self-esteem or self-respect 
(Selbstschätzung)\textsuperscript{68} as well as the moral right to respect (Achtung) from all others.\textsuperscript{69} In other words the Formula for Respect of Persons legislates and thus requires from us to think of (literally regard) ourselves and others in a specific way, namely as owning or ‘having a dignity’ that most importantly becomes the reason or ground for self-respect and esteem and furthermore is the reason to claim the moral right to respect from others.

One could say that Sullivan says here that dignity is \textit{something within}, on the basis of which I am \textit{owed} respect. And this respect that is due to me becomes a (i.e., my) moral right. However, if we take seriously his use of the word ‘regard,’ which moreover, occurs in the same context where he stated that the second formula ‘appeals to the self-awareness of moral agents,’\textsuperscript{70} we cannot but conclude that this formulation suggests \textit{(philautia).}\textsuperscript{68} This sentence is important for two reasons because it reveals the mechanism or dynamic of love (self-love), namely worthiness to be loved, and it is, furthermore, a worth based on and requiring a \textit{judgment}. Although Kant does not use the notion of judgment in this sentence, the last sentence of this paragraph reads: ‘Judging something to be worthless is contempt.’ Kant’s reference to judgment (especially in the same context of worthiness) highlights what is actually implied throughout. My question is therefore: do all of these loci confirm that we have to do with a ‘mental operation’ when we talk of dignity or the dynamic of dignity?

\textsuperscript{68} Sullivan deliberately quotes this word (Selbstschätzung). \textit{Schätzung} means among others to guess, estimate, appraise, evaluate, to appreciate, reckon, assess, to treasure and even to value. All of these bespeak a ‘mental’ action involving both reason and judgment. I argue that this takes place in the context of consciousness, and indeed therefore self-consciousness.

\textsuperscript{69} Sullivan 1989, 198. The reference is to MM 462.

\textsuperscript{70} In the first paragraph of this section Sullivan talks about the second formula’s appeal to self-awareness. The very first sentence of the next paragraph is the one under discussion and starts with: ‘The second formula therefore requires us to regard...’ ‘Therefore’ is a concluding concept that links with whatever precedes it. See Sullivan 1989, 198.
that dignity is not the ontologically given-within that grounds respect, but is rather an attitude of (or perhaps, due to) thinking. This attitude of thinking says three things: one, it is a matter of perspective; and two, it is a thought-based attitude present in me, that is, in the one (agent) showing respect; and three, it grounds, in character with the dynamic of self-awareness, respect toward myself, first as shown by me toward myself and second in my expectation that others therefore show respect toward me too. In other words self-awareness (of my dignity) in the context of the second formula unleashes a dynamic of respect, which in terms of a dynamic of reciprocity would lead ultimately to the cultivation of an internal attitude of respect for others. Here I would then respect others because I grant them the respect that I demand from them. Important here are the ideas of reciprocity and of the self-awareness of having dignity that grounds self-respect, which in turn grants me moral entitlement to respect from others as my (moral) right. This ‘reciprocity’ is grounded in reason. Sullivan notes that this is so because (quoting Kant) ‘the way in which every other rational being conceives his existence on the same rational ground which is valid for me.’

Respect is defined by Sullivan as an ‘emotional attitude’ that we are obliged to render to all persons and to express in ‘courteous conduct.’ Sullivan stresses that morality can be based only on reason, but admits that ‘respect or reverence is a special kind of moral feeling that arises irresistibly within us upon recognition of the existence, the nature, and the demands of the moral law.’ For Sullivan this means that in

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71 Quoted from G 429. See Sullivan 1989, 198. See also G 447-48. We see something here of the power of the universality of reason.
addition to the duty to ‘have respect for the moral law in persons’ no one ‘can avoid experiencing moral respect for others as persons.’ 73 While our behavior can be coerced from the outside, respect, as internal disposition, needs cultivation and eventual transformation into action. This disposition or attitude cannot be enforced by an external authority. For Kant the interior obligation to cultivation falls under what he calls ‘a duty of virtue.’ 74

The ‘moral duty’ of ‘respect for persons’ that is for Sullivan equivalent to ‘the unconditional duty to recognize the dignity of persons’ is related to the ‘moral idea of a person, [which] must “be conceived only negatively.”’ 75 By this is meant that the respect owed to the dignified person is “necessary,” universal and moreover deliberately devoid of all and any subjective feelings of attraction or aversion in me with regard to the person (be it friend or foe is immaterial) or any empirical data giving contours to the person in question. ‘All contingent facts about individuals –and our subjective, affective relationships with them–are completely irrelevant both to their inherent value and to the respect we owe them.’ 76 The moral law shows no preferences

73 Sullivan 1989, 198. He is clear that we have respect for the presence of the moral law within persons (as duty), but also adds the experiential dimension. This dimension, I shall argue, is related to our consciousness, which implies also self-consciousness. Sullivan refers to CPrR 77 and MM 399.
75 Sullivan 1989, 199. See also G 437-38.
76 Sullivan 1989, 199. See also G 428, 436; MM 380-81, 385, 395-96, 448 and Collins 357-60, to which Sullivan refers. We see here, at least as I interpret Sullivan, something of the rational, universal and ‘pure’ nature of reason active in the practical realm. Reason does not refer to or seem to relate to the empirical in legislating. See also Collins’ presentation of Kant’s Lectures on Ethics. Kant says, ‘[t]he examples of moral men are standards drawn from experience; the moral law, however, is a standard set by reason’ (Kant, Moral Philosophy: Collins's Lecture Notes 1997, 27:357).
nor does it exclude anyone. Indeed as Sullivan states: “Being a person” is a pure practical idea of reason that is defined in a completely impersonal, formal manner, so that it in effect is equivalent to the requirement of universality in the first formula.\textsuperscript{77}

Given the fact that Kant refrained from discussing how one might identify such a bearer of a moral personality, Sullivan writes, nonetheless, that ‘we obviously must apply that idea to anyone who in our judgment has the power of pure practical reason.’\textsuperscript{78} Human beings are the only beings that can lay claim to having the status to be

\textsuperscript{77} Sullivan 1989, 199. See CPR A 365.

\textsuperscript{78} Sullivan 1989, 199. The implication being in other words that the idea of ‘being a person’ needs to be applied to someone who has the ‘power of pure practical reason.’ Two things need mentioning: one, it requires a power in the person to whom we apply it; and second, before we apply it we make a judgment as to the presence and potency of that power within an individual. Does dignity then rest on these two legs? And if one were to see someone diminished as to their practical reason (for instance, someone who suffers from Alzheimer’s disease) does that imply they are judged as lacking this power and therefore are disqualified from the right to moral behavior in accordance with dignity? Furthermore, does the lack of the power of practical reason or my judgment therefore imply the non-personhood of the individual human being in question? These are critical questions one may put to Kant in testing his notion of dignity.

Relationships between subjects are structured. The type of structure depends on the factors we take into account. And so we might end up by dividing relations into different structural possibilities. Kant sets up a table of division in which he sets out to do precisely this. He identifies four structural possibilities in relations between subjects. What he takes for the determining factor is the relation between the (one) subject ‘imposing obligation’ to the (another) subject placed ‘under obligation.’ This is his way to determine, as he also calls it, the ‘relation of right to duty.’ (Under ‘rights’ Kant understands the ‘capacity for putting others under obligation’; while ‘duty’ is related to ‘the moral imperative, which is a proposition commanding duty.’ Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:239). Kant determines a fourfold division. We might think of these as four sets. The point is then to see which set(s) would have members in them, in other words, which set or division would be one between whose members (i.e., subjects) ‘a relation of right to duty can be thought of (whether admissible or not)’ [emphasis mine]. (Ibid., 6:241). In determining these divisions and their membership Kant asks a question which would be something like this: what is the relation in terms of rights of human beings toward beings that have one, neither rights nor duties; two, that have rights as
called ‘persons’ and thus we owe moral duties to them only. This is on a formal level for
we need not know anything about these individuals personally before or in order to
show them respect. Recognition of their status suffices. Moreover, as Sullivan points
out: ‘The respect owed persons is owed not to the individuals as such but to the
individuals as the bearers of the moral law.’ This insight is central because it links
being a carrier of the moral law as being integral to being a person in the moral sense
and this because of the power of reason that becomes practical. Sullivan talks also of
the ‘disinterested and impersonal character of the notion of personhood’ and this
remains central to the concept.

well as duties; three, that have only duties but no rights; and fourth, towards a being
that has only rights but no duties (God). Three of the sets (divisions) are empty. The set
representing the relation between human beings and those who have ‘neither rights nor
duties’ has no members because (and this pertains to our critical remarks above, which
shows that reason is the crucial attribute) ‘these are beings lacking reason, which can
neither bind us nor by which we can be bound’ (Ibid., 6:241). The second set (or
‘division’) concerns the relation towards beings that have both rights and duties. This set
is the only one that has members and signify the ‘relation of human beings to human
beings.’ Both the third and fourth divisions are empty. The third because it concerns the
relation in terms of rights of human beings towards beings that have only duties and no
rights and these would be human beings ‘without personality (serfs, slaves).’ The fourth
refers to a being that has only rights and no duties (God) and is empty because such a
being ‘at least in philosophy [...] is not an object of possible experience.’ Ibid., 6:241. See
also MM 442-43.

79 Sullivan 1989, 199. See also G 401n, 435; CPrR 77-78, 131-32 as suggested by Sullivan.
‘reverence’ here means following the moral law as a duty for the sake of the moral law
itself.

80 He refers to CPrR (21 and 110) and states that this point can never be overemphasized
because it lays at the ground of Kant’s ideal of a society ‘in which justice is unaffected by
personal relationships’ leading to Kant’s doctrine being described as ‘an ethics for
relations between strangers.’ This is a reversal of traditional Western moral philosophy
that sees the ethical movement as emanating from relationships starting from within
the personal and familial sphere and moving outwards towards public order. Morality’s
primary context for Kant is within human public life. See Sullivan 1989, 199.
Sullivan presents next the fine line Kant walks in the application of respect on the grounds of dignity. On the one hand, there is the respect due to the dignity of the human person that is purely formal and as such related to the concept of person and the moral law all awakened and sustained by reason and her demands. On the other hand, there is the more human, anthropological and psychological dimension that leaves the formal, pure realm and ventures into the realm of human experience with all its contingencies, ambiguities and relativity. In this (realm of experience), duty to the moral law, i.e., the following of the moral law for the sake of the moral law (only), is always the sole guide by which to steer ourselves amidst the world of contingency and confusion, and, similarly, the only actions that have moral worth are those motivated by reverence for the moral law. On a purely human and subjective level, however, we can find many reasons to respect individuals who dutifully exemplify the moral law (for e.g. saints or people who develop their talents) just as we might lose respect for those whom we judge to have a morally bad character. Yet for Kant the fundamental (and formal) respect owed to persons has nothing to do with individual merit or any accomplishment, not even of moral character. For Kant says: ‘I cannot deny all respect to even the immoral man as man, even though by his deed he makes himself unworthy of his humanity.’ This is because, as we showed above, the formal requirements of the second formula demand it. But Kant seems to allow here also for subjective reasons, which although not foundational, are still motivational. In this case he states that no

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81 ‘We have shown,’ writes Kant ‘how neither fear nor inclination, but solely respect for the moral law, is the incentive which can give an action moral worth.’ Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals 1981, 440.

82 Quoted from MM 463, by Sullivan 1989, 199. See also MM 448 and G 401n.
matter how immoral a person may have become, ‘such a person still “sees himself as subject to the law of duty, no matter how obscure his ideas about it may be”; [and as such] he “can never lose all his disposition to good.”’

At this point in my presentation of Sullivan’s systematic exposition of Kant’s understanding of dignity I wish to examine a passage crucial to Sullivan’s reading of Kant on dignity. I want to imagine Sullivan trying to find a question whose answer points unambiguously to the fundamental essence of what is asked about or intended (in this case relating to the dynamic of human dignity). So the question needs to be asked from within a context, which can reveal the level of essence or necessity required in the answer. For instance, to ask concretely about the essential requirements for human life from the point of view of someone living in a third-world country rather than a first world country, will produce an answer that comes closer to the barest essentials. The circumstances can give a clue as to the intention of the question, which in turn would give an indication of the weight of the answer. The context I am setting for Sullivan’s question concerns persons who are immoral, who have lost their respect, people caught up in hateful vice, and, in fact, whose deeds have made them become unworthy of their

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83 Sullivan 1989, 200. Sullivan quotes Kant from Anthr 324 and MM 464. He also refers to MM 379n; G 435, 454-55 and Rel 45. In these Kant writes that within a human being the turn from being evil to being good (i.e., into good) is as inexplicable as the fall from good into evil. This inexplicability is the result of freedom in which the original choice for evil lies. And so he writes: ‘For, in spite of that fall, the command that we ought to become better human beings still resounds unabated in our souls; consequently, we must also be capable of it, even if what we can do is of itself insufficient and, by virtue of it, we only make ourselves receptive to a higher assistance inscrutable to us. – Since we must presuppose in all this that there is still a germ of goodness left in its entire purity, a germ that cannot be extirpated or corrupted.’ Kant, Religion within the boundaries of mere reason (1791) 1996, 6:45.
humanity. Given this context then, I imagine Sullivan asking the question: ‘what gives me hope for humanity? Wherein lies the light of hope because I feel surrounded by darkness?’

If this then is the question, its answer will give us insight into the grounds of hope for humanity’s worth however much evil may abound. Sullivan’s answer, found in a quotation from *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, presents according to my mind a kind of summary of Sullivan’s hope for dignity. And the answer is that regardless of our moral imperfections we all still possess our ‘humanity.’

Kant calls this ‘humanity,’ as Sullivan makes explicit, ‘the “subjective ground” for the possibility of morality’ that is nothing other than our autonomy, which is, in other words, the possession of ‘the power of moral reason (*Wille*).’ This relates at the deepest level to (and also implies) our ‘consciousness of being free’ and because of this consciousness we have a moral personality (that is we are persons) and therefore we have ‘the capacity to develop a morally good will’ [Sullivan’s emphasis].

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84 See Sullivan 1989, 199-200, (esp. 200 for this last quote). Sullivan refers the reader to the following passages: G 431, 428, 436, 437, 440, 454-55; CPrR 77, 87, 131-32; CJ 442-43; Rel 23; Anthr 324. In addition to this last reference he also refers to MM 464, from which I quote. There Kant writes: ‘[T]he censure of vice, which must never break out into complete contempt and denial of any moral worth to a vicious human being; for on this supposition he could never be improved, and this not consistent with the idea of a human being, who as such (as a moral being) can never lose entirely his predisposition to the good.’ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* 1996, 6:463-64. We see here the close association between human being and moral being and the good, and note also the emphasis on improvement. It reminds one of Kant’s insistence on the effort one puts in to achieve virtue. In a further note Sullivan ascribes this disposition to the good in terms of the good will. He writes: ‘This is what Kant had to have meant [in G 445 and CJ 443] by the expression “a good will” (or “willing” – *Willen*): Man is still “subject to” and “under” moral laws even if he does not actually have good character.’ He refers to CJ 448n. Sullivan 1989, 358 n 8.
paragraph draws together many themes and is rich in revealing what Sullivan makes of humanity, personality, autonomy, but also of dignity and its demands. I wish to draw the reader’s attention to the use of words that signify an interior dimension as well as the power or possibility alongside and associated with it. Words like ‘subjective ground,’ ‘possibility of morality,’ ‘possessing the power,’ ‘Wille (will),’ ‘consciousness,’ and, ‘capacity to develop.’ All of these signify and imply an interiority as well as a dynamic process that needs to be enacted in the empirical, experiential, practical realm. This is important to remember because it relates to Sullivan’s understanding of dignity. Just as he is introducing this summary Sullivan writes: ‘None of us is morally perfect but we all still possess the intrinsic and innate basis for respect’ [my emphasis].85 We have already seen that dignity is the basis for respect. Dignity for Sullivan in other words demands respect and grounds it as well and dignity is inherent and associated with the possibility for morality and the process this dynamic requires. He gets this from his reading of the second formula, which as he says, ‘[stresses] the objective and intrinsic worth of persons.’86

The second formula has another ‘equally important’ function in emphasizing why we must be moral.87 And to this Sullivan answers: ‘to live up to the dignity we have by virtue of being rational beings, to sustain the right we and all other persons have to

87 Although Sullivan does not state this explicitly I see a two-fold dimension to motivation here: one being formal in that it provides the foundational or grounding reason for there being morality as such; and the second more psychologically concrete, in that it motivates concrete persons in concrete living to act according to the moral law. To my mind both are present in Sullivan’s understanding.
moral self-esteem.’ As I understand this, it means that the fact (as endowment) and therefore presence of reason yields an inherent dignity that, in virtue of its presence, calls us to live worthily of it (dignity), to live in accordance with it. In my reading of the second part of the sentence – ‘to sustain the right we and all other persons have to moral self-esteem’ – Sullivan repeats what he has just said and adds to it at the same time so as to give it a deeper perspective. He talks of sustaining, which means to continue upholding that which is already there and in this case he uses ‘rights-language’ in saying to uphold the right for ourselves and others to have moral self-esteem.

Although he does not spell this out here, he seems to me to imply the requirement of having a relationship with the self that includes a judgment of worth and respect. In other words this implies self-consciousness. Note again the importance that ‘regard’ or ‘vision’ (esteem) plays. Sullivan explains that in immorally giving in and satisfying our inclinations ‘we violate our integrity’ because we treat both others and ourselves then as ‘mere means’ and thus granting ourselves and others only ‘instrumental value.’ In fact, Sullivan summarizes the positive command of the second formula by quoting Kant: ‘Live according to your nature.’ Sullivan interprets this as meaning ‘to act out of respect for yourself as a moral being.’

89 See Sullivan 1989, 200, who refers also to MM 420, 435, 450.
90 Sullivan (1989, 200) refers to MM 419. Kant there states: ‘The first principle of duty to oneself lies in the dictum “live in conformity with nature” [...] , that is, preserve yourself in the perfection of your nature; the second, in the saying “make yourself more perfect than mere nature has made you” (perfice te ut finem, perfice te ut medium).’ The latter is translated as ‘perfect yourself as an end, perfect yourself as a means.’ See Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:419 n r.
To mean anything the second formula, like the first, needs concrete application. According to Sullivan it is applied to ‘the only persons of whom we have any knowledge – ourselves and our fellow human beings.’\footnote{Sullivan 1989, 200.} Knowledge is a function of reason and although Sullivan does not say this explicitly here, as he does later, it seems to me there is a dynamic of a reciprocity-within-recognition at work, insofar as moral reason extends what goes for me to other persons too. Moreover, moral reason recognizes that all human beings are agents, i.e. persons who are autonomous, initiating actions by acting freely and taking responsibility for these actions. Sullivan adds that moral reason recognizes that all human agents are also both ‘imperfectly rational agents and also moral-physical beings’\footnote{Sullivan 1989, 200. As far as I can tell this is the first time he mentions the bodily dimension, albeit without talking about ‘the body.’ I assume, however, given the context, that moral-physical being refers to a person’s body and according to the context again it seems to me that this recognition implies that the body as well as our imperfect moral nature carry the idea of negativity or imperfection. He also talks also of ‘moral beings with a physical nature’ requiring that we do not commit suicide for instance. See Sullivan 1989, 201. In the next section we shall see, however, that he brings in the body, albeit in a roundabout way, where he forbids suicide. Although, even there it is more because of the presence of life, which implies personality, and which, therefore, is the ‘carrier’ of the moral law. A quick glance through Sullivan’s subject-index will also reveal no mention of the ‘body’ of a person or human being, as such, even though he mentions subjects associated with the body like sensuality, deathbed, impulses and animal nature of a person, animality, and even sex. See Sullivan 1989, 401-413.} and that human agents fall into two classes, the agent \textit{himself} and all others. Kant organizes the duties we have towards persons according to this classification. The positive duties towards ourselves concern our moral perfection; but those towards others concern for the most part their happiness.\footnote{Sullivan (1989, 200) refers to MM 385, 398.}
6. Self-respect

Sullivan introduces this section by noting that there seems to be an inherent contradiction in saying, as Kant does, that we are obliged to fulfil absolute duties to ourselves. If someone is under my (a lawmaker’s) obligation I may relieve him/her from that obligation, yet when it concerns my duty towards myself this is not allowed. It would for Kant ‘destroy all duties’ and the reason is that all duties involve by necessity self-constraint, and if I now relieve myself of duty (and by implication of self-constraint) it would thus affect all other duties as it would attack and weaken the very instrument or agent that perform the duty.\(^{95}\) Kant resolves this conceptual difficulty by saying that in thinking of duties to the self we have to conceive of ourselves as being supersensible beings, i.e., both and at the same time in the noumenal and phenomenal realms. In the noumenal realm we are to think of ourselves as free and in this capacity we legislate the Law of Autonomy with our pure rational reason. And, as natural, sensuous phenomenal beings, we are subject to the laws of nature and experience and also to the very law of Autonomy that we legislate.\(^{96}\) As autonomous agents we legislate in freedom from the noumenal realm; as phenomenal agents we obey dutifully what we legislate.

These duties towards the self are both positive and negative. The negative duties forbid actions that would cause conflict with the ‘humanity in our own person’ (‘an end in itself’); the positive duties help us to grow in harmony with this end, in effect

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\(^{96}\) Sullivan 1989, 200.
becoming it through developing virtue. This is why we need to adopt the maxim that we will do what we ought from the motive of duty. The positive obligation involves negative duties because we are imperfect moral agents. Kant presents three violations that ‘are directly contrary to and violate the inherent dignity’ we have as moral agents – what Kant calls “the dignity of humanity [Menscheit] in our own person.” These three violations are lying, avarice, and servility. Lying and avarice (as greed and miserliness) lead to a harmful denial of our self-respect. Avarice and servility for example violate our self-respect because the value of our existence is reduced through them to becoming mere means either to the accumulation of wealth or to curry another’s favour. For Sullivan these violations disavow our self-respect and as such they underlie ‘every immoral action.’

Given the nature of our beings as a mixture between sensuality (physicality) and morality Kant identifies three positive morally natural ends we are obligated to fulfil: self-preservation, preservation of our species and the development and use of our abilities in order to attain our goals. The point of this, however, is in Sullivan’s words: ‘Since the moral law obliges us to recognize our own absolute, intrinsic worth as rational

⁹⁷ Sullivan 1989, 200 f. He quotes Kant who writes ‘[I]t is not enough that an action should refrain from conflicting with humanity in our own person as an end in itself; it must also harmonize with this end’ (G 430). See also MM 395, 453, 387, 446.
⁹⁸ My own emphasis; pointing again to the ‘inhering (indwelling) character’ of dignity as Sullivan writes about it.
⁹⁹ See Sullivan 1989, 201 who quotes from MM 429 and refers further to MM 403, 420, 429-30.
¹⁰⁰ Sullivan 1989, 201. See also MM 434-47. Sullivan also points out that the prohibition against servility had political implications for Kant’s day. “Be no man’s lackey” [...]
“Bowing and scraping to others” is beneath one’s dignity is Kant and Sullivan’s final word, it seems. See Sullivan 1989, 201 and MM 436-37.
¹⁰¹ See Sullivan 1989, 201 and previous chapter 13 as well as MM 421.
agents, it also requires each of us to protect our life and develop our abilities, not for any prudential advantage this may give us but to “live up to,” “be worthy of,” and “promote” our being persons, our having “humanity.”  

This is an important sentence as it clearly reveals Sullivan’s understanding of the operative or dynamic workings of dignity and of its motivational power, real and psychological. If we put it in our own way we might say dignity originates within the moral law. It requires, indeed demands, from us a certain consciousness or mentality, which involves a recognition of our own absolute (i.e., not comparable to anything calculable in terms of a market value), intrinsic (i.e., belonging to our very own nature and coinciding with an interiority that links to consciousness) worth, or value as rational agents. In other words this worth is directly related to and identifiable with the reason we as human beings are endowed with. However, it is not just reason solely by and in itself (as we might say a computer’s artificial intelligence is ‘rational’), but reason within a context (we might even say rationally ‘embodied’103) and this is reason that goes with agency, i.e., with maxims acting in relation to reason. In this sense reason just by itself means and accomplishes nothing. Of necessity it is associated with and requires agency. In other words reason becomes practical. Agents imply, moreover, also acting on behalf of something, and in this case we act on behalf of reason – a maxim that gives us the

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102 Sullivan 1989, 201 with references to MM 387, 391-92, 444-45 and G 430.
103 This would however not be Sullivan’s phrase of choice. I get the phrase from Susan Shell’s book *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community* (1996). If we were to insist on this phrase to make the point clear that here there is something more than just reason in and by itself, we might talk of a rational embodiment. This is because when reason becomes practical it necessarily implies agency.
moral law. So, in effect we are agents of the moral law, i.e., our dignity lies in the fact that we are agents of the moral law. Because of all this, it (i.e., this dignity) requires from us that we protect our lives and develop our abilities. But Sullivan presents the motivation – not because of the intelligent advantage this may hold for us but because of a two-fold obligation. First, it is our duty and secondly, it is the vehicle through which we answer to our dignity. In other words in order to become worthy agents of the moral law, which would be to answer to our calling, we need to harken to these preparatory obligations as they set the conditions for living and for expressing our dignity. Dignity becomes then the motivation and end. We see here how dignity itself becomes an ethical motivation, something like the law that puts us under obligation to ourselves but for its own purposes, namely to safeguard its own realization. The motivation requires us to engage in this process, which has a dynamic that seems never-ending, insofar as it is not something we can accomplish once for all. We strive towards it but it remains ahead of us. To my mind this seems to be the meaning of the phrases like: ‘to live up to,’ or to ‘be worthy of,’ and to ‘promote’ our dignity. Finally, Sullivan describes dignity here in terms of the notions it is most closely associated with, namely our ‘being persons’ and our ‘having humanity.’

The positive obligations entail negative ones and regard our physical nature. Although Sullivan treats here of suicide and of unnatural sexual activity, the reasons are related to self-respect and us not treating ourselves as means but always as ends in ourselves. Committing suicide to avoid pain would be an example of treating ourselves merely as a means, as would gratuitous sexual pleasure. The point is to safeguard ‘the
ability to be an end-in-oneself,’ and so ‘to act rationally and morally.’ Kant’s concern is to conserve the conditions that would allow for ‘conduct [...] “compatible with the maintenance [emphasis mine] of humanity as an end in itself,”’ [and] “with the promotion of this end.” Both suicide and sexual activity relate to the body, even though, as we said before, it seems Sullivan does not name it thus explicitly. He talks about our physical nature and this could refer to our body, but also to our being subject to the natural laws of physics in the phenomenal realm. But, as I mentioned above, all of this assumes the presence of the body. Sullivan actually quotes Kant in saying: ‘Man cannot [i.e., may not] renounce his personality as long as he is a subject of duty, hence as long as he lives,’ and then he adds relating to suicide ‘even [...] to avoid the madness at the time inevitably caused by rabies.’ We have here the duty to preserve the body since life and body coincide. In this quote personality is related to being a subject of duty (which relates to the moral law). So, as long as we are subject to duty we have to preserve our bodily integrity. Dignity and duty seem here to be related to each other although again Sullivan does not say this explicitly here. We might ask here, and in the sections to follow, what have these ethical duties and discussions to do with dignity? The point is, however, to see that for Sullivan they are inherently connected to dignity.

104 See Sullivan 1989, 201. See also G 429; MM 420, 423, 427-28; Collins 342-44.
105 Sullivan 1989, 202. For Kant’s quotes see G 430.
106 Sullivan 1989, 202. Quoted from MM 422; see also 423.
7. Our own happiness

We have the right to pursue pleasure and happiness as long as these do not conflict with the moral law. In fact, we cannot avoid the concern for our own wellbeing. According to Kant’s third formula happiness is our highest natural good and forms an essential part of ‘our total final good.’ This does not mean, however, that we are to pursue our happiness as our end as a ‘direct duty.’ ‘Duty’ for Kant involves the effort of a real struggle against our selves to rein in these very selves with their wayward desires, so something like happiness, so attuned to our natural selves, cannot be called or identified with duty. ‘What we will inevitably and spontaneously does not come under the concept of duty, which is necessitation to an end we adopt reluctantly,’ says Kant.

All the same, we do have an indirect duty to nurse our own happiness. Kant provides four conditions: if it makes the task of the good will easier; if it removes the obstacles that would tempt us into not performing our duties (like poverty for example); if we are convinced we deserve happiness that we do not have; and lastly, if our state in life becomes unhappy to such a degree that even self-love does not

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108 As quoted by Sullivan 1989, 203 from MM 386; see also MM 387, 451; G 399; CPrR 37 and Rel 6. Sullivan adds elsewhere another reason. The Formula of Autonomy requires the exclusion of any determining influence from outside of our own reason, including happiness or what makes us feel good or bad, ‘the only kind of restraint consistent with our freedom is self-constraint, self-control imposed by our own reasoning.’ See Sullivan 1989, 166.
110 Sullivan refers to G 393.
111 Sullivan refers to MM 388; see also CPR 93. For a positive formulation see MM 452 and 216.
112 Sullivan refers to CPR 110-11.
motivate us anymore (to care for our health, for instance) then we are to search for an increase in happiness as a prudent step.\textsuperscript{113}

The key and rule remains nonetheless that ‘it is not my happiness but the preservation of my moral integrity that is my end and also my duty’ and again ‘the end is not the agent’s happiness but his morality.’\textsuperscript{114} Our direct obligation requires us to do our duty but to fulfil our obligation to achieve moral perfection we may employ all that would prudentially help us achieve this aim.\textsuperscript{115}

\textbf{8. Respect for others}

Sullivan begins this section with reference to the ‘law of consistency.’ This relates to the Formula of Autonomy operative in the dynamic of setting maxims that determine the Categorical Imperative, which is a norm of self-constraint,\textsuperscript{116} an effort central to humanity’s moral project. This dynamic of the Formula of Autonomy requires its maxims to serve as objective laws analogous\textsuperscript{117} to the laws of nature. In a technical sense it does not matter for Kant whether these are the laws of physics (physical nature) or not. He is

\textsuperscript{113} Sullivan refers to MM 399.
\textsuperscript{114} See Sullivan 1989, 203 quoting from MM 388.
\textsuperscript{115} Sullivan warns that Kant’s notion of indirect duties should be read against the background of his doctrine on mixed motivation. See also Sullivan 1989, 359 n 12, 117-130 esp. 112-114.
\textsuperscript{116} See Sullivan 1989, 165-66. According to Sullivan ‘the most fundamental requirement of the first formula,’ that ‘supreme principle of right,’ is ‘that we act autonomously and respect the right and obligation of everyone else to do the same.’ Ibid., 165.
\textsuperscript{117} Kant actually talks of ‘the form of the laws in the phenomenal world,’ meaning their likeness in terms of their universal validity, as ‘[a] “typic” or type or model of what \textit{any} nature must be like.’ See Sullivan 1989, 167.
concerned with the nature of laws; and a law, in order to be a law, needs to be universal: ‘Genuine laws are all alike in that they all hold without exception. If they did not do so, they simply would not be laws,’ writes Sullivan.\textsuperscript{118} In addition laws must also be consistent with each other. If this were not the case and things did not happen with regularity and laws were in continual conflict with each other the world would be ‘chaotic and self-destructive.’\textsuperscript{119} We can understand because all things are governed by laws. This universality, which is essential to any law’s being law, includes also necessity and consistency. These constitute the law-like character of laws and Kant calls it the \textit{form} of the laws. That is why the Formula for Autonomy could also be called the Formula of Universal Law. This establishes the procedural norm for moral judgment, namely that our maxims ‘fit together coherently and with harmony (\textit{Einstimmigkeit}) in a moral world.’\textsuperscript{120}

For Sullivan the second formula of the Categorical Imperative is a ‘practical version’ of the law of consistency. It is also a law of justice, and commands us to respect all other humans. Relating it to the law of consistency gives us pause because it necessitates (and if I give to Sullivan words he does not use) a certain reciprocity built into the moral law insofar as consistency demands that what counts for me, also counts, likewise and to the same degree, for others. This is easier to see when he speaks of a law of justice: ‘Just as we have a right to self-respect and to the respect of all others, so

\textsuperscript{118} Sullivan 1989, 166.
\textsuperscript{119} Sullivan 1989, 166. One can see here the dynamic at work in Kant’s testing of maxims as expressed in the dynamic of the first formula: if it becomes a universal law, how would the world look like?
\textsuperscript{120} See Sullivan 1989, 167. Sullivan refers among others to G 421, 424, 437; CPrR 67-70, 43.
too they have an equal right to our respect.'\textsuperscript{121} He adds another reason too, namely, that it is simply ‘by virtue of being a person [that] every person is “equal with all others.”’\textsuperscript{122}

For Kant this ‘\textit{moral} attitude of respect’ ought not be confused with the ‘\textit{prudential} honor and respect’ shown to the aristocracy and powerful. Quoting Kant he writes: ‘The concept of the respect we are obligated to show other men ... is only a negative duty. I am not obligated ... to show [others] positive high esteem. The only reverence to which I am naturally obligated is reverence for the law as such; and to reverence the law is man’s universal and unconditional duty to others, which each of them can demand as the respect originally due him.’\textsuperscript{123}

The Law of Autonomy thus wants us to recognize that all other persons ‘have objective value and that they therefore are, negatively, “the supreme limiting condition of all subjective ends.”’\textsuperscript{124} In another quote from the \textit{Groundwork} we see how this law for respect acts as a limiting rein to our own relative and random ends. Here we see how Kant grounds this in our very nature as rational beings. Sullivan quotes Kant as follows: ‘A rational being, as by his very nature an end and consequently an end in himself, must serve for every maxim as a condition limiting all merely relative and

\textsuperscript{121} Sullivan 1989, 203.
\textsuperscript{122} See Sullivan 1989, 203 and also MM 451, 468.
\textsuperscript{123} See Sullivan 1989, 203. Quoted from MM 467-68. See also MM 449, 464-65.
\textsuperscript{124} Sullivan 1989, 204. See also G 431. Here another dimension of \textit{objective} (value) is presented, namely that of being a yard-stick with fixed measurements that in practise, i.e., in the dynamic determining the categorical imperative in accordance with the second formula, limits all subjective ends. It does this because it is the limiting condition (in that it provides the objective yard-stick). It is that ‘objectivity’ against which we measure, and that in fact makes measuring possible.
arbitrary ends.\textsuperscript{125} The reference to rationality is important because for Sullivan it means we have to treat others ‘as morally responsible agents,’ meaning that their actions are to be understood and judged in terms of their rational choices. This places on us the responsibility then to respect their autonomy. Concretely it implies that in the pursuit of our own happiness we should restrict ourselves and never treat others as mere means to our ends – something that would ‘endanger or violate’ their autonomy and self-respect.\textsuperscript{126} This includes both attitudes as well as actions: envy, ingratitude, malice, pride, being vengeful, slander, giving scandal, ridicule and contempt.\textsuperscript{127} Denigrating others by these attitudes or actions or by promoting our own interests and well-being is at heart a refusal to ‘recognize that they have a dignity equal to ours by virtue of the presence of the same Law of Autonomy in their reason as in our own.’\textsuperscript{128} Here we have Sullivan’s succinct statement bringing together rationality that harbors the presence of the (same) Moral Law within each person that grants them as for us (reciprocal and equal) dignity.

In the \textit{Groundwork} Kant presents four examples or test cases by means of which he illustrates the practical applicability of the formulas. When it comes to the second formula\textsuperscript{129} he shows how these moral examples, for instance, like the deception involved in making false promises, in effect treat others \textit{only} as things and as means

\textsuperscript{125} Sullivan (1989, 204) quoting G 436.
\textsuperscript{126} Sullivan 1989, 204. Sullivan here brings autonomy and self-respect into relationship with each other. See also G 437 and MM 424, 449.
\textsuperscript{127} Of which Kant writes ‘that demands from others a respect which it denies them’ MM 465, as quoted by Sullivan 1989, 359 n 13. He refers also to MM 458-61, 464-68, 474; Collins 435-44.
\textsuperscript{128} Sullivan 1989, 204.
\textsuperscript{129} G 429-30.
according to the deceiver’s ends and not in a way to which he himself would assent if he truly respected himself. This applies equally to violence and theft, etc. Sullivan notes that in Kant’s treatment he appeals to the second of his ‘dialectical rules’ for getting to the truth, including moral truth. This rule forces one to ‘think from the standpoint of every other person’ and more specifically as a rational person and not as a person with desires.\textsuperscript{130}

Some have taken this as Kant’s version of the Golden Rule.\textsuperscript{131} Sullivan is clear, however, that Kant never intended the Categorical Imperative to be simply an interpretation of the Golden Rule. In fact, he argued that, stated negatively, the Golden Rule contained crucial flaws. For one, since it cannot ground duties to the self, it is focussed solely on how to treat others; second, it cannot ground positive duties because it insists neither on respect due to others nor on duties of benevolence owed them; and

\textsuperscript{130} See Sullivan 1989, 204. These rules are simply (1) to think for oneself; (2) to think from a standpoint of every other person; and (3) to think consistently. These are related to autonomy and would have it that autonomy as ideal is both impersonal and social. Taken together these are nothing but a ‘restatement of the Law of Autonomy in the form of the Categorical Imperative.’ See Sullivan 1989, 59. As Sullivan puts it in the context of the discussion, it means ‘acting only on maxims that can be willed as universal laws in a morally good world.’ (Sullivan 1989, 204). As for dialectical rules Sullivan refers also to CJ 294; Logic 367/63; Anthr 228. The best place to apply these actively would be in an open and public forum where the debate includes the testing of a person, a group or even a culture’s ideas as to their truth from the standpoint of others and especially using the Categorical Imperative. This is one way of guarding against cultural relativism. It is noteworthy that Kant thought that ‘thinking, even thinking for oneself (Selbstdenken), is virtually impossible without the ability to communicate and discuss one’s thinking with others.’ See Sullivan 1989, 319 n 27.
third, as regards negative duties to others, its very vagueness is sufficient to see it merely as a norm of prudential reciprocity.\textsuperscript{132}

Implicit to reason is the setting of goals and this is also reflected in Kant’s presentation of the positive duties we have toward others. Each human being has two necessary goals (ends). As a moral being each person is under obligation to pursue his/her own virtue (i.e., our moral well-being or perfection). Yet our physical nature drives us to seek our own happiness (i.e., our natural well-being). We have no positive obligation to take on the responsibility for another’s virtue because this is something each has to do for him/herself. As Sullivan puts it: ‘Only the individual person can respect him- or herself and adopt the end of virtue.’\textsuperscript{133} Our only negative obligation is to refrain from tempting others through scandalous example to act immorally.\textsuperscript{134} Sullivan, however, suggests that we modify Kant’s position here somewhat because the point is not whether we ‘can make another person virtuous’ (which we cannot), but rather whether we can ‘have an effect on the moral character of another,’ which we can. In fact this falls within the stated purpose of Kant as to why he wrote the \textit{Groundwork}: in order to ‘help others make correct moral judgments.’\textsuperscript{135} His many other writings serve the same educational purposes.

\textsuperscript{132} Sullivan 1989, 204.
\textsuperscript{133} Sullivan 1989, 205. Sullivan refers also to MM 393-94. Sullivan phrases this in terms of self-respect that grounds and motivates the adoption of pursuing the end of virtue. When this is understood in its relation to dignity, I take it that Sullivan sees dignity as a grounding and motivating factor in pursuing and living the moral life and its resulting perfection or virtue.
\textsuperscript{134} See Sullivan 1989, 205 and refers also to MM 394 and 464.
With regard to our other end, our search for happiness, Sullivan writes that even when refraining from using others for our own ends, we still have an obligation ‘of “inner freedom” to show positive respect for them as moral-physical beings by adopting their end of happiness, insofar as we can, as if it were our own.’\(^{136}\) Because the furtherance of our own happiness is inevitable, we have no duty towards ourselves in this regard. In addition we do not normally care for others’ happiness unless we have strong altruistic feelings and this can easily tempt us, in the name of our own happiness, to disregard others’ rightful interests and concerns. Since the maxims of the Categorical Imperative bespeak only universal laws, we are ‘morally entitled’ to further our own happiness (within the bounds of morality) only if we ‘also emphatically identify with, and contribute to, others’ pursuit of morally permissible happiness.’\(^{137}\) Sullivan adds that the moral obligation to contribute to others’ happiness depends on the impersonal Idea of personhood and not on the actual happiness of others’ being of any personal concern to me.\(^{138}\) This is summarized by Kant as the ‘law of love.’\(^{139}\)

This ‘law of love’ takes love to mean ‘moral love’ and not a feeling or inclination, for, according to Kant, one cannot ‘love someone merely on command’\(^{140}\). Neither can one legislate sympathy (emotional empathy). The issue is that, just as duties themselves cannot be based on feelings, we also have no duties to have such feelings.\(^{141}\) Moral love,

\(^{136}\) Sullivan 1989, 205. He refers to MM 450, 488.

\(^{137}\) Sullivan 1989, 205. See also CPrR 34; MM 387-89, 393, 451.

\(^{138}\) Sullivan 1989, 205. He refers to G 441.

\(^{139}\) Sullivan 1989, 205.

\(^{140}\) See Sullivan 1989, 206; quoting CPrR 83.

\(^{141}\) See Sullivan 1989, 206. He refers to MM 456; Collins 413-14; Ed 487. To illustrate the point I quote from the latter. ‘Morality is a matter of character. Sustine et abstine
like moral respect, is ‘a practical attitude of the will’ towards others through which we ‘take pleasure in their happiness and feel pain because of their suffering.’ This happens without any regard to feelings of affection. Sullivan says that although it might seem that moral love is an imperfect, wide version of respect, it does go further than the demand for ‘strict justice’ in that it ‘positively requires’ from us to develop kindness, which Kant defines as a ‘habit of harmony with all other men.’ This inculcates in us a concern for the matter of others’ will, which Sullivan defines as their wishes, desires and needs. Developing this ‘genuinely benevolent attitude’ towards all others, instead of indifference, will result in our taking satisfaction in their well-being and happiness. This requires that we take this benevolence on as a maxim. Negatively, it forbids us to ‘refuse to wish anyone well.’ And as Sullivan points out, according to the moral requirement of universal law, ‘it is morally permissible for us to be benevolent toward ourselves only if we also are benevolent to every other human being as well.’

Benevolence on its own, however, is not enough. To mean anything it must be practical and it means ‘adopting a maxim of beneficence – of acting benevolently – not from inclination or affection for others but from duty.’ Concretely this means we should make and accept the legitimate ends of others, ‘which can be summed up under the

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title of their happiness [emphasis mine],’ as our own mandatory end by fostering their well-being without an eye to what we may gain.\textsuperscript{146}

The ground for the moral imperative to be beneficent and benevolent lies in the demand given by the second formula that Sullivan formulates as follows: ‘morally acceptable maxims must be able to serve as laws in a moral world in which persons are given the respect they deserve.’\textsuperscript{147}

Sullivan looks next at Kant’s discussion in the \textit{Groundwork} of the fourth example\textsuperscript{148} (of the maxim of not asking for, or giving, any help) in the light of the second formula. Admitting that such a world where this maxim would be law is conceivable, it nonetheless falls short of the full force implied by the maxim of benevolence and respect. It is very respectful to refrain from all interference in another’s pursuit of happiness but the other side, as we have seen (where we are obliged to go so far as to ‘sacrifice part of our own well-being for others’), which includes our actions in order to promote their ends is not addressed. And as we have seen, beneficence to self is reciprocally dependent upon beneficence to others.\textsuperscript{149}

The right to happiness is proportionate to one’s morality (i.e., adherence to the Moral Law). So how do I act toward someone who seems not to be moral? Kant states

\textsuperscript{146} See Sullivan 1989, 206 with refernces to MM 387-88, 391-93, 401-2, 441, 449-52.
\textsuperscript{147} Sullivan 1989, 206.
\textsuperscript{148} In the \textit{Groundwork} Kant presents four test cases which illustrate duties to oneself and to others. He uses these as examples illustrating how one would apply his theories. The examples, if one were to put them in question format, would be whether it is permissible (1) to commit suicide when one is in despair; (2) to make false promises out of dire need; (3) to neglect cultivating one’s talents; and (4) to receive no help from anybody, nor offer anybody help. See G 421-423.
\textsuperscript{149} See Sullivan 1989, 207.
that since it is only an omniscient being that could use that norm to judge, we, who cannot even judge our own or others’ virtue, should not let that guide us. ‘We need to be very careful about refusing to help others we are tempted to judge to be not morally worthy of our help.’\textsuperscript{150} Barring small children and the mentally ill, in appropriating the ends of others as our own and helping them achieve their desires, respect demands from us to ‘take into account what they need and want, what they count as making them happy.’\textsuperscript{151} But should we disagree with their judgments, we are not under obligation to ‘follow their wishes’ unless the demands of justice require a particular help.\textsuperscript{152} Helping others obliges them to gratitude, so our help should always be such as to allow them to keep their self-respect and it should never damage their ability (or duty) to be self-determining.\textsuperscript{153}

The positive obligation to benevolence is a ‘wide and imperfect duty’\textsuperscript{154} and as such we are to adopt and act according to ‘the maxim of practical benevolence.’ This does not require from us the total sacrifice of our well-being in order to advance that of others. Were we to sacrifice our all for the sake of helping others, we would risk falling prey to losing all and becoming subject to a similar need of help. That would render such a maxim self-contradictory. With limited ‘resources and power’ we cannot help all in equal fashion. Only an infinite God can do this. In the end universal benevolence does

\textsuperscript{150} Sullivan 1989, 207.
\textsuperscript{151} Sullivan 1989, 207. He refers to MM 388, 393, 468.
\textsuperscript{152} Sullivan 1989, 207. See also MM 388 and 454.
\textsuperscript{153} Sullivan 1989, 360 n 18. He refers also to MM 448, 450 and 453-54.
not oblige us to ‘be benevolent toward everyone equally, except by minimal well-wishing.’

We may have specific duties of beneficence towards some people but these cannot be determined beforehand in an a priori way. Thus they are not so much ‘principles of obligation’ as ‘rules modified according to the differences of the subjects to whom we apply the principle of virtue (on its formal side) in cases that arise in experience (the material).’ Contrary to the demand of justice the positive duty to beneficence is indeterminate as it can be applied in many ways, times, and to many or even one person. This leads Sullivan to say that the use of this maxim cannot admit ‘to any a priori and universal claims’ since it ‘depends too heavily on empirical factors.’

Taking account of empirical factors is in this case neither bad nor prohibited. As Sullivan puts it: ‘Kant again shows his common sense as well as his sensitivity to ordinary moral convictions by holding that we can make such decisions rationally and rightly only by

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155 Sullivan 1989, 207. Regarding duties of benevolence, Sullivan (1989, 360 n 19) states elsewhere that people often refer to these as the ground for rights. In a fuller treatment of this Sullivan (Ibid., 246 ff.) links rights to reason and to the notion of person that ‘has humanity,’ which in terms of the second formula is constitutive for dignity. In other words, the Categorical Imperative in these terms is ‘mandating us to treat everyone “in accordance with their dignity.”’ Ibid., 1989, 248. In terms of Kant’s liberal political philosophy, civil law enshrines a ‘juridical condition’ that ‘protects each each person’s freedom by protecting everyone’s freedom.’ Sullivan writes: ‘Just as Kant had championed the dignity of individual persons in the second formula by focusing on the impersonal moral law within them, so in his political theory he defends the rights of each citizen by focusing not on specific individuals and their desires but on a system of impersonal laws, a system of negative legislation that provides the purely formal juridical condition for the political social union.’ Ibid., 248.

156 Sullivan 1989, 208, quoting from MM 468 and referring also to 393 and 452.

157 Sullivan 1989, 208. See also MM 448, 468, 469, 393.
taking empirical facts and possible consequences into consideration.'\textsuperscript{158} What is called for is prudence in one’s judgments.

Kant also does not give guidance as to which features of others should be taken into account when determining the nature of help to be given. All differences in social rank, age, sex, health, economic standing, education, and even personality may be considered. He does say however that we are generally obliged to ‘to show greater benevolence to those closest to us.'\textsuperscript{159} Sullivan notes that he does not define this closeness. Depending on the situation it might vary from kinship to friendship to those with whom we share similar ideas or cultures. However, since we are closest to ourselves we are not bound ‘literally to love others as we love ourselves; [and] ‘even according to duty” we are morally permitted to tend to our own needs first.'\textsuperscript{160}

9. Concluding remarks

Sullivan takes the articulation of the second formula as the Formula for the Respect of the Dignity of Persons as the classic expression of Kant’s position on human dignity. In the first place it is part of the Moral Law and as such an alternative expression

\textsuperscript{158} Sullivan 1989, 208.
\textsuperscript{159} Sullivan 1989, 208. See also MM 451-52.
\textsuperscript{160} Sullivan 1989, 208. This seems somehow at odds with what we said earlier, namely that there is a reciprocity insofar as we cannot expect to be beneficent with ourselves unless we are such with others, and also that we are to sacrifice ourselves to some degree also for the sake of others. The point however is to see that Kant is balancing issues that would not be helpful to force into an either-or logic. We are to apply prudential judgment and that is in keeping with dignity.
of the Categorical Imperative. It carries within it the notion of the human person who
has responsibility and this is related to his rationality that sets ends and in practical form
also sets moral demands. Being a person in this context means to treat one’s
personhood as an end and never as a means towards some other end. In this lies our
value which cannot be measured. Reason has however more to it than my own nature:
in fact it has a universalizing tendency and, when it enters the realm of experience, it
also lets me see that what goes for me also goes for another. This dynamic is important.
The formula requires respect, and involved in this is a reciprocal dynamic, which
requires me to respect myself. This (self respect) is the foundational starting point of the
reciprocity. Central to this attitude is the ground for this respect which is my worth as a
person, that is my dignity. Dignity has a formal dimension but also an emotional or
experiential dimension and here, even though the law demands from her subjects
obedience without reference to personal feelings, we are allowed to pursue our own
happiness within limits. The ultimate expression of dignity treats all people with the
respect that is their due as human persons. In this I am to make some sacrifices. And so
my formal dignity becomes existential and I become dignified, so to speak,

\textit{phenomenologically}. Throughout, dignity is seen as an inner value, one that determines
me and is used as an equivalent for the humanity in my person. As such it has no equal
and it also grounds moral behavior towards myself and others. In keeping with the
nature of reason as setting ends, humanity sets virtue as its end. This can, however, only
be done on an individual level. Respect is expressed in treating myself and others as
ends-in-ourselves. Respect, however needs concrete expression, which is why, for Sullivan, in my relation to others it requires beneficent behavior and love.

To be sure, Sullivan identifies ‘some serious problems’ with the second formula’s ability to help us clarify and organize our moral duties. Some of these relate to moral issues, and that they are treated here shows Sullivan’s mind as to the approximation between dignity and morality.

Sullivan identifies problems with regard to respect (as emotion) and the danger of falling prey to sentimentality. The notion of the good is problematic especially if we need to distinguish between the moral good and the natural good. This prevents one from giving a clear answer when faced, for example, with a question like ‘what is the value of human life?’ Illustrating this complexity Sullivan says: ‘In Kant’s theory, human life is not automatically equivalent to personhood; and insofar as it is simply a natural good, it is not in itself an absolute good. In most cases, the promotion of virtue may require, as we have seen, the protection of one’s life and health; but in some other circumstances endangering and even sacrificing one’s life may be morally obligatory.’

There are other issues he raises both with regard to the distinctions between harm and moral wrong and the importance of judgment in these matters. The fact that we are not given clear guidelines has led to deep divisions among Kantian scholars. Technological advances complicate matters especially with regard to issues of birth, life and death. Most problematic, perhaps, is the lack of clarity as to who belongs to the ‘class of persons.’ As Sullivan points out, the resolution of some moral problems requires a clear

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answer to that question. Failing that, the moral quandaries remain. As he states it
‘[t]here are no empirical facts that can function as identifying criteria for the purely
rational Idea of a person.’\textsuperscript{163} To my mind this highlights a problem we identified earlier,
namely the absence of the real body in terms of human dignity.

In the next chapter we shall focus on Susan Shell’s account of Kant’s notion of
dignity.

Chapter Two: Susan Shell on Kant and Human Dignity

Prelude

Shell’s explicitly stated approach to Kant’s works is to present a deep unity between the man and his thought; and insofar as his thought goes, to see the unity between man and nature and between Kant’s political philosophy and his philosophy as a whole.¹ In a later work Shell talks about Kant’s insight into ‘the perplexity intrinsic to our awareness of ourselves as worldly or embodied beings.’² This perplexity is sharpened because Kant fully engages his time, a time that gave birth to the modern notions of nature as well as the human subject. ‘Attention to this insight’ she writes ‘reveals an intellectual career more unified in its fundamental concerns than has generally been recognized; and it makes possible a deeper understanding of Kant’s relation to later intellectual movements, whose insights he anticipates and in some important ways surpasses. Additionally, and not least, it brings to light the image of an

¹ Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 5-7. Indeed she writes about the basis of this unity being man himself. Anthropology is thus the tie that keeps all the threads united. Distinguishing her aproach from some others she writes: ‘It differs from several modern rights-centered theories of justice (inspired by Kant) in that Kant attempts, as these modern authors do not, to provide his theory with a metaphysical basis supported by and supportive of his understanding of human experience generally. Many modern authors try to keep their moral and juridical claims free from both “epistemology” and dependence on natural facts, as if the realms of nature and freedom were, as Kant implies, entirely separable. But as Kant also states, these two realms are joined, however mysteriously, by a common inhabitant – man.’ Ibid., 7.
extraordinarily focussed human being, for whom philosophizing and living at its most mundane converged to a remarkable degree. Kant’s greatness lies, at least in part, in a singularity of purpose – a self-imposed attentiveness – by which, in aiming to found philosophy as a systematic science, he also, and not incidentally, expressed and fashioned his own character. [...] Herder accused his former teacher of trying to give spiritual birth to himself. More positively and accurately assayed, Kant’s systematizing efforts go together with – and in a nontrivial sense constitute – a lifelong self-experiment. To this extent, Kant’s life can be (and was, evidently, by him) regarded as a “masterpiece.” In overstepping, then, the usual boundaries between textual and biographical analysis, I claim special warrant – one justified, I hope, by the results.’³

Shell’s special gift is her ability to bring the human Kant to the fore in a way that reveals his personal searching in congruity with his most profound philosophy; and she does this in a way that shows how it all seems to flow from a profound integrity to which he remained true all his life. In this she presents his whole life as an expression of his thought and vice versa.⁴ Reading Shell impresses one with a conviction that Kant’s whole life and purpose was to search for and (once found) to live and express his inherent dignity as a human person. Indeed it is the dignity of man as man, a dignity that is somehow a hallmark of what it means to be human. If Sullivan thought Kant dry and

⁴ As she warns elsewhere: ‘I do not mean to reduce Kant’s thought to the contingencies of his biography (although the necessity of such contingency is, for Kant, throughout his life, [...] a critical issue). My aim is rather to help uncover the concerns that push him towards romanticism and at the same time prevent his yielding to it. Romanticism has been characterized as a “longing to believe.”’ See Shell, Kant as Propagator: Reflections on Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime 2002, 466.
not really a man of flesh and blood, in Shell we shall meet a Kant fully human. The lens through which she interprets him is anthropological.

After the introduction we shall look at Shell’s interpretation of the early Kant as it bears upon the search for dignity. We look at the roots of the problematic that gives rise to this search and see how Kant tried to resolve it. He lays the foundation of his mature philosophy. We turn next to her article on human dignity and then look at dignity and autonomy, dignity and value, reason and end-setting, followed by the implications of Kant’s concept of human dignity for ethics and politics. Next we discuss her understanding of history as the dimension which reveals the collective worth of human existence and end with her evaluation and concluding remarks.

1. Introduction

In asking the question: What does it mean to speak of ‘human dignity,’ Shell at the same time limits the scope of the dignity concerned here and perhaps also provides the measure of such dignity and its meaning. This is seen in her qualification of the question. She asks: ‘what does it mean to speak of “human dignity” or the dignity of man as man?’\(^5\) It is not obvious that dignity refers only to humanity. In the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, talks about the ‘dignity of God the Father’ vis-à-vis the ‘dignity of the Son.’\(^6\) The dignity of the species refers to the being of what the species is - no more and no less. Dignity stated thus is nothing else but the full

measure of man as man. In other words, a full description of our humanity set against ourselves and not measured against the divine (or any other) will be equivalent to human dignity. It is thus assumed that mankind has dignity or is dignified in its being man, i.e., human. It says something of the essence of the humanity of man. This emphasis on the dignity of the human being in his/her concrete humanity, is to my mind the unique gift and contribution of Shell’s scholarship with regard not only to human dignity but also to Kant. If, as we heard above from Sullivan, Kant can seem to be dauntingly devoid of flesh and blood, we will meet within the pages of Shell, a Kant very human, and indeed, all too human. It is this human Kant that Shell brings to word and through which she presents the dignity of the human person. In this, she presents his doctrine almost as if flowing from his autobiography and as such dignity becomes linked to anthropology, and in fact in line with his whole philosophy as a sort of spiritual discipline.7

It is with this methodology in mind that we should not be surprised that Shell then takes a special interest in the early works of Kant. In fact there she finds much that is present, even if as a seed, that would bloom into the mature Kant’s notion of human

7 Shell talks of the ‘wavering course of Kant’s ambiguous spiritual ascent.’ See Shell, The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community 1996, 35. This notion of the ‘spiritual’ is explicitly stated by Shell even in the opening paragraphs of her first work. She sees this as Kant’s own project. ‘Kant set himself the difficult task of recovering and reasserting the spiritual assurances which science seemed irrevocably to destroy.’ Then she adds what is very important, namely, ‘Human spiritedness is the vehicle of this spiritual recovery.’ This is pivotal, because for Kant process is not merely theoretical but in fact spiritual, i.e., anthropologically existential, involving the whole man in his whole being and not only in his reflections but especially in his acting and actions. See Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s Philosophy and Politics 1980, 3.
dignity. For this reason we shall take a detour into her retrieval of this notion and its context in the early Kant. Shell has written extensively on this subject, so our detour will not do her justice, but at least we hope to show how dignity came to be a core concern for Kant and how it remained with him throughout his career.

2. Interlude I: The Roots of the Question in the Early Kant

One of the strengths of Shell is that she incorporates the early and pre-critical works of Kant into her interpretation. In these she sees the precursor to the later critical Kant.8 Although she shows how the concept of dignity is present in these early writings she does not go fully into them in her article on which I base this chapter. I shall therefore refer very briefly to some themes she mentions in her other works. These themes undergo a transformation in Kant’s later critical period, but more importantly for us, they provide a backdrop as they form part of the imagination and vocabulary, implicit and explicit, associated with human dignity as perceived by the mature Kant. This is merely an interlude and does not claim to be a thorough treatment. Such a treatment with regard to dignity would of course be fascinating.9

9 Shell has done a lot of work in this area and it seems to me, at least, as if dignity is a prominent presence throughout. See for instance Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980; Shell, The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community 1996; Shell, Kant as Propagator: Reflections on Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime 2002; Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009.
‘The predominating concern of Kant’s thought’ according to Shell ‘is the reconciliation of nature, scientifically understood, with the requirements of moral life.’

In fact, Kant began his career as a philosopher of nature with special regard to Newtonian mechanical physics. His engagement with the world of science and its relation to God, metaphysics, spirit and nature/matter, Leibniz, Wolff, Hume and the philosophy of the day laid the foundation for his later work. It provided not only the matter for his imagination but also the many intellectual concepts that he would later employ in coming to terms with the, to him, disturbing mechanical implications of Newtonian science. A picture emerges of a view in which man as spiritual being is opposed to (if not crushed by) a brutal and indifferent overpowering nature and in this situation he struggles to find happiness. He has reason with which he might understand his place and as such find solace, but in the end true reflection reveals that reason is limited and cannot provide him with sure and certain knowledge of God and the hereafter.

We focus on one result of science: it frustrates human aims and interests and in short ‘devastates human self-esteem.’

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Shell actually heads this chapter with a saying from Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals (III 25) that reads: ‘Concerning the humiliating and discrediting effect of astronomy Kant has left us a remarkable confession: “It annihilates my importance.”’ See Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 11.
2.1 Searching for the Question in the face of relentless Nature

Shell traces the ways in which Kant attempted to answer this concern. It is true that this concern might have been expressed differently but, as she says, it in essence and direction remained the same throughout his entire academic life. Moreover, at the heart of this question one can discern the question of the worth of a human being. And as we know from his later works, the worth or value of the human being is specifically tied to its dignity. In this sense then we can say dignity has been a concern for Kant since his beginning albeit perhaps in an unthematized way at first. What is of importance in this short presentation is that we can see not only how he tried to wrestle with this question but also what the contours of his solutions were and the intellectual weaponry he used in order to approach a solution. This reveals the context of his imagination, as it were, and that will help in understanding perhaps how much of his thinking changed and how much remained the same.

In the *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755) Kant shows that he has adopted the Newtonian worldview—at least its mechanical physics. Yet the implications of this worldview haunted him and he tried to resolve them with reference to the Leibnizian-Wolffian rational worldview he inherited from his Prussian university education. He tried to resolve the seemingly irresolvable by attempting to bring these two systems together. So he tried to solve the challenge that Newtonian (mechanical) physics posed to God as Creator by proposing that God created the fundamental
mechanical properties of matter and that He was also the ‘source of the lawfulness of nature.’

Of greater importance, however, is that he envisaged not a static but a dynamic universe, which in accordance with the fundamental laws of attraction and repulsion gave rise to the endless birth and destruction of entire world systems. The point here is twofold: first, this whole process is universal and runs (universally) in accordance with, i.e., in obedience to, fundamental laws; and second, with these laws an ‘economy of nature’ is established that even in the destruction of worlds is of ‘no loss to Nature’ because what she loses on the one hand is gained on the other with the formation of another new world. This brings Shell to say, quoting Kant, that not even man ‘who seems to be the masterpiece of creation [is] excepted from this law.’ And in all of this ‘it does not appear that nature has thereby suffered any damage.’ As Shell puts it: ‘The economy of nature is indifferent to human costs. The exchanges of matter which ensure a balance between creation and destruction assign no special weight to human interests.’

So, in the face of nature’s cold and indifferent eyes cast toward man, how ought he to respond? Kant entreats him to resign himself ‘to the common ways of providence’

14 Shell remarks that Kant writes somewhat similarly about man’s impotence before the powers of nature in his Critique of Judgment penned forty years later. She adds, ‘However, that theory of knowledge which, in the Critique of Judgment, enables the mind to transcend its dependency on nature is unavailable to Kant in his Natural History, in which he declares man virtually helpless against the overwhelming power of nature.’ See Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 13.
and to abandon ‘the human perspective, to which nature pays no special regard, for a
divine one.’ And she adds, ‘this divine perspective is contemplative and not active. […]
Kant here cites Alexander Pope, whose God observes “with equal eye” the death of hero
or sparrow, bubble or world.’ And this contemplating of the cosmic system ‘as a
coherent and beautiful whole’ can bring with it a certain comfort.16

This contemplation requires reason’s understanding of the cosmic system.

Reason is thus a two-edged sword: it gives us solace in the form of leading us to
understanding, but it also makes us aware of our fragility. But solace is not peace and
does not satisfy our souls. ‘The soul requires a sense of permanence,’ writes Shell ‘to
enable it to fend off nature’s physical assault on its security and spiritual assault on its
dignity.’17 Sadly, reason is not able to provide this happiness. Kant writes that true
happiness requires freedom from the dependence on finite things. However, being part
of nature means we are dependent on finite things so true happiness requires ‘the
liberation of man from nature.’ So, since we are creatures of need and as such
dependent on nature, our position is dismal. Even reason, ‘the sole means’ through
which we may find relief from the insecurity and indignity of this natural state is limited
in power. This is felt as ‘a humiliation or degradation (Erniedrigung) brought about by
the obstruction of reason by matter.’18 For Kant, at this stage at least, we are caught as

16 And again, in comparison with the Critique of Judgment, the experience of beauty is
contemplative and is accompanied with disinterestedness and indifference as regard
one’s person and fate. See Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and
politics 1980, 14.
it were midway between spirit and matter, such that something like gaining knowledge ‘entails a toilsome struggle against matter.’ 19

Shell says that Kant now seeks relief from this conundrum by suggesting that one turn away from science and nature to ‘Revelation and the “sweet hope” of a Hereafter [where] the soul might enter into “a new relation with all of nature” [and] “find the source of its happiness in itself.”’ 20 Nature holds no good intentions toward us, nor is the purposiveness in nature directed toward us. We have no stake to claim on nature and have no rights against it, so the only recourse for us is to adapt ourselves to nature. We wrongly assume there is some justice behind or operational in nature so that we think we receive just punishments when we are subject to her violence or reward when we benefit from her good. This attitude reveals only our arrogance in that we take ourselves to be the measure of all things. In fact nature is indifferent to our desires and to our sense of justice. We cannot change her, we need to adapt to her. Shell in fact quotes this reminder from Kant in his essay History of the 1755 Earthquake: ‘[The] humiliating reminder ... that man can never be anything more than a man.’ 21

19 Shell points out that this doctrine reveals the influence of Wolff rather than Newton. She phrases this conundrum beautifully by saying ‘Men, who are too rational not to aspire, are not rational enough to succeed.’ See Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 15.
21 See Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 17. Olaf Reinhardt’s translation of this sentence reads: ‘[T]hey lead him to the humbling reminder [...] that he is never anything more than a human being.’ Kant, Continued Observations on the Earthquakes that have been Experienced for some Time 2012, 1:472. Shell’s translation is more pointed and powerful, and reveals, moreover, something of the human interest that drives her. This concerns humanity, the full measure of man, that is, of man as man. This phrase returns in the opening question in
All of this points to the fact that ‘science devastates human self-esteem.’\textsuperscript{22}

Reason’s ultimate inability to withstand the opposition of nature and thus its ‘partial access’ to the divine, or ‘more-than-human perspective’ adds insult to injury and constitutes the ‘essence of man’s “humiliation.”’ This is because man has no recourse but to submit to nature with all the indifference to man it entails and to submit to the reality that we are dependent and conditioned by matter (nature). As Shell expresses it: ‘Nature poses for man a problem whose adequate solution it precludes.’ She also notes that in turning to Revelation and the Hereafter to set things right implies that nature ‘has somehow wronged us.’\textsuperscript{23}

This gives rise to the problems of theodicy (to justify God in the face of the injustice we suffer here) but in the end Kant’s solution is to question the very search for a theodicy. Nature is not made for our happiness; indeed, it prevents it. We are unable to do anything about it, other than accept it. However, he offers ‘an almost wistful hope that what may be will set things right.’\textsuperscript{24} As Shell says ‘If the purely rational in man could be liberated from its dependence on the material, he could view nature from the point of view of God. Nature, as seen from this centre would show on all sides “utter security,

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\textsuperscript{22} Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 17.
\textsuperscript{24} Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 19. The phrase ‘to set things right,’ which Shell uses here, is a phrase that we will meet again with regard to Rousseau’s impact on Kant. It is quite significant and, as we shall see, Shell translates it in two ways. Its use here gives depth to her reading and significance for her to the “Rousseau chapter” in Kant’s life, as we shall see further on.
complete adaptation.” From such a vantage point “the changeful scenes of the natural
world” could no longer “disturb the restful happiness of [the] spirit.”25

As yet Kant is more concerned with personal solace and self-esteem, and his
reflections are more speculative and theoretical. In *Universal Natural History and Theory
of the Heavens* (1755) he writes beautifully about this: ‘When one has filled one’s mind
with such considerations, the sight of a starry heaven on a serene night gives a kind of
pleasure which only a noble soul can feel. In the general silence of nature and calm of
the senses, the hidden knowledge-power of the immortal spirit speaks an ineffable
language, and yields undeveloped concepts which we can experience but not express.’26

As she says, thus far it is still only ‘for noble souls.’ But in the end we find the
roots for his understanding of human dignity here. She writes: ‘In the radical dualism of
his mature philosophy, Kant secures a ground for human worth, a ground which, in his
eyearly writings, he stubbornly sought. The distinguishing mark of his critical philosophy is
his conviction that the moral law within us is a subject of far greater awe than nature
can inspire. It is the recognition of this inner law as an objective guide to moral action
which decisively establishes the priority of practical reason, of morality, over
contemplation.’27

25 Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 19. This
notion that our happiness requires ultimate supernatural intervention is something we
shall meet again in Kant’s later moral philosophy. Shell, in fact, states that his doctrine
of moral freedom as ‘liberation from dependence upon nature’ has its roots in these
earliest scientific writings.
26 Quoted from NH 367 by Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and
politics 1980, 19.
2.2 The moral turn and its implications for dignity

Shell refers to ‘a much quoted but too little understood’ personal confession found on a loose-leaf note appended to Kant’s own copy of his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. These notes became known as the *Remarks on the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, or simply as the *Bemerkungen* or *Remarks*.\(^2^8\) This quote is treated in the next section where Shell relates it specifically to dignity so I shall not go into it here in depth. What it does reveal, however, is that Kant’s intensive reading of Rousseau effected a profound conversion in him, which caused him to rethink and then recast all he had done up to that point. Shell states that this effect had a much more profound impact than Hume’s awakening of Kant’s dogmatic slumbers. In fact she proposes that one talk here of Kant’s sense of vocation being born. In any case it effected ‘a decisive turning point’ in Kant’s intellectual career.\(^2^9\) According to Shell ‘this passage charts the beginning of the priority of morality in Kant’s thought’.\(^3^0\)

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\(^{2^8}\) See Shell, *The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics* 1980, 21. For Shell’s take on this ‘*Remarks* [...] among the most neglected of Kant’s early writings’ that in the end proves to be a ‘remarkably coherent set of reflections on the human condition broadly understood and on what might be done to improve our present situation in a manner that is both in keeping with the laws of nature and favorable to human freedom’ see Shell, *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* 2009, 40, 83. She devotes an entire chapter to *Remarks*. Shell, *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* 2009, 39-84. See also Beiser 1992, 36, 42 ff.

\(^{2^9}\) Kant wrote: ‘I am by inclination an investigator [*Forscher*]. I feel the thirst for knowledge and … the deep satisfaction after each step forward. There was a time when I believed all this could be the honour of mankind and I despised the people, who knew nothing. Rousseau has set me right … I learned to honour mankind and I would be less worthy than the average worker if I did not believe that [philosophy] could contribute to
Now, instead of seeking honor in knowledge that would lead one into the God-perspective that is, in effect, reserved for the ‘few “noble souls”,’ Kant finds honor ‘in the rights of mankind, the property of all.’\footnote{Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 21.} Shell encapsulates this change beautifully: ‘Heretofore knowledge absorbed itself in the self-sufficient pleasures of contemplation; hereafter it must justify itself; it must “contribute” and “restore.”’\footnote{There is an important insight to be gleaned in Carazan’s dream that Kant relates in his Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime. It tells of a dream by a very rich and miserly fellow, ‘who had closed his heart’ to others. The Angel of death brought him to judgment and he was damned to spend eternity in effect as he had lived in isolation and centered upon himself. This dream brings Carazan to the realization that the truly important and essential thing in life is not wealth or even knowledge, but human relationships. In terms of the turn from the priority from knowledge to morality (as an expression of the rule that governs human relationships) this is a telling and remarkable narration. See Kant, Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings 2011, 16 n a.} Whereas Kant, in line with the rationalists, regarded the presence of reason in man and in all the ‘orders of the universe’ as the ‘measure of perfection,’ he saw after Rousseau that the greatest perfection lay in ‘the subordination of everything to freedom.’\footnote{Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 22.} Truth and science have worth only in their service of ‘the practical.’ This practical relates to the advancement of the rights of mankind. Shell shows how this insight is accompanied by its inherent implication: the fact that all people are equal. Kant taking his cue from Rousseau sees inequality only as a matter of opinion. Shell quotes Kant: ‘The opinion according to which we are unequal also makes us unequal. Only the doctrine of Herr Rousseau can
convince even the most learned philosopher that he should not consider himself better than the common man, and this without the help of religion, but solely by means of his own honest wit.'

If there is then any science necessary, it is a science that will teach man his place in creation so that he ‘can learn what he must do to be a man.’ ‘Illusive seductions’ will tempt him in his ignorance and propel him ‘from his proper place.’ However, the true knowledge (of this science) ‘will lead him back to the estate of man, and then, as small and imperfect as he still finds himself, he will be upright and good in terms of the place to which he is assigned, for he will be precisely what he ought to be.’ False knowledge

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34 The quote is from Remarks 20:176. See Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 22. The German reads: ‘Die Meinung von der Ungleichheit macht auch die Menschen ungleich. Nur die Lehre des HE. R. kann machen daß auch der gelehrteste Philosoph sich mit seinem Wissen aufrichtig u. ohne die Religion zu Hülfe zu nehmen nicht vor besser hält als den gemeinen Mann.’ [See http://www.korpora.org/kant/aa20/176.html]. Shell’s translation reads to me better than the more literal one offered in the Cambridge Edition of Kant’s texts in English, which reads: ‘The opinion of inequality also makes human beings unequal. Only the doctrine of Mr. Rousseau can bring it about that even the most learned philosopher, with his knowledge, earnestly regards himself, without help from religion, as no better than the common man.’ See Kant, Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings 2011, 20:176. The relation between one’s ‘own honest wit’ in lieu of ‘religion’ comes out clearer in her rendition. This underscores her position that religion is replaced with one’s own rational abilities. These, moreover, are presented here in moral terms (‘honest wit’), which actually reflect the German ‘aufrichtig.’ ‘Aufrichtig’ bears relation to honesty, sincerity, and even fairness. It is my contention that, at least insofar as honesty goes, it provides a key to a concrete human expression (i.e., actualization) of dignity for Kant. Shell will develop this theme ‘without religion’ further.


36 Quote from Remarks 20:45-6 see Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s Philosophy and Politics 1980, 23 n 1. This quote from Kant is translated by Shell and it is important to note how Kant’s notion of ‘being in the place one is assigned to’ is translated by Shell with ‘upright.’ The German reads: ‘[…] so wird er doch vor seinen angwiesenen Posten recht gut seyn weil er gerade das ist was er seyn soll [my
with its ‘illusive seductions’ lures man away from his ‘rightful place’ and has to be exposed. Man must know his limits and this is what critical philosophy aims to achieve. Kant’s science of man is thus twofold: learn your limits and learn what you ought to be. Speculative philosophy thus does not bring us anything positive. In all of this Kant is radically democratic long before the French Revolution in 1789. ‘Man asserts his dignity and his honour as a race, a species, a humankind,’ she writes, ‘for which the dignity of each is that of all, and all that of each.’

At the risk of putting words into Shell’s mouth one might say that Kant solved the problems that science posed for human dignity by effecting a type of Copernican revolution. With regard to truth he makes ‘truth serve right’ instead of serving science. Shell finds in the confessional passage quoted above already ‘an element of self-denial and self-overcoming. The assertion and establishment of human right requires the submission and subjugation of the inclination towards truth.’ But there is another reversal. The honor of mankind lies no more in knowledge, which in virtue of placing man on a rung higher than nature, brought him closer to ‘the perspective of a contemplative God.’ Newtonian science, however, crushed all of this. Its laws are equally applicable (one might say universally democratic) and hence no hierarchies could be tolerated. Similarly, the pre-eminence with which Kant imbued reason has in

fact been nullified by Newtonian science since it revealed just how fragile we rational beings are, as we saw above. In all of this Rousseau taught Kant to, as it were, turn away from God, and rather ‘do for himself’ thus giving him ‘an attitude of confident self-reliance.’ Moreover, the equation of honour and right in this context resulted in further spin-offs. ‘Right pertains to the sphere of humanity, not to the relations of man to nature, but to the relations of men to men.’ Earlier Kant found men to be very needy and dependent upon nature, now he writes ‘Man is needy, but also has power over his needs.’ We have the power to assert our rights and it is also in the power of others to respect. This softens nature’s devastating effect on us. Finally, as Shell writes, ‘Honour is not bestowed on man, either by nature or by God, but rather lies in his doing “what he ought to do to be a man.”’ Kant now realizes that the feeling of ‘natural injustice,’ which had him search for a proper theodicy, is in fact a ‘misplaced assertion of human right.’ It is misplaced because he searched for the human right at the wrong place. It is not in nature’s power to give or to answer our quest for human rights. ‘The struggle for respect and dignity is properly conducted not upon the natural but upon the social field.’

44 Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 25. As she writes elsewhere: ‘Rousseau did not so much moralize Kant as redirect his moral concern from cosmic to human community and its more satisfying economy of intrinsic worth or “dignity”. Kant would later discover the true “intelligible world”—or the only one available to us—and with it compelling support at last for man’s individual integrity within a larger whole. The physical economy of nature, alternately infinite and finite, gives way to the kingdom of ends and its moral economy of absolute worth. The dual
This struggle is different because unlike nature which ‘is maintained by a certain determined rule, [...] the willfulness of man is without rule.’\footnote{Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 25.} This willfulness, which is made possible ‘by a kind of lapse of nature,’ forms the basis of human freedom. In the interplay between different men’s willfulness ‘rights are properly asserted.’\footnote{See Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 25.}

In a section of Remarks under the title ‘On Freedom’ Kant draws a distinction between dependence on ‘the necessity of nature’ and dependence on ‘the will(fullness) of another human being.’ We have no choice but to yield to nature. ‘To submit to the will of another,’ however ‘is harder [...] and more unnatural.’\footnote{Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 25.} Shell shows how Kant builds on Rousseau, who employed a similar distinction in his pedagogy in Emile. For Rousseau we are dependent on either things or on men. Dependency on things comes with nature; dependency on men, with society. And whereas the former is ‘non-moral’ and ‘begets no vices,’ the latter is ‘out of order’ giving ‘rise to every kind of vice.’\footnote{Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 25.}

Rousseau came to this insight by noticing the difference in a child’s crying when it suffers the ‘blows of chance’ as opposed to when it feels or recognizes the pain as intentional. The former is taken in stride as it were, but the latter produces crying that reveals a sense of being wronged and even rage. For Rousseau this experience reveals points of attraction—both ground and abyss—that center Kant’s early cosmology give way to the moral will as itself the final ground of human purposiveness and perfection.’\footnote{Shell, The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community 1996, 75-76.}
‘man’s innate sense of justice and injustice.’

Before recognizing this intentionality of others man is non-moral. Upon recognition, however, ‘comes the possibility of vice, which lies in the “mutual depravity of master and slave.”’

The slave depends on his master for his ‘very life’ and the master on his slave for the satisfaction of new needs and becomes thus ensnared. It is through moral and civic virtue that men strive to regain some of the former independence they had ‘in the state of nature.’ Human liberty and natural necessity are thus for Rousseau not at odds with each other. We accept natural necessities (they are inevitable); but restrictions, ‘which appear to place [me] at the mercy of another will call [my] own freedom into question.’

Kant agrees. According to Shell, Kant comes to see that it is no longer nature that poses the greatest threat to our dignity and security. She points out that in the Remarks a concept of freedom, vis-à-vis other men, is developed, which Kant later would call external freedom.

Kant echoes Rousseau in asserting that man’s self-awareness is his distinguishing mark. Herein lies our difference with animals. In fact Shell quotes from Remarks the saying ‘An animal is not yet a complete being because it is not conscious of itself.’

We, on the contrary, are aware of our existence and are, moreover, ‘whole and free’ until


‘another will’ imposes itself upon our existence. This self-consciousness, which Kant later calls the ‘ability to reflect’ includes, as a necessary consequence, ‘an ability to recognize a similar self-consciousness in others.’ This means I come to realize that others have, just like me, the ability to be aware of themselves as reflective (i.e., self-reflective) beings. So they would be as aware as I am that they have the power to execute desires like lifting an arm, or using a tool in the service of their own purpose. As Shell says, Kant first distinguished between himself and outer things, then between things and other men; and it gradually dawned on him ‘that he too can be a tool, a mere thing to other men.’ With reference to Remarks Shell describes the effect of such use as follows: ‘To allow oneself to be used as a tool, to become a thing in the eyes of another, that is the meaning of submission (Unterwürfigkeit). To yield to the will of another is to cancel one’s own essence, and is as such a “contradiction” which indicates the injustice (Unrechtmässigkeit) of the deed. “That man should need no soul of his own and have no will of his own, and that another soul should move his limbs, this is absurd [ungereimt, “unrhymed, blank] and inverted [verkehrt, “exchanged,” “turned the wrong way”]. Such a man is the mere tool of another.” To stand in dependence on another is to lose one’s standing and to be “only a possession.” The man who submits to another is “no longer a man.” Shell notes here that Kant at this stage had not yet drawn a distinction between inner and outer freedom.

54 Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 27; see also 27 n 7. See also Remarks 20:93, 66.
There is now another dimension in which man is distinguished from animals and that is in his ‘capacity for self-contradiction.’ God makes all things good but man destroys himself. Quoting Kant she writes ‘All the evils on earth are caused to man by man.’\textsuperscript{56} It would seem then that self-contradiction is expressive of a deep flaw within humanity. The upshot of this, according to Shell, is that for Kant here, as later on in his life and thought, self-consistency becomes ‘the standard of both metaphysical and moral legitimacy.’\textsuperscript{57} Self-consistency is understood in this context as ‘freedom from dependence on the will of another [and forms] the basis of right.’ And she adds ‘this right is an essential constituent of his humanity; without it he would cease to be a man.’\textsuperscript{58}

It is clear that Kant boasts a new understanding of man accompanied with a new appreciation of rights. This he attributed to Rousseau, whom he called ‘the Newton of the moral world.’ Newton discovered order and laws in a nature many thought chaotic. Similarly Rousseau saw ‘beneath the varying forms human nature assumes the deeply concealed essence of man and the hidden law in accordance with which Providence is justified by his observations.’\textsuperscript{59} What Kant means then by saying that Rousseau ‘set him right,’ according to Shell, is ‘that the fundamental fact about man is his awareness of his freedom to use his own power as he will.’\textsuperscript{60} Nature and things do not challenge this awareness; they provide the context in which man consciously and consistently may

\textsuperscript{57} Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 27.  
\textsuperscript{58} Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 27.  
\textsuperscript{60} Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 28.
exercise his powers. What challenges us, however, in that it contradicts and subverts us in our very essence, is submission to another’s will. And this is a willful act, which means that it is not nature that destroys the will, but the will itself. As Shell says, Kant’s new theodicy boils down to the realization that ‘[i]njustice is our creation, [it is] a kind of self-mutilation.’ What this leaves Kant with is the important and powerful conviction that in the end our rights ‘are part of us; and it is we who must restore them.’ This restoration then will depend on the will.

Shell shows that Kant carried some of these ideas with him throughout his entire life. As such some are found even in his last published work before he died, his *Anthropology*, and the first book to be published posthumously, the *Pädagogik*. In this regard the Rousseauian distinction between dependence on things versus other wills deserves special attention. Both philosophers saw the discovery of other wills as imbued with pivotal moral significance. For Rousseau that discovery disturbs the natural balance in man between desire and power, opening the way to tyranny by using others in order to enlarge my own powers. The solution is to retard or stop the child in developing new desires. For Kant, on the other hand, the emphasis falls on the fact that this opens the possibility of submission to another will and this leads to the loss of both dignity and the self (self-abnegation). ‘Kant,’ writes Shell, ‘is more concerned with dignity, less with

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61 Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 28. With this he thought the problem of theodicy now solved. Shell mentions though that in his mature philosophy the entire problem of theodicy is dismissed as ‘incapable of theoretical solution.’

Furthermore, the desirable development of reason leads necessarily to ‘new and dangerous desires.’ Even so, the real problem is not tyranny or enslavement but rather ‘submission and self-contradiction.’ What is needed pedagogically therefore is to ‘[instill] in the young child strength to “renounce” desires already present, when as “passions” they threaten to overwhelm him.’ If education for Rousseau was to ‘stimulate self-sufficiency,’ it is for Kant to ‘accustom the child to opposition [and] to encourage self-control.’ The key word is ‘discipline.’

In the *Anthropology* Kant regards anger as the first human passion. The infant experiences it when he is confronted by an object or by a change in his general state, in fact by anything that makes him feel ‘that he is checked.’ Shell quotes from the *Anthropology*: ‘Animal young play; children quarrel very early; it is as if a certain concept of right (which relates to external freedom) develops at the same time as animality, instead of being progressively learned.’ Shell writes then ‘Kant locates the first inkling of right in the child’s experience of things. The opposition of matter itself occasions a child’s first sense of injury and injustice, even as it calls to life the child’s sense of his own liberty.’

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64 Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 29. I have gone into as much detail here as Shell gives in order to show that the theme of discipline, of overcoming opposition, is a theme that has deep roots in Kant and it is also essential to the expression and living of dignity, as we shall see.
65 Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 29; also 29 n 8. Taken from Anthr 7:269 (Shell’s translation).
66 Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant's philosophy and politics 1980, 29-30. This is important to keep in mind when we try to determine whether dignity is something ‘inherent’ or not.
Shell claims Kant consistently throughout his life held that matter is ‘an obstacle against which man tests his liberty.’ According to its nature, matter thwarts the ‘fulfillment of human desire’ leading Kant to conclude that the destiny of a being ‘whose desires are naturally insatiable’ cannot be happiness. As she says: ‘The destiny of man lies not in satisfaction but in work, in struggle to overcome the limitations imposed by matter and man’s material nature. Man should regard as his destiny not happiness but the struggle for freedom.’ If I understand Shell’s juxtaposing here between ‘destiny to work’ and ‘destiny to struggle for freedom’ correctly, it seems that work is at heart the effort or struggle for freedom, and vice versa. This is an important notion to take with us when we look more closely at dignity.

Shell shows that even at this stage Kant harbors some disquietude with the ‘necessary limitations which the natural world imposes on our moral lives.’ This ‘fundamental incongruity between the moral quality of our actions and their effects within the material world’ leads Kant in his ‘generally ironic’ and even ‘playful’ Dreams of a Spirit-Seer to project a spirit world in which the true quality of our moral actions is worked out. Access to this world is granted not through knowledge but through moral sentiments. ‘These impulses of duty and benevolence conflict with our selfish inclinations and so make us realize that “in our most secret motives, we are dependent

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67 In virtue of this we may say that nothing that brings *satisfaction*, which implies a more passive, receptive attitude, can belong to our essential destiny. Shell quotes a few lines from *Pädagogik*: ‘Work (Arbeit) is “occupation not pleasant in itself, but undertaken for the end in view”’ (Ed 9:470); and, ‘It is of the utmost importance that the child learn to work. Man is the only creature who must work’ [translation Shell’s]. (Ed 9:471); See Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 30; also 30 n 9.

on the rule of the will of all.’” Kant ‘elevates’ this will into the heavens, in effect giving it a power to ‘move our very wills.’ Inner conflict reveals the presence of this ‘higher will’ within us. Moral awareness thus comes to light when we acknowledge this conflict between duty and benevolence and our selfish sentiments. For Shell this inner conflict (in Dreams) “awakens” us to the moral world, and so to recognition of physical/moral dualism.”70

Let me conclude this section with Shell’s remarks on Carazan’s Dream. Kant’s text runs as follows.

‘One evening, while I was drawing up my accounts and going over my profits ... I was overcome by sleep.... The angel of death overcame me like a whirlwind and struck me before I could utter a terrified scream. I was struck dumb as I feared that my die was cast for eternity, and that all the good I had done could not be augmented nor all the bad taken away. I was led before him who dwells in the third heaven. The sight that flamed before me spoke thus: “Carazan, your divine service is rejected. You have closed your heart to love of man and held onto your treasure with an iron hand. You have lived only for yourself and thus you shall live for eternity alone and cut off from all community with the whole of creation.” At this moment I was grasped by an unseen power and thrown through the shimmering edifices of creation. I had already left uncountable worlds behind me. As I approached the outermost boundaries of nature, I observed that the shadows of limitless emptiness stretched into the depths that sank before me. A fearsome realm of eternal quiet, loneliness and darkness! Inexpressible

terror befell me at this moment. I gradually lost sight of the last stars and finally the last
glimmering appearance of light in the outermost darkness. The death angel of despair
grew with every moment, just as my distance from that last inhabited world increased. I
considered with unbearable anguish of the heart that if ten thousand times a thousand
years went by ... I would still hurl forward into the immeasurable abyss of darkness
without help or hope of return. – In this state of stupor I stretched out my hands toward
real objects with such impetuosity that I thereby awoke. And now I have learned to
esteem human beings highly. For in that horrifying isolation [Einöde] I would prefer to
all the treasures of Golconda even the lowliest of those whom in my proud fortune I
drove from my door.’71

This profound and deeply disturbing dream seems, especially in the possibilities
it raises, to solidify in an imaginative way the utter logical consequences of some of the
tenets the earlier Kant seemed to have held sacred; and furthermore, its horrifically
bleak picture of the effect of such an imagined eternity on the whole person,
accentuates thereby what is really essential to being human. That without which makes
existence a living hell, i.e., a living death. This acts as a mirror against which Kant’s
earlier values are to be viewed and tested.72 For one thing, the earlier value placed upon

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71 As quoted in Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 37; from Kant,
Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings 2011,
2:209-210n. For the particular history of Carazan and this story see Shell, Kant and the
Limits of Autonomy 2009, 351 n 22.
72 It is interesting to compare Kant’s confessional note regarding Rousseau’s effect on
him with Carazan’s dream. For one thing, the man who searches for and values
knowledge above all else, especially the God-perspective, seems to court destruction. In
Carazan’s words ‘the angel of death’ becomes in his utmost isolation ‘the death angel of
despair.’ It would seem the primacy of knowledge, important as it might be, is not, on
knowledge, with the despising of the rabble who knew nothing, is here, when drawn to its utmost logical and anthropological conclusion (i.e., what will it be like if I am to be like this for all eternity in absolute consistency and in character with all my value implies) shown in all its horror to be inhuman and foreign to our beings. We cannot attain the God-perspective as little gods. We are not made for such solitude. In other words the priority of the theoretical (for oneself) is a lonely and selfish affair and brings about utter solitude, which as Shell points out is here presented negatively as ‘a total absence of sensation’ and she adds ‘brings home the virtual identity for subjective human purposes, of “worldless” self-sufficiency as a kind of living death.’ Carazan discovers he is a human being and that means he needs other people, and furthermore, he needs to invest his time in them: spending time, even with those he most despised, is better (i.e., has more worth/value) than all the wealth of the world.

But Shell delves deeper. ‘We cannot imagine ourselves worldless,’ she writes, ‘without cancelling in thought the possibility of inward changes of state and with it self-consciousness as we now know it. Bereft of outer relations, the unity of the I is an empty shell.’ I take Shell to mean not only the metaphysical dimension, but also that for (and in) humans the contemplative ideal of being the ‘self-thinking thought in itself’ is not anthropologically structured toward us. In other words, we are self-transcending this ultimate level, the *sine qua non* that determines humanity and survival as human being. It is also interesting that both pieces end with saying: ‘[now] I have learned to esteem human beings [highly].’ In both, a real conversion is noted and explained. Ultimately it is not the mind that transforms Carazan, but his heart.

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73 Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 37.
74 Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 37. Note here the importance of being grounded and attached to the world as an embodied being, and also of the need of the senses and for others.
beings. We need to move out of ourselves toward others. In this Shell discerns a moral
turning in Kant. She talks about pleasant feelings of transcendence that in his earlier
*Universal Natural History* intimated our ‘participation in a contemplative world of
spirits, elevated above the fray of time and space.’ Here, however ‘those feelings have
[an] intellectual and moral valence. Carazan, the proud miser, “awakens” with a new
yearning to “connect” with his fellow human beings, the lowliest of whom now seems
ininitely precious. Moral community, based on a feeling for the dignity of all human
beings, beckons where unwarranted pride had failed. In sum [...] Carazan translates
hope for the future [...] from the metaphysical to the moral plane; we are on the
threshold of the “revolution” in Kant’s thinking that would finally lead him to the
principle of autonomy as we now know it.”

The horror of Carazan’s experience set Kant, as it were, on a trajectory, which
opened the priority of the moral realm above all else. As his confessional note made
clear, if he did not contribute to the betterment of mankind’s moral life especially in
terms of dignity and human rights, his life would not have much value. Kant’s journey
led him to ask how it would be possible to effect this betterment. Rousseau opened the
way in that he saw laws operative in the human sphere that would be analogous to the
laws of nature. Hence his regard for Rousseau as the Newton of the human sciences.

Taking nature as his cue, Kant found in all organic life a principle at work, which
he called the principle of ‘return.’ This principle expressed his observation that organic
life seemed to harbor within itself a ‘capacity for orderly growth and self-

75 Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 37-38.
maintenance. In applying this principle to human history Kant concludes that his ‘natural principle of “return,”’ in fact ‘limits how far social depravity can go before prompting a countermovement of recovery.’ Kant’s desire is now to find a way hasten this counter-movement and this goal is stated in ‘Archimedean’ terms: ‘He will set his fulcrum upon the “state of nature” in order to “move the emotions” of human beings.’ Human perfection lies not in the virtue of the ancients but in the ‘moment of return.’ Kant sees his role then as an educator of humanity. Kant finds his ‘Archimedean point’ when he imagines the worst that can happen to a person is the loss of his freedom by being subjected to the tyrannical whims of another who has no law restraining him. As Shell puts it, ‘[t]he occasion of that terror [losing one’s freedom] was the recognition of lawless freedom in another and the thought thereby prompted of one’s own cancellation as a “complete” or free and active being. In subjecting freedom to itself, Kant’s pivot of “return” answers to that moment.’ These ideas will ultimately lead to Kant’s mature concept of autonomy and dignity within it.

This is still all in the pre-critical phase, but, as we can see, many themes are already present in this phase and they will surely be felt when we try to examine his doctrine of dignity. We shall now move to Shell’s understanding and presentation of dignity in the mature Kant.

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76 Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 40.
77 Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 40.
78 Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 40.
79 Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 47, 79 ff.
80 Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 83. For a presentation of the development and analysis of this idea in Kant see Ibid., 39-84.
3. The Mature Kant on Human Dignity

Shell discerns a two-fold dimension to the concept ‘dignity’. The Latin *dignitas* means virtue or worthiness. It can also refer to honorable office. The Latin seems to refer to ‘that aspect of virtue or excellence that makes one worthy of honor.’\(^{81}\) The German equivalent that Kant uses, *Würde*, connects etymologically with the English ‘worth’ and ‘worthy.’ This two-fold dimension means that dignity refers ‘both to a kind of deserving and to something deserved.’\(^{82}\)

She points to another understanding of dignity operative in medieval times where it functioned as a comparative category that in effect divided people in terms of rank and authority. The king had dignity that his subjects did not share and it transcended the concrete particularity of the king as it passed to the next ruler when the king died. This was in virtue of his rank (which as she points out was seen as a sharing in the dignity of Christ). In this way dignity became something that was not shared by all and referred rather to the comparative elevation of some over others. It was inherently anti-democratic, or at least had different meanings attached to it. She points out that there was a sense here in which one could say all people shared a dignity ‘deriving from our rank as humans.’\(^{83}\)

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\(^{81}\) Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 53. She continues by saying ‘which, as Aristotle put it, accompanies virtue as its crown.’ This is important because it emphasises that dignity is more than just honor for the sake of office, but is tied essentially to virtue or excellence.

\(^{82}\) Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 53.

\(^{83}\) Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 53.
The two main sources that fed thinking on human dignity in the western world were the Bible and classical philosophy. The Bible presents man as a creature (with the implication of embodiment) created in the image of God; and thus man as creature derives his dignity from the status of being made in God’s image. This Shell presents as a matter of rank (status) and not of any ontological gift. But according to classical philosophy the dignity of people is derived from their status as rational beings. Here Shell sees rationality as ability; she states that it enables us to ‘contemplate nature’ and thereby allows us ‘to justify [...] the value of human existence.’

It is also important to see that this rank or status is derivative and not inherent. The concept of ‘elevation’ is thus present and operative in the background within the notion of status. She explains: ‘Philosophic reason and supraphilosophic (or nonphilosophic) revelation were, then, the twin pillars on which man’s claim to dignity, or worthiness of honor and esteem, were largely set.’ Here it seems that dignity has to do with man’s worthiness of honor and esteem. Worthiness of honor and esteem seems (to me) in the first place not something possible in isolation. In other words it looks like something social and furthermore like something that has to be granted to me by others. In this way her use of the word ‘claim’ makes sense; for it is something that I claim for my own. In other words it implies the concept of ownership. Secondly, it is something that I also in this sense demand from others because honor and esteem are really social realities. In this sense dignity belongs to, or at least approximates, the

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84 She also refers in the same vein to the idea of man being ‘reborn in Christ,’ which has ‘ontological overtones’ at least from a traditional theological viewpoint. See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 54.
85 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 54.
discourse of human rights, insofar as rights are things we lay claim to. And this is something that Kant brought to the understanding of human dignity.

The seemingly odd-man-out in this brief historical and systematic characterisation would be Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. For Mirandola, human dignity is to be found in our freedom, but as Shell shows this freedom is for him a freedom guided by theoretical knowledge, the *sine qua non* for freedom as he sees it. We have here then in addition to the conception of dignity as something akin to rank and status and thus in essence fulfilling a social dimension in its relatedness to other people, also dignity considered in itself. By this is meant dignity as encapsulated within the individual’s own use of his freedom, whose flowering is rooted in theoretical knowledge.

Shell identifies three elements taken from the two traditions – reason, freedom, and a kind of heroism (related to his definition of virtue as ‘spiritual courage’\(^\text{86}\)) – that Kant integrated into an understanding of dignity (and by implication of humanity).

She traces Kant’s use of reason in this context back to the ancients, saying that ‘like the theologians he finds [dignity’s] deepest source in what we share as creatures who must choose rather than in natural endowments that lift some above others.’\(^\text{87}\)

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\(^{86}\) Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 54.

\(^{87}\) See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 54. Shell draws a distinction between Kant’s notion of freedom as *autonomy* [self-legislation] and the Stoic concept of *autarky* [self-rule]. Reason plays a role in both. *Autonomy* and *autarky* are both brought about through the intervention of reason. Yet, their respective difference lays in the role and understanding of reason and its reach. For the Stoics the universe is permeated with reason, which is an active principle giving us through our appropriation in theoretical knowledge ‘contemplative participation in an order beyond the self.’ As we saw earlier, Kant rejected this use of reason. Reason on his account is associated with ‘the self and
would seem from this that reason is understood to mean some endowment which, to
the degree of its presence and exercise in a person, distinguishes him or her from
others. In this sense we get the understanding that reason is something that does not
naturally lead to a ‘democratic’ understanding or distribution of dignity. Freedom, on
the other hand, would presumably be such an instrument that democratizes dignity.88

With this foundation Shell can now say that for Kant, ‘[m]an is exalted [...]’
neither by nature nor by God, as classical philosophy and biblical religion respectively
insist, nor by the martial glory celebrated by the ancient poets, but by autonomy, or
subjection to self-made law, as announced and certified by conscience.89

In our Interlude we referred to Shell’s treatment of an extraordinary
autobiographical ‘confessional note’ found on one of the loose-leaf pages Kant wrote on
and then attached to his own copy of his earlier published [1764] Observations on the
Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime (1764). These have been published as the
Remarks in the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime (1764-1765) as

its powers of origination (i.e., “spontaneitas”) rather than [...] contemplative
participation in an order beyond the self.’ See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 75 n 4. It is interesting, that etymologically, ‘spontaneitas’ is associated with ‘sponte,’ which
means: willingly, of one's own accord, unaided. See Cawley, Neumann and Neuburg
2013.

88 In fact Shell speaks of Kant’s ‘democratic turn of mind’ and even in the context of
dignity as she says, ‘Man asserts his dignity and his honour as a race, a species, a
humankind, for which the dignity of each is that of all, and all that of each. The pre-
eminence of equality in Kant’s discussion of right, undertaken in the 1760s, dispels any
suspicion that the democratic element in Kant’s thought was primarily the result of his
enthusiasm for French events of 1789. But what is even more interesting than this
democratic turn of mind, twenty years before the French revolution, is Kant’s change of
heart from a longing after truth to a respect for the rights of man, a respect which
Rousseau awakens even against Kant’s own inclination.’ Shell, The Rights of Reason: A
study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 24.
89 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 54.
we have already pointed out. Shell notes the personal transformation that is reflected in what is written. Kant was about 40 years old when he wrote: ‘I am by nature an inquirer. I feel a whole thirst for knowledge and a desirous restlessness to come into more of it, along with the satisfaction in each acquisition. There was a time when I thought that this alone could constitute the honor of mankind, and I despised the people [Pöbel] who knew nothing. Rousseau brought me to rights [hat mich zurecht gebracht]. This imaginary prejudice vanished, I learned to honor human beings [Menschen], and I would find myself less useful than the ordinary worker if I did not believe that this consideration could give value to all the others, in establishing [herzustellen] the rights [Rechte] of humanity [Menschheit].’

This passage is important and we shall look more closely at it later but here I simply quote this essential point made by Shell: ‘Biographically speaking, Kant’s

90 See Frierson 2011, vii-xlv; especially xxxviii-ix and xliii.
91 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 54 ff. Shell here translates the phrase ‘hat mich zurecht gebracht’ with ‘brought me to rights.’ In later publications she translates it, however, with ‘[Rousseau] set me upright.’ Shell, Kant as Propagator: Reflections on Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime 2002, 456. See also Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 41. Other scholars follow her example in using this translation—with reference to her. See for instance Luftig 2011, 614. This is significant to me since ‘upright’ carries clear connotations of integrity and truthfulness that I associate with dignity. We might glean from the following quote exactly what Shell understands with this phrase ‘[Rousseau] hat mich zurecht gebracht’ (however she translates it). In The Rights of Reason she writes: ‘Rousseau sets Kant right by showing him that the fundamental fact about man is his awareness of his freedom to use his own power as he will.’ See Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 28. Shell equates ‘setting upright’ with ‘a self-rectification.’ As to the background of this latter concept, see above. She writes: ‘To put matters simply: Through reading Rousseau, Kant appears to discover his own true calling or vocation, described not as a rectification by God, but as a self-rectification or “setting upright” that lets him assume his proper “place” within the physical and moral universe.’ Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 41.
moralized understanding of human dignity goes together with a doctrine of equal rights understood not as a fact of nature (as with Hobbes and Locke) but as an ideal, i.e., something that needs to be historically established because it *ought* to be. In Kant’s later thought, this transformation persists [...] in his understanding of respect (rather than benevolence or love) as the primary quality of a morally good attitude.\textsuperscript{92}

4. Dignity and Autonomy

Shell begins her presentation of the mature Kant’s position with reference to Kant’s understanding of the concept of person. This she will link to conscience. Her argument goes like this: In the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant distinguishes between ‘psychological’ and ‘moral personality.’ Psychological personality is defined as ‘the capacity for being conscious of one’s identity in different conditions of one’s existence’\textsuperscript{93} A ‘person’ in the moral sense, however, is ‘a subject whose actions can be *imputed* to him.’\textsuperscript{94} Imputation, which is a term of legal provenance, implies freedom.

Shell’s starting point with the concept of moral personality places the thematic squarely within the sphere of the ‘Moral Law’. Within the moral law (as I read her) she

\textsuperscript{92} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 55.
\textsuperscript{93} Quoted from MM 223, see Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 55, 75 n 7.
\textsuperscript{94} The Latin word *imputare* combines ‘in’ (in, toward) with ‘putare’ (reckon) and it is often used in a legal sense where it refers to something that is being attributed or ascribed to someone. It could also refer to association. Although its legal context is important (for in a court the question of guilt and responsibility are decided) it is here the deeper dimension of morality itself that provides the context. To be sure it includes the notions of guilt and responsibility (and hence freedom) but goes beyond the legal sphere.
identifies two dimensions that form as it were one dynamic. The first relates to freedom. Indeed the moral law whose purport is to lead to concrete actions brings the law to the realm of nature, which as we know falls totally under the sway of the determinate laws of nature which not only predict but also necessitate the concrete phenomena, thus by implication cancelling out freedom. Here, however, by virtue of the concept of moral personality, which implies imputability and hence responsibility, Kant argues that such imputability must involve freedom. In other words moral personality is the condition of the possibility for freedom. For without freedom imputability is of no use. This leads Shell to quote Kant’s statement that freedom is the *ratio essendi*, or the ground and reason of the being of the moral law.  

The second dimension is the awareness or consciousness of freedom, the *ratio cognoscendi*. It is important to note that the awareness is awareness of (and not knowledge of) the moral law and this awareness Shell calls conscience. In itself then this awareness or conscience becomes in us the reason of our recognition that we are free. Her statement reads: ‘Freedom, in other words, is the ground or reason without which there would not be a moral law, while awareness of the moral law, or conscience, is the ground or reason for our recognizing that we are free.’  

We should take the first statement as a pointer to the ‘metaphysical’ reality or givenness of freedom as being the condition of the possibility for the moral law and the second as a more psychological-epistemological process ‘within’ me (that is manifested as an awareness or recognition of conscience, which in itself is an awareness of the moral law) that leads

95 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 55.
96 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 55.
to my recognizing that I am free. Thus Shell concludes that “[o]ught,” in short, implies “can.” 97

The stage is now set to show how Kant can argue from freedom to autonomy with all that it implies in relation to the moral law and the ‘categorical nature of morality’s demands.’ 98 The moral law as law [nomos] is a law that I as person both give to myself and am subject to obey at the same time. 99 Only in such autonomy can the categorical nature of moral demands as both necessary and universal be reconciled with the freedom ‘to which the moral law […] testifies.’ 100 Now the moral law as practical and concrete enters the realm of experience and facts. Experience and facts, however, pertain to the empirical realm where freedom and responsibility would seem to be excluded.

Kant’s solution is to tie reason to autonomy and hence to the moral law and thus to bring it into the empirical experiential realm. Shell quotes Kant in the Critique of Pure Reason where Kant ties reason to the moral law but brings it into the empirical realm by means of the idea (and experience) of consciousness.

Shell calls the reader’s attention to the importance of the phrase ‘fact of reason.’ This phrase is important because it is here that two worlds collide and intersect. Reason that is not attached or subject to the world of phenomena or experience (in other words it is not part of the world of facts with all its contingencies) becomes here and now fact.

97 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 55.
98 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 56.
99 Shell talks of autonomy as the ‘subjection to self-made law.’ Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 56.
100 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 56.
that is, it becomes practical and ‘incarnate’ (to borrow a phrase from theology) as it enters the world of facts and becomes itself fact. Reason becomes fact and in this way we can attain a grasp on reason as one would on another fact. It has become available to humanity and indeed Shell calls it ‘the only fact of this nature.’

Quoting Kant she writes, ‘Consciousness [of the moral law] may be called a fact of reason, since one cannot ferret it out [herausvernünfteln] from any antecedent data of reason, ... and since it forces itself upon us as a synthetic a priori proposition. ...

In order to regard this law without any misinterpretation [Mißdeutung] as given, one must well note: that it is not empirical but the sole fact of reason by virtue of which “[reason] announces itself as originating law [ursprünglich gesetzgebend] (sic volo, sic jubeo).”

The fact that the moral law is ‘given’ (and we have to note that whatever is given can only be given within the phenomenal realm, i.e., if its reception is to be a possibility) and yet as such also necessary and not contingent, as one would expect with all

101 See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 56. See also Kant’s Introduction (Second Edition) to his Critique of Pure Reason. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason 1996, sections V and VI. (CPR A 10/B 14 – A 11/B 24). See also Beck 1960, 11: ‘Fragment 6 of the Lose Blätter, which I think must have been written between 1781 and 1784, shows the transition to the new position in asking of practical judgments the question that the Critique of Pure Reason raised with respect to theoretical judgments: How are synthetic judgments a priori possible? For he realized at this time that morality requires synthetic a priori judgments, that these judgments cannot be justified in exactly the same way that their theoretical counterparts had been justified,...’For a more detailed discussion see Beck’s informative essay The Writing of the “Critique of Pure Reason” in Beck 1960, 3-18.

102 See CPrR 31.

103 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 56. The Latin phrase ‘sic volo, sic jubeo’ can be translated as ‘So I will, so I command’ and Shell refers the reader also to this quote from Juvenal which reads: ‘This is my will, this is my command; my will is reason enough’. See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 75 n 8. Shell quoted CPrR 31.
‘empirically “given” facts,’ must therefore stem from the very nature of reason, since only reason gives birth to necessity. ‘All necessary propositions [...] are true by virtue of their a priority or origin in reason, as distinguished from empirical perception.’¹⁰⁴ This leads Shell then to conclude: ‘Interpreted aright, the moral law not only “forces itself” upon us but also “announces” its own autonomous foundation.’¹⁰⁵

At this point in the argument we seem to have come full circle; we have established that autonomy of the will, which (quoting Critique of Practical Reason¹⁰⁶) Shell calls the ‘sole principle of all moral laws,’ belongs part and parcel to the concept of ‘personhood.’ As such it belongs then to all persons, i.e., to all beings whose actions can have a dimension of imputability. This brings Shell to the following conclusion: ‘Dignity, in short, applies to any finite being who has, or can be presumed to have, a conscience. It is thus something that all human beings possess because we are all co-legislators of the moral law.’¹⁰⁷

This way Shell ensures that virtue (with its inevitable grades of comparisons, insofar as some are more virtuous than others) is being excluded from the essence of ‘dignity,’ insofar as everyone shares the ‘same dignity,’ or, if one were to quantify it – to press the point – ‘the same amount of dignity and moreover an amount that cannot be enlarged or decreased.’¹⁰⁸ In fact she puts in parentheses the following statement: ‘Degree does not enter in here, since to be accountable in any way is to be free in the

¹⁰⁴ Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 56, 76 n 9.
¹⁰⁵ Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 56.
¹⁰⁶ CPPrR 32, 33.
¹⁰⁷ Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 56.
¹⁰⁸ Hence the phrase ‘the dignity of humanity,’ to which she refers later on in the paragraph; see Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 56.
morally decisive sense and hence infinitely raised about anything [else] in nature.'\textsuperscript{109}

Comparison, as the category that allows for measuring ‘distinction’ (as in difference) or ‘degree’ is out of the question because it has been removed from the equation. In this sense dignity then belongs to humanity and in fact dignity \textit{is} the humanity of humanity. Although Shell does not formulate it in this way, it is implied in the counter example she gives when making the point that Kant did not mean to include the category of virtue and vice (and by implication degree) under dignity. She says: ‘It is true that Kant speaks of certain vices (e.g. lying) as a kind of forfeiture, or “throwing away,” of one’s humanity. At the same time, for Kant, there is no action we can take that altogether destroys the possibility of moral development, now or in the future, and hence no annihilation of our moral personality in any absolute sense.’\textsuperscript{110}

In all of this, freedom and autonomy stand central. If this is the case, however, it means that dignity lies in the \textit{possibility} of moral improvement and that this is guaranteed because of the instruments that make moral improvement possible, namely freedom and the autonomous will as legislating the moral law.

Shell points out that true autonomy means that the law and its authority are absolutely self-grounded. She acknowledges that something within us would like to grant this authority to God, as source ‘outside and above us’ but this Kant sees as harmful in its inherent propensity to confuse us and ultimately prevent us from following (obeying) the moral law for its own sake and not, for instance, to achieve salvation or even happiness. Happiness and virtue (although not the same) belong

\textsuperscript{109} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 56.
\textsuperscript{110} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 56.
together. But in our confusion (or corruption), when true virtue requires of us to sacrifice our happiness for the sake of duty, we can let go of our firmness of resolve to cling to virtue and instead hold onto happiness. The point is that we have to seek not current happiness but to become worthy of happiness in striving for virtue. This often requires that we sacrifice our happiness for the sake of virtue. True autonomy will also help us to keep the hope of happiness alive in those cases where we have to sacrifice our happiness or have lost the immediate hope of happiness. Ultimately Kant sees his task as moral philosopher to keep the voice of conscience as loud as it is clear and to present and preserve it true to its nature, which is pure, that is, as singularly unattached to anything extraneous.

Shell says in summary: ‘[t]he quality that gives human life its dignity is not the privilege of a few, as earlier philosophers (and a younger Kant) believed, but as universal as the awareness, however dim, that one is morally obliged and therefore morally accountable.’ The phrase ‘the quality that gives human life its dignity is [...] as universal as the awareness’ is telling. Certainly it speaks of a certain quality that is given to humanity universally; but the crux is that this dignity is as universal as the awareness. The scope of the universality lies in awareness and this in effect declares awareness to be a central and pivotal protagonist. And awareness is awareness of the moral law and

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111 Shell writes: ‘The “supreme good” may be virtue, or holiness of will; the “highest” or “perfect good” is virtue, or “worthiness to be happy,” and happiness combined.’ Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 57.
112 See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 57-58.
113 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 57.
114 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 57.
by implication of moral responsibility. In essence then, I would say Shell sees dignity as that quality in humanity that allows for the awareness that bears conscience.

5. Dignity and Value

Shell now turns her attention to dignity and value. In order to show how dignity is defined in terms of value but against ‘value of a different and lesser kind’ she presents us with some lengthy but important quotations from Kant. I shall present these in full as well.\(^{115}\) The first quote is from the *Metaphysics of Morals*:

> ‘In the system of nature man ... is a being of slight importance and has with all other beasts, as offspring of the earth, an ordinary value [gemeinen Werth] (pretium vulgare). Although man has, in his understanding, something more than they and can set himself ends, even this gives him only an extrinsic value for his usefulness (pretium usus); that is to say, it gives one man a higher value than another, that is a price as of a commodity in exchange with these animals as things; though he still has a lower value than the universal medium of exchange, money, the value of which can therefore be called preeminent (pretium eminens). But man regarded as a person, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted/lifted up [erhaben] above any price; for as a person (homo noumenon) he is not to be esteemed as a mere means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but rather as an end in himself, that is, as possessing a dignity (an absolute inner value), through which all other rational beings in the world

\(^{115}\) See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 58-60, esp 58.
are required [abnöthigt] to have respect for him, so that he can measure himself with all others of this kind and esteem himself on a footing of equality with them.’\textsuperscript{116}

Based on this passage Shell identifies dignity [\textit{Würde}] with ‘intrinsic value’ [\textit{inner Werth}] and then juxtaposes the latter with ‘external value,’ which is a judgment made in terms of relative worth by placing things in relation to each other. In this latter sense ‘value’ is the equivalent of ‘price’: quantifiable in terms of units one can give a value to and use as currency for exchange. Dignity is something not related to this ‘external realm’ or ‘value.’ As she says: ‘To have dignity [...] is to have value of a sort that makes one priceless, or without equivalent.’\textsuperscript{117}

Shell then quotes a famous passage from the \textit{Groundwork}\textsuperscript{118} where Kant writes:

‘Whatever has reference to universal human inclinations and needs has a market price; whatever, without presupposing a need, accords with a certain taste, i.e., a delight in the mere unpurposive play of our forces of soul [\textit{Gemüthskräfte}], has an affective price [\textit{Affectionspreis}]; but that which alone constitutes the condition under which something can be an end in itself does not have a merely relative value [\textit{Werth}], i.e., a price, but rather an inner value, i.e., a dignity [\textit{Würde}].’\textsuperscript{119}

Shell comments: ‘Our estimation of virtue, and humanity insofar as it is capable of it, “puts it infinitely beyond all price” with which morality “cannot be brought into competition” without, as it were, “violating its sanctity.”’\textsuperscript{120} What we have here is Shell

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{116} The quote is from MM 6:434-35. See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 58, 76 n 10.
\item\textsuperscript{117} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 59.
\item\textsuperscript{118} Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 4:434-35.
\item\textsuperscript{119} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 60, 76 n 12. (Quoted from G 434-35).
\item\textsuperscript{120} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 59.
\end{itemize}
giving words to both the value aspect (here meaning an estimation) and also to dignity (here being descriptive of, if not interchangeable with, virtue and humanity). As if wanting to confirm that we have here two realms that cannot be compared, judged, and even known in the same way, Shell adds in a footnote that ‘pricelessness’ can also be understood with reference to personality, where, as we have already seen, moral personality refers to freedom and responsibility.121

Shell then introduces the concept of morality and relates it to dignity. Morality is, as it were, the top of the mountain, and as such it is the gateway or door to dignity as the expression122 of the realm123 of absolute value. She says: ‘Morality is the vehicle through which we participate in the economy of absolute value -an intelligible world whose necessitating bonds affirm our irreplaceability, and thus “reveal” a life, on our part, “beyond all sense”- despite the humiliating fact, to which human consciousness also testifies, that as beings of need we are fated to arise and perish.’124 This is a pivotal and very rich passage. As I have already indicated, one cannot read it without at least being aware of its allusion to the ‘intelligible world […] beyond all sense’, which is to say the ‘noumenal world.’ The fact that she talks of ‘absolute value’ that cannot be

121 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 76 n 13.
122 Regarding expression: this is not Shell’s formulation. Another word that we might use (if it would not be too bold and open too many questions and avenues, which might be best left unopened!) would be to talk of presenting or representing dignity or the absolute value. I hesitate to use it without qualification because it is open to certain metaphysical implications that might not be intended by Shell.
123 As we shall see in the following quotation, Shell actually uses the word economy, which is a better choice, since realm denotes something static. Economy, on the other hand is a word that invites action and participation, words integral to the living and doing/performing nature of morality.
124 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 59.
measured and determined points to the noumenal world, which by definition lies beyond normal cognition. This is juxtaposed with ‘a life, on our part,’ i.e., as we experience it in the phenomenal realm. The references to ‘humiliating fact’\textsuperscript{125} and ‘human consciousness,’ as well as to ‘beings of need’ who rise and die, all point to the phenomenal connection. If we ‘arise and perish,’ we would seem to be truly insignificant, and our consciousness in its own way testifies to this. However, for Shell it does more: it also testifies to something else, which she actually calls a revelation. This revelation, as I see it, is two things that build on each other. In the first place it affirms our ‘irreplaceability.’ In light of our insignificance as beings of need that arise and die, we are nonetheless irreplaceable. This speaks of ‘a life’ that is unique and imbued, as it were, with an eternal dimension in terms of its meaning and value: literally it cannot be replaced. It is both unique and eternal. Life is here concrete (a life) and not generic. In the second place, this life is a life ‘on our part.’ To me this is tied to the revelation, which in effect removes it from the realm of facts and phenomena. It is to be found in a concrete life and refers to the value and meaning of the life but the value and meaning is not discernable from the realm of nature. It is beyond the senses and the knowledge that they bring. Hence the word ‘revelation.’

Before we move on, we might ask, in what does this revelation lie? Shell talks about ‘an intelligible world whose necessitating bonds affirm our irreplaceability.’ This world in which we participate is, as she makes clear, the moral world. The ‘necessitating

\textsuperscript{125} As we saw in the Interlude (above) the early Kant was well aware of the humiliating position we humans occupy in the face of a cold and indifferent nature (the realm of facts). This passage has thus direct reference to the search for worth and dignity.
bonds’ I take to refer to what we see expressed, for instance, in the categorical imperative, which binds us with moral demands and duties.\textsuperscript{126} It is this (morality) that is the vehicle through which we participate in our dignity.

Here I would like to draw attention to two points. One, just before this passage Shell spoke of the concept of personhood with its priceless value and responsibility integral to it. This responsibility is a responsibility to the moral law. Second, Shell mentioned the concept here of consciousness. Even in this passage it is something that straddles two worlds, it ‘reveals’ and yet ‘testifies’ to the humiliating fact of our finitude.

To summarize here, we see that Shell brings together a few notions especially of personality, the intersection between phenomenal and noumenal, value, and also human consciousness. But in all of this, morality is the main protagonist. It is morality with its imperatives that inaugurates absolute worth – that is, dignity.\textsuperscript{127} We have seen

\textsuperscript{126} Shell makes this point elsewhere by comparing ‘natural necessity’ as the ‘lawful relation of material bodies’ and practical necessity as ‘the lawful relation of rational beings’ (G 434). Practical necessity ‘binds individuals together not only externally (as with natural necessity) but also inwardly and essentially: “from the idea of the dignity of a rational being, who obeys no law other than the one it gives itself,” reason relates the maxim of each will, both to itself and to every other will.’ Shell, The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community 1996, 147.

\textsuperscript{127} See for instance Shell, The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community 1996, 147 ff. ‘Dignity (\textit{Würde}), which Kant identifies with absolute (or “inner”) value (\textit{Wert}), as distinguished from value that is only relative (or, “external”), furnishes reason with an immediate “practical motive.” Values are inner causes of action.’ Shell argues then that these causes are not ‘merely springs (\textit{Triebfeder})’ but ‘genuine motives (\textit{Bewegungsgründe}).’ According to the \textit{Groundwork} (G 436) all values are ‘determined “by the law”,’ but, asks Shell, to which law are we to yield? There are two possibilities: Nature is possible through laws ‘concerned with causes whose action is necessitated from without’; while ‘[t]he kingdom of ends is possible only through ... self-imposed rules’ (G 438). If man were to be unworthy to be a member of the kingdom of ends he would be considered subject ‘merely to the law of nature—the law of his own needs’ (G 439). It is this need that makes us replaceable, and indeed, in terms of nature
how all of these dimensions are actively involved in the dynamic of dignity. This dynamic is as much the dynamic of autonomy in determining (legislating) the moral law, as it is in the dynamic of personhood in taking the responsibility for (obeying) the law as it is in what Shell now brings to the fore: human consciousness.

Shell quotes this (arguably confessional) remark of Kant’s from the conclusion of his Critique of Practical Reason and I quote the entire paragraph in Shell’s translation.

Two things fill the mind [Gemüth] with ever new and increasing admiration [Bewunderung] and awe [Ehrfurcht] the oftener and more steadily we occupy ourselves with reflecting on them: the starry heaven above me and the moral law within me. Both I do not merely conjecture as obscured in darkness or in the transcendent [Überschwenglichen] exceeding my circle of vision; I see them before me and they connect immediately with consciousness of my existence. The former begins at the place I occupy in the external world of sense, and it extends the connection in which I stand into an unbounded [unabsehlich] magnitude of world beyond worlds ... into the limitless times of their periodic motion, their beginning and their continuance. The latter begins at my invisible self, my personality, and exhibits me in a world that has true infinity, but which is traceable only by the understanding – and a world with which I recognize myself in a connection that is not merely contingent but universal and necessary. The former view of countless multitudes of worlds annihilates, so to speak, my importance, as an animal creature that must give back to the planet (a mere

‘exchangeable for an equivalent.’ So, our choice is between the ‘external law of nature, which can only establish values that are relative;’ or, ‘the moral law, which establishes a value that is absolute.’ And the crux for Shell is this: ‘Since “all values are determined by the law,” law-giving itself must have an “unconditioned, incomparable worth,” and autonomy is thus the ground of worth (Grund der Würde) for every rational being [G 436]. In choosing between heteronomy and autonomy, we insert ourselves in one or another of two radically different sorts of communal economy. […] Dignity is the practical analogue of absolute essence, a self-subsistent (selbständig) value that, unlike substance(s) of Kant’s early speculative efforts, requires no extrinsic ontological grounding. It is therefore not God as Creator whom Kant here invokes but God as Judge.’ This means that the possibility of the intelligible world is built on moral and not ontological grounds. This means its reality depends not on God, but on ‘the collective will of all finite rational beings, who constitute the world’s (potential) members.’ The kingdom of ends ‘would actually “come into existence” if the categorical imperative “were universally followed.’” (G 84). Shell, The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community 1996, 147-149.
speck in the universe ([Weltall]) the matter from which it came, the matter that is for a little time provided (we know not how) with vital force. The latter, on the contrary, lifts up [erhebt] my value [Werth] as an intelligence by my personality, in which the moral law reveals [offenbart] a life independent of animality, and even of the entire sensible world – at least insofar as it allows itself to be assumed from the purposive determination of my existence [Dasein] through this law, which is not bounded by the conditions and limits of this life, but goes [on] into the infinite.\(^{128}\)

This passage alone is so rich and profound it would warrant a thorough exegesis, but it is not the purpose of this chapter to do that, and neither does Shell do it here. However, the themes which we have discussed above are all present here and one may safely say that it is not for nothing that Shell quoted this long passage as it presents in Kant’s own words in a quasi-biographical (or at least confessional) tone his own experience expressed within the framework of his philosophical thinking. Shell’s translation reveals how she understands Kant and has appropriated him. Of special note is the importance throughout given to the concept of consciousness.

Shell goes on to make the following statement about Kant and dignity: ‘Dignity, for Kant’ she says ‘is, then, connected with a kind of immortality beyond temporal calculation in an everyday sense. Human consciousness testifies both to our location in a world informed by space and time [...] and to a status that transcends it.’\(^{129}\)

Dignity is related to a world beyond, to a transcendent (or the transcendent) beyond the realm of nature, science and senses, that somehow implies or involves ‘a

\(^{128}\) Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 59-60. See also Kant, Critique of Practical Reason 1996, 5:161 ff.

\(^{129}\) Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 60.
kind of immortality.'\textsuperscript{130} This seems to be something that happens within us or to us (an 'event,' by which I want to say it is not something theoretical or imaginative). It, furthermore, involves our consciousness in that through consciousness we become aware of our place in this finite world and of our 'status' that transcends it.\textsuperscript{131} This transcendence happens when we overcome the natural world, (as we saw even in the early Kant). It is a moral transcendence.

Shell admits the pivotal role played by consciousness. She discusses a two-fold dimension in consciousness. One is being spectator (of the starry sky) and the other of being participant (in the moral law within as legislator). Both of these have corresponding worlds -the world of nature ‘informed by space and time,’ of ‘temporal calculation’ and of ‘everyday sense’ and the world beyond, the world that ‘transcends’ this everyday sensual world and that is ‘connected with a kind of immortality’ but always beyond the world we have (sensual) access to. In the former we have virtually ‘zero value,’ in the latter ‘priceless value.’ The former world is accessible to us through the senses and we can have knowledge of it, but the latter is hidden and in the realm of ‘practical necessity’ or regulative ideas, but the proviso is that none of this can be determined with scientific precision or even fall under theoretical knowledge. It is

\textsuperscript{130} With this notion of immortality we find evidence of two worlds (noumenal and phenomenal) drawing upon each other. On the notion of immortality and Kant’s early interest in it, as well as its relation to a community (albeit of the spirit-world) see Shell, The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community 1996, 75, 111, 117, 126.

\textsuperscript{131} What this status is is not spelled out in greater detail, but it would involve the participation of this \textit{transcendental world} where we are legislators. Shell does not use this concept but it seems to me not foreign, insofar as transcendence lies in transcendence of our nature through the moral law.
human consciousness that ‘testifies’ to our ‘location’ within this former world and at the same time to ‘a status’ that transcends this world. Consciousness makes us aware of these two worlds, but in a deeper sense consciousness itself is also always and at the same time in virtue of its nature an actor (as participant) and a spectator. One can similarly identify a passive and active dimension to consciousness. It is these together that give us awareness and self-awareness. It is within this dynamic that we experience ‘this subjective feeling of “being lifted up”,’ and it is herein that Shell sees human dignity. It is interesting to note that ‘being lifted up’ is actually a passive event in the case of the one being lifted up. It reminds one of being graced with a gift (in the sense of being gifted). But for her there is also an ambiguity here: can we rely only on this feeling? On what ground does this assumption of our invaluable value rest? Is the moral law enough? Do we not also need other ‘worldly knowledge’ (which, according to her, Kant’s language suggests), which at least will also testify to our worth in this world?

We see here the problematic of the two worlds that Kant postulates and also their interaction or intersection with one another (made all the more problematic since we are theoretically cut off from the ‘other world’) and this is the problem Shell brings to light. We have the ‘reality’ as given to us in the Critical philosophy and also the reality that consciousness seems to imply, beckoning us to something more and beyond. Although she does not put it this way I would venture to ask whether one could not say that here is the spirit of self-transcendence at play and the where-from is clear but the where-to remains unclear. We see the dynamic clearly enough but not where it is pointing to. Shell suggests that we look to history to gain a subjective appreciation of
our worth in *this* world.\textsuperscript{132} It is important to note too that Shell remains focussed on *this* world and to this effect she intends to search for a subjective (because it cannot be other than subjective) *appreciation*, which is other than and different from subjective feeling. Appreciation involves our rational faculties as well.

\textbf{6. Reason and End-Setting}

There seems to be access to the intelligible world in which we participate (besides our participation itself). It is through the moral law that we can ‘trace the form’ but not the content of an intelligible world. This is familiar as Kant also draws this distinction in his moral philosophy between form and content of the moral law. ‘Our task, according to Kant,’ says Shell, is ‘to actualize the intelligible world in the here and now (to the extent that it is possible), and thereby bring the “two standpoints” of human consciousness—incommensurable and yet somehow united—into ever greater harmony or attunement.’\textsuperscript{133} This concretely means that freedom and law be brought into outward harmony (‘since inner harmony eludes our intuitive grasp’) and thus the lawful ways in which we might affect others is conditioned through the structure or dynamic of ‘consent.’\textsuperscript{134} Shell does not specify the meaning of ‘consent’ and whether it

\textsuperscript{132} See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 60.
\textsuperscript{133} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 61.
\textsuperscript{134} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 61.
refers to an individual act or whether consent is more of a communal event.\textsuperscript{135} On a personal level it could refer to obedience (to consent to oneself, i.e., one’s reason)\textsuperscript{136} and is in that sense related to Kant’s concept of duty.

Shell introduces next Kant’s famous ‘Formula of Humanity’.\textsuperscript{137} This formula dictates that one should ‘treat humanity, whether in one’s own person, or the person of another, not only as a means but also as an end [or, “end in itself”].’\textsuperscript{138} In providing a definition of ‘humanity’ she turns to Kant’s \textit{Lectures on Ethics} (as transcribed by Vigilantius) where Kant said: ‘To make a rule for oneself presupposes that we set our intelligible self, i.e., humanity in our own person, over against our sensible being, i.e., man in our own person, and thus contrast man as the agent with the law-giving party. ...

\textit{Humanity is the aforementioned noumenon, and thus thought of as pure intelligence in regard to the capacity for freedom and accountability implanted in man. Man, on the other hand, is humanity in appearance, and thus subordinated to humanity as genus.}\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{135} She talks later of ‘the collective nature of the end of moral legislation’ and even a view of mankind as collective, which makes one assume that consent has a communal dimension. See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 63, 73.

\textsuperscript{136} In this way outward harmony is achieved in that we are both the lawgiver and subject (i.e., consenting) to the law. It would also include honesty toward oneself. This is one of the primary duties one has toward oneself. See for instance Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:429.

\textsuperscript{137} Or: Formula for the Respect of the Dignity of Persons, as Sullivan names it.

\textsuperscript{138} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 61. This is a quote from Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals 1981, 4:429 – see Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 76 n 17. Shell actually speaks of the ‘formula of humans’ see Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 62.

\textsuperscript{139} The emphasis is added by Shell who adds, ‘man, for Kant, is, in this particular sense, a species being.’ See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 76 n 16. Quoted from Kant, Kant on the Metaphysics of Morals: Vigilantius’s Lecture Notes 1997, 27:579.
Thus within the dynamic process of self-legislation we make a distinction within ourselves, setting, as it were, one part against the other. And here Kant talks of our ‘intelligible self’ (which he defines as humanity in our own person) as opposed to our ‘sensible being’ (which Kant calls man in our own person).¹⁴⁰ Both of these distinctions can be traced to a difference within the concept of the ‘person’. It might be that we have here an example of the two different concepts of person Kant describes in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, i.e., moral and psychological personality.¹⁴¹ He also makes a similar distinction when considering one’s duties toward oneself. These correspond to duties that relate to our animality (the natural man) and those pertaining to us only as moral beings.¹⁴² Humanity is then related to morality (the law-giving dimension within), which is at odds with our lower nature. Lastly the fact that humanity is relegated to the realm of the noumenal and ‘man’ only ‘humanity in appearance’ (in the phenomenal realm), with the explicit implication that ‘man’ is thus ‘subordinated to humanity as genus,’ means that our essential selves remain hidden from us. This affirms what Shell

¹⁴⁰ And one ought to recall that person is that dimension where something can be imputed to a man, presupposing that he is both free and responsible. (See above).

¹⁴¹ Kant writes: ‘A person is a subject whose actions can be imputed to him. Moral personality is therefore nothing other than the freedom of a rational being under moral laws (whereas psychological personality is merely the ability to be conscious of one’s identity in different conditions of one’s existence). From this it follows that a person is subject to no other laws than those he gives to himself (either alone or at least along with others).’ Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:223.

¹⁴² Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:420. Kant here makes an important statement regarding dignity, personality and humanity. ‘But,’ he says, ‘a human being’s duty to himself as a moral being only (without taking his animality into consideration) consists in what is formal in the consistency of the maxims of his will with the dignity of humanity in his person.’
referred to above when she said ‘inner harmony eludes our grasp.’\textsuperscript{143} We have, however, an approach to it through reason.

With regard to the formula of humanity, we have determined that the meaning of humanity is tied to the concept of person, which relates to a something (literally, a \textit{capacity}) ‘inhering in’ (literally, \textit{implanted}). We need to look at the setting of ends or goals or (final) purposes. Shell elucidates two possibilities here: a human being could be an end or can ‘lawfully set or have an end.’\textsuperscript{144} To have an end is to involve both consciousness and reason and it is something we set for ourselves on the basis of reason. In this regard the formula of humanity is really a formula celebrating the rationality of human beings. In fact Shell states that this formula ‘requires, above all, that we respect man’s status as a rational being (the only one we know of)...’\textsuperscript{145} Respect and reason combine to enjoins us to treat others according to their status as rational beings. What does it mean to be a rational being?

To better understand this, Shell takes the reader through a short presentation of Kant’s concept of reason.\textsuperscript{146} Contrary to his (arguably wrong) reading of Plato, Kant’s critique of reason deflects reason away from the theoretical field where it might act as a faculty, instrument or vehicle of (theoretical) knowledge to the practical field where it enforces upon us with necessity its ideas in such a way that they regulate our behavior in the ethical realm and determine our ideals in terms of the purposes we strive for – even when we search for theoretical knowledge. ‘Reason is less a faculty of knowledge

\textsuperscript{143} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 61.
\textsuperscript{144} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 61.
\textsuperscript{145} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 61.
\textsuperscript{146} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 61 ff.
than a capacity to project or originate “ideas” that possess regulative or practical necessity—less about what is than about what should be.” Reason’s ideas are not to be taken as ‘objects of an immediate theoretical intuition of reality’ (as Kant mistakenly thought Plato held). According to Shell they are to be conceived of as points of focus (i.e., focus imaginarius) of reason’s ‘self-imposed, rule-governed demands.’ ‘Reason, in short,’ she writes ‘is essentially a capacity for self-necessitation, or the setting for oneself of binding tasks.’ In its theoretical application, where it searches for knowledge of the natural (phenomenal) world, i.e., the world as it appears to us, reason’s demand ‘takes the form of a striving toward totality’ that is a ‘self-consistent, all-embracing unity.’ This reflects a deep desire and goal of perfect knowledge of the whole of nature and it guides and directs reason’s activities to such a degree that Kant talks of these as regulative ideas. The unity of knowledge and the world is one such ‘idea.’ We do not have any direct intuition or evidence for such unity or whole. But we strive toward this goal as if ‘to approach what thereby serves us as a “regulative” goal.’ We see here a practical dimension to reason in that it acts as regulator and task master and as such directs our activities, whether on the theoretical or practical (moral) front. Reason comes with demands and these relate to necessity, self-consistency, and the absence of self-contradiction; and all of these are self-imposed. That is, reason imposes them on itself. Reason legislates and then, under its own guidance, obeys. The

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147 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 61.
148 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 61.
149 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 61.
case in point is the striving and need to see everything in totality, i.e., the presupposition of the unity of the world.

The point of reason is, however, not to remain theoretical but to become practical. Reason is eminently and ultimately practical. In its theoretical reach it is severely limited (in so far as what it can know), but in its practical reach it legislates truly universally and attains objectivity. This is due to reason’s nature as purposive, or ‘end-setting’ and in this it legislates, even in its theoretical dimension, its ‘ideas’ which as the conditions of the possibility of our knowledge determine the form or face of our knowledge. In its practical application, as will, reason finds its true and highest task. ‘In making this transition from theory to practice reason embraces its proper vocation.’ It is thus reason as practical and not theoretical that ultimately establishes objectivity. And more importantly, since the nature of practical reason is moral, so the objective reality is imbued through and through with moral significance. In short, Kant’s revolution

150 As Shell writes after enquiring about the relation between practical reason and its object: ‘The object of practical reason is the reality of an idea whose actualization is a thing in the world which reason sets before itself as a goal. The relation between reason and its object is dynamic, reason moving towards an actualization which, securing the object as a thing of nature, obliterates it as an object of desire.’ Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 71.
151 Shell, The Rights of Reason: A study of Kant’s philosophy and politics 1980, 70-74, esp 72. Shell presents here a thorough explanation as to the need for and way in which theoretical reason becomes practical. All rational activity is ultimately practical. This practicality is in virtue of its goal-setting capacity or its purposiveness. She writes: ‘To set oneself a task or purpose is to take an interest. The purposiveness of reason is itself a kind of self-necessitation. In theory as in practice reason accomplishes its tasks through rules or imperatives which reason itself generates. Imperatives are statements “that express a possible free action by which a certain end is to be made actual.”’ Ibid., 73.
ultimately implies that we live in a *moral* universe. In this conscience plays a central role.

In the end Shell brings this dynamic of the formula of humanity into relation with the dynamic of conscience. Both rely on reason—the latter as sufficiently able to ‘serve as its own self-judging and self-correcting tribunal.’

Shell ends this section by stating that the decisive winner in this entire process is reason, and more pointedly, reason in its autonomy. ‘Both directly and indirectly, then, the critique of pure reason affirms the autonomy of reason (and with the formula of humans as ends-in-themselves) to which conscience bears witness by a different route.’ Whether reason follows the path of the formula of humanity or of conscience,

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152 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 62. For Kant’s description of conscience as being ‘consciousness of an internal court in the human being (“before which his thoughts accuse or excuse one another”’)’ see Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:438. Kant talks of everyone as having a conscience which is not made (created) but ‘something incorporated in his being’ and that is also ‘the thought of duty’ and that ‘follows him like his shadow.’ This process is analogous to the person who is in court being faced by a prosecutor and judge, leading inevitably to one who thinks of a dual personality in himself. Kant describes this as a battle between the higher and lower faculties. He says: ‘When the proceedings are concluded the internal judge, as a person *having power*, pronounces the sentence of happiness or misery, as the moral results of the deed. Our reason cannot pursue further his power (as ruler of the world) in this function; we can only revere his unconditional *iubeo* [I command] or *veto* [I forbid].’ In terms of the former Kant says the accuser and judge cannot be the same person and that in the process we ‘have to think of someone other than [our]selves’ and later that this ‘other may be an actual person or a merely ideal person that reason creates for itself. Such an ideal person (the authorized judge of conscience) must be a scrutinizer of hearts, since the court is set up within the human being.’ Kant talks then of this ‘person’ as needing to be able to ‘impose all obligation’ with the necessary and implied power. The candidate for this being ‘is called God, [and thus] conscience must be thought of as the subjective principle of being accountable to God for all one’s deeds.’ See Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:438-439; esp. 438n.

153 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 62
it is the same ‘subject’ or ‘actor’ at play in legislating as well as obeying in its capacity as an autonomous being.

7. Implications of Kant’s Conception of Human Dignity for Ethics and Politics

This association of dignity with ‘our status as imputable end-setters’ – in other words, as rational beings – grounds Kant’s discussion of human rights and virtues. These inform the concrete content of the more formal ‘categorical imperative.’\textsuperscript{154} As we saw above the possibility and presence of reason is for Shell part of the dynamic that makes dignity possible and that drives the dynamic leading to its actualization. This actualization takes place under reason’s practical application, where it is being guided by ‘the idea of the “Highest [moral] Good” or virtue.’\textsuperscript{155} The “Highest Good” as Shell defines it is virtue and happiness combined. And virtue is the worthiness to be happy. The idea of the highest good supplies us with ‘broad positive duties’ that lead us to self-perfection and to the promotion of the happiness of others, while leaving it to ‘God (and, in a qualified sense, to history)’ to ensure that virtue and happiness are ultimately brought into a just relationship and balance.\textsuperscript{156}

Because the moral law originates in the will of the individual the collective nature of the final purpose of moral legislation is subordinated to the individual nature of the will. The individual takes precedence. As she writes: ‘The “narrow” and “perfect”

\textsuperscript{154} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 62.
\textsuperscript{155} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 62. In its theoretical mode reason is guided by the idea of the totality of nature.
\textsuperscript{156} See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 62-63.
negative duty to refrain from using humanity in my own person or that of another merely as a means trumps the “wide” and “imperfect” positive duty to perfect myself or benefit others.’ In explaining what this means Shell presents an argument that would allow us to claim (with reference to what we saw earlier with Sullivan) that Kant does, albeit in a roundabout way, allow for the notion of embodied dignity.

The argument goes like this. Kant’s prohibition against self-mutilation and suicide aims to prevent the divestment of the ‘natural’ and ‘so indirectly the moral use of one’s powers.’ Failure to avoid this destruction would, in Kant’s words, ‘root out the existence of morality itself in the world so far as one can.’ In other words destroying the body destroys the possibility for morality, i.e., the moral law, which resides within the body. This makes embodiment ‘an indirect’ condition for the possibility of dignity, albeit in a roundabout way. Kant distinguishes between perfect and imperfect duties. Shell writes, ‘the imperfect duty [...] bows before the perfect duty not to abuse the organism in which my moral life, in this world at least, necessarily takes shape.’ However, Kant’s position is more nuanced and Shell brings this out when she explains the meaning of the injunction never to use one’s humanity in one’s person as a mere means. She writes that this ‘implies that I may not use my own reason, or lawmaking and end-setting power, to serve natural inclinations that ought, properly, to

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157 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 63.
158 Shell speaks elsewhere also of Kant’s notion of ‘humanity’ as being ‘embodied rationality’. See Shell, Kant’s Concept of Human Dignity as a Resource for Bioethics 2008, 334. See also Sullivan 1989, 200 ff.
159 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 63.
160 MM 422-23; 219 as quoted and referred to by Shell. See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 63, 76 n 18.
161 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 63.
be reason’s tool’ [emphasis added].\textsuperscript{162} She continues: ‘To respect humanity in my own person is to acknowledge a certain naturally purposive (but nonhierarchical) order of the body, \textit{which supports rational activity without defining it}’ [emphasis added].\textsuperscript{163} The body has its place and is part of our ‘organic constitution,’ as she puts it, and in this there are certain ‘natural limits’ in harmony with which ‘our body may properly be put.’ Even so, the priority of freedom over nature importantly does not mean ‘using one’s body in ways that conflict with its own, self-organizing tendencies’.\textsuperscript{164} Picking up on a central theme of her interpretation she writes that the recognition of these limits is not dependent on or determined by theoretical reason but ‘on an \textit{immediate awareness} of ourselves as living beings in the world, however much that status may defy final empirical explanation’ [emphasis added].\textsuperscript{165} This brings her to the conclusion that there is ‘a robust connection between human dignity, as Kant conceives it, and the link between the “two standpoints of \textit{embodied} rationality” [Shell’s emphasis] (from which we respectively reflect upon the starry heavens above and the moral law within) —a link that somehow unifies these vantage points without collapsing them.’\textsuperscript{166}

Shell turns next to a section of the \textit{Metaphysics of Morals} where Kant discusses duties we need to observe toward ourselves in our capacity as moral beings and not in our animality. These duties Kant sees as the formal expression of the harmony between the maxims of the will on the one hand and the dignity of our humanity in our person on

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the other hand. These consist negatively in the prohibition against lying, avarice and false humility, all vices that are ‘directly contrary to “inner freedom” and hence the “innate dignity of man.”’\textsuperscript{167} All three of these vices according to Shell sin because in the case of lying we treat ourselves as ‘even less than a thing’ depriving others of our potential service, and in the latter two because they fail to ‘treat one’s person as a purposive whole (at least potentially), informed by rational ends.’\textsuperscript{168}

Quoting from the \textit{Metaphysics of Morals},\textsuperscript{169} Shell draws a distinction between human nature with man as \textit{homo phenomenon} and \textit{animal rationale}, and man considered as person \textit{homo noumenon}. The former has a considered, that is measurable and external, value while the latter ‘is lifted up [\textit{erhaben}] above all price; for as a person (\textit{homo noumenon}) he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in himself; that is he possesses a \textit{dignity} (absolute inner value) by which he necessitates \textit{respect}.’\textsuperscript{170}

In attempting to define the meaning of ‘humanity in one’s person,’ Shell quotes Kant in saying that this humanity is ‘the object of a respect that one can demand from every other man, but which one also must not forfeit.’\textsuperscript{171} In the previous section we saw how it is practical reason that actualizes ideas, that brings them into objectivity. So our practical reason’s object in this instance is an object demanding respect and which goes by the name of ‘humanity.’ In her quote Shell then describes the process of living the

\textsuperscript{167} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 64. See MM 420.
\textsuperscript{168} See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 64.
\textsuperscript{169} See MM 434 ff.
\textsuperscript{170} See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 65; quoted from MM 435.
\textsuperscript{171} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 65; as quoted from MM 435.
moral law in accordance with the consciousness of our dignity. ‘Since one must regard oneself not only as a person in general but also as a human being, i.e., as a person who has duties laid upon him by his own reason, one’s insignificance as a human animal [Thiermensch] must not do damage [Abbruch] to one’s consciousness of one’s dignity as a rational man [Vernunftmensch] … [hence] one should pursue one’s end, which is in itself a duty, not abjectly, not in a spirit of servility (animo servili) … but always with consciousness of the sublimity [Erhabenheit] of one’s moral predisposition (which is already contained in the concept of virtue).’

Shell relates humility with this exultation/elevation/sublimity – i.e., Erhebung. Proper humility comes from comparing ourselves with the moral law ‘in all its strictness, and thus entails exaltation (Erhebung) and the “highest self-esteem” for oneself in one’s capacity as moral lawgiver.’ In this process I come to ‘discover’ and appreciate the object (of my humanity) within myself. The dynamic comes about when, as she says, I compare myself to the moral law. Comparison arises as a result of the awareness of a sense of difference. In this case it is an awareness of a difference within me, and the difference being the presence of the moral law vis-à-vis myself (i.e., the moral law to which I compare myself). This induces ‘proper humility,’ inclusive of one’s elevation ‘and this “highest self-esteem” for oneself [emphasis added],’ especially when I realize that I am the moral lawgiver. This respect entails that I never treat myself as a means toward an end, nor allow others to treat me as such. Shell shows that this has political

173 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 65.
implications and is directed against ‘paternalistic monarchs’ who treat their subjects
‘like sheep rather than human beings.’\textsuperscript{174}

According to Shell, Kant’s system of ethics, ‘whose positive duties are
benevolence and self-perfection [...] presupposes a system of rights.’ This system
‘imposes absolute negative conditions on the actions I am morally allowed to
undertake.’ These rights are absolute even if my ends are morally ‘proscribed,
permitted, or forbidden.’\textsuperscript{175} Kant’s liberal regime justifies itself in terms of ‘civic honor,’
with ‘Ulpian’s “honeste vive”—live honourably—as the first rule.’\textsuperscript{176} She continues by
showing how rights have both a ‘private’ and ‘public’ dimension. In the private sense
they describe a system of property law that maximizes (in accord with his famous
formula) ‘the freedom of each consistent with the freedom of all the rest.’ She points
out that ‘freedom’ here means ‘access, unobstructed by the will of others, to the use of
objects as means.’\textsuperscript{177} Concretely this means that I will not use others or their belongings
as means ‘except in ways that they consent to.’ Shell points to a similarity between
Kant’s formula for civic justice and the working of an ideal marketplace where all
outcomes are the result of ‘voluntary exchanges of property.’\textsuperscript{178} There is also a property
in one’s own body and this relates among other things to one’s sexual rights. Shell also
mentions the status of a citizen (‘itself a “dignity”’) and one’s right to be formally free,
equal, and economically (materially) self-sufficient. The need for public right, or

\textsuperscript{174} See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 65-66.
\textsuperscript{175} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 66.
\textsuperscript{176} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 66.
\textsuperscript{177} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 66.
\textsuperscript{178} See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 66.
government arises because people are ‘ill-equipped’ to defend their rights and in the case of defending themselves might not be able to do so appropriately, that is without using violence or treating their adversaries as means and not as ends. In this sense she makes quite clear that for Kant republicanism is the only just form of government.\(^\text{179}\)

She ends with this warning to rulers: ‘That a ruler should [...] declare his subjects altogether lacking in rights, so that his relation to them is one of pure benevolence (as with a shepherd and his sheep) is, according to Kant, both morally and prudentially impossible—morally so, because it reverses the relation between right and ethics on which genuine morality depends, and prudentially so, because a people confronted with paternalism in so explicit and unambiguous a form would certainly (or so Kant claims) revolt.’\(^\text{180}\)

8. History and the Collective Worth of Human Existence

Kant’s refusal to ground dignity in religion (or more precisely, in God, as traditional religion does), raises the question of the importance of human progress. Shell quotes Kant, who says, ‘[we] can scarcely help feeling a certain distaste on observing [men’s] activities as enacted in the great world-drama, for we find [...] everything as a whole is made up of folly and childish vanity, and often of childish malice and destructiveness. The result is that we do not know what sort of concept we should

\(^{179}\) See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 66.
\(^{180}\) Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 67.
have of our species, which is so proud of its superiority.\textsuperscript{181} She comments ‘[t]he “only way out for the philosopher,” is to discover a “purpose in nature” behind the seemingly senseless course of human events.’\textsuperscript{182} The point for Shell here is that it is only with additional – by which she means \textit{historical} – ‘assurance,’ that we can say man’s collective existence on earth is purposive. This is important because despair can easily overtake us and bring dignity to ruin. This section thus tries to show how there are resources for hope in history that will protect and give impetus to lived dignity.

Harking back to the confessional note at the end of the \textit{Critique of Practical Reason} where the dynamic between consciousness as worldly spectator and as (moral) subject and agent is at play and gives birth to a tension-producing dynamic Shell points out that for Kant this tension is irresolvable ‘in this life’ and moreover points to our ‘fractured nature and condition as a species.’\textsuperscript{183}

Nature is scientifically knowable but devoid of purpose, and this prompts Shell to ask, where do we find a purpose? Turning to the \textit{Critique of Judgment} she finds an answer in Kant’s concept of ‘culture’ that is ‘man’s aptitude \textit{[Tauglichkeit]} in general for setting himself purposes, and for using nature … as a means, in conformity with the maxims of his free purposes generally.’\textsuperscript{184} According to Shell this definition enables one

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The quote is from Kant’s \textit{Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Standpoint}. See Kant, Kant: Political Writings 1991, 8:18; as quoted by Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 68, 78 n 30.
\item Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 68.
\item Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 68.
\item See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 69. She quotes from Kant, Critique of Judgment 1978, 5:431 and points to the fact that Kant himself acknowledged the affinity between \textit{Tauglichkeit} (aptitude) and \textit{Tügend} (virtue). See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 78 n 32.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
to see the whole of nature as purposive on condition that ‘culture’ is subordinated to
‘man as moral subject,’ which according to Kant, is ‘the final purpose of creation
itself.’

The realization of culture and its relation to nature is dependent on the
emergence of republicanism as the system of government that best supports the play
and development between the mutual conflicting freedoms within civil society. In the
dynamic where these freedoms conflict, we exhibit our brokenness, or impairment
[Abbruche], and this requires the countering balance provided by lawful authority.

Our ““asocial sociability”—[the] crooked tendency, coeval with reason itself, to
subjugate [ourselves] and others—culminates, on such a view, in free self-government,
allowing for the full development of all [our] faculties.” In this process of the ‘passage
to republicanism’ the role of the saint/philosopher/king is essential. The role of
consciousness returns here again, because it is only this ‘figure’ that is able to ‘arouse
men’s awareness of their honourable, and, indeed sublime, vocation as self-legislating
citizens.’ This task encapsulates for Kant the philosophical vocation. In the face of
events connected to the French revolution that saw rulers nullifying the rights of their
subjects and causing ‘catastrophic wars,’ thus ‘forestalling the self-emancipation of

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185 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 68.
186 As she writes: ‘The formal condition under which nature can alone achieve [its] final
aim is that constitution of human relations where the impairment [Abbruche] which
results from mutual conflicting freedom is countered by lawful authority in a whole,
called civil society.’ See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 69, 78 n 34; in quoting Kant,
Critique of Judgment 1978, 432 ff; see also 434-36; 320; 322-23.
187 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 69.
188 See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 69, who adds ‘a task that epitomizes the
calling of philosophy as Kant himself conceives it.’
humankind by submerging the principle of autonomy, and with it human dignity, in paternalistic oblivion,' Kant had to renew his efforts to show that mankind is making progress. Kant finds especially in the ‘sympathy’ evoked in ‘wishful spectators’ of the French Revolution, a response that he calls a ‘sign [...] that mankind is in constant progress toward the better.’

For Shell this response relates to those ‘distinct moments of sublimity’ that the earlier quoted note from the Critique of Practical Reason ‘consecutively evoked’ except that in the case of the Revolution these ‘response signals’ are ‘representative of human history.’

She quotes from the Conflict of the Faculties regarding the constant progression of humankind of which the French revolution is one such instance. ‘Here, therefore, is a proposition that is not just well-meaning and commendable for a practical intention, but, despite all skeptics, maintainable for the most rigorous theory: that the human race

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189 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 70.
190 Shell quotes from the Conflict of the Faculties where Kant pits the possible selfundoing of mankind against his natural insignificance thus revealing the sublimity and responsibility that goes with the moral order. ‘Before the omnipotence [Allgewalt] of nature, or even more, before its to us inaccessible highest cause, man is, in his turn, but a trifle [Kleinigkeit]. But for the sovereigns [Herrschert] of his own species to take and treat him as such, in part by burdening him bestially, as mere tool of their intentions [Absichten], in part by exposing him in their conflicts with one another, in order to let him be slaughtered—that is no trifle, but an overturning [Umkehrung] of the ultimate purpose [Endzweck] of creation itself.’ See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 69-70, 79 n 38; as quoted from Conflict of the Faculties, 7:89.
191 See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 70, and 78 n 39, where she makes the point that sympathy is most properly related to the Stoic ideal of sympatheia, ‘that intimate connection between God and humans by virtue of which all the wise and virtuous are friends’ rather than to the sympathetic feelings of ‘pathological good-heartedness.’ See also Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:456-457, from which she quotes above.
192 See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 70. It seems we have here the ‘transcendence’ moving into history or historisizing itself, that is it becomes incarnate.
has always been in constant progress toward the better and will continue to be henceforth; which, if one has regard not only for what happens to one people, but also to the extension [Verbreitung] [of that progress] over all peoples of the earth, who gradually come to participate in it, opens/inaugurates a prospect of incalculable time [die Aussicht in eine unabwehliche Zeit eröffnet].’ [The emphasis is Shell’s.]

The ‘glimpse of the eternal’ that this passage opens up is at our disposal in virtue of our ‘higher, moral nature.’ It is here where the ‘eternal’ breaks through; or to put it another way: within the realm of nature on the plain of history we find a moment of revelation of a glimpse of eternity (that is, literally, incalculable time). Even though the possibility of the darkening of humankind remains with rulers arising to push aside progress, Kant is certain that this will never be the permanent or final possibility. ‘So construed,’ says Shell, ‘Kant’s concern with history is no mere afterthought, but the outcome of a conception of human dignity that relies, for its potency, not only on the moral law, but also on some assurance against despair, also morally derived, as to the pointlessness of our collective existence – a pointlessness that may finally put human dignity itself in question.’

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193 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 70.
194 See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 70-71.
195 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 71.
9. Evaluation and Conclusion

In this closing section let us consider how Shell deals with some alternative views; and what resources she finds within Kant for answering his detractors. Looking at the paradox in saying that freedom is autonomy, with the implication that we are able to freely do the wrong, even though it is contrary to the moral law, Shell points to a distinction Kant makes between Wille and Willkür. The former is that facet of the soul that legislates while the latter expresses the actual freedom of choice. Moral law pertains to the former, and in its lived expression we need to bring the latter into line with the former. We saw, moreover, that in the phenomenon of our conscience, the moral self is of a ‘divided nature,’ being ‘a self both humbled and exalted.’

A source for the second criticism comes from an essay in the same collection to which Shell contributed her essay. Shell makes the point that Kant rejected all hierarchical forms of dignity. ‘Honor [...] for Kant, is always honestas or integrity, never

196 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 71.
197 Shell (Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 72) explicitly refers the reader to this essay by Robert Kraynak (Kraynak, "Made in the Image of God": The Christian View of Human Dignity and Political Order 2003, 81-118, esp., 83, 107 ff). Kraynak deliberately singles out Kantian dignity as it merges with contemporary Christianity to provide a basis for human rights and dignity grounded in freedom. Shell responds to one of his points here where he is critical of the modern (and by implication, Kant’s) notion of dignity as an absolute right ‘rather as a matter of degree in a hierarchy of perfection.’ Kraynak, "Made in the Image of God": The Christian View of Human Dignity and Political Order 2003, 83.
honor, or distinction of a sort that lessens the honor owed to others.' To further her argument Shell refers to the *Groundwork* where Kant states that the only (unqualified) good is a good will, the point being that this good will is precisely a great equalizer and available to all. ‘The only unqualified good is in this sense universally accessible.’

Shell continues by showing how this universal ‘accessibility’ of dignity is for Kant ‘anything but easygoing.’ Even in the early Kant, virtue is a ‘strenuous affair, requiring (uncommon) moral strength and fortitude. Most difficult of all, it involves a never-ending effort to be truthful with oneself.’ To this she adds elsewhere: ‘Greatness of

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198 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 72.
199 See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 72 (and also 78 n 47) where she quotes from Leo Strauss: ‘The only thing which can be held to be unqualifiedly good is not the contemplation of the eternal, not the cultivation of the mind, to say nothing of good breeding, but a good intention, and of good intentions everyone is as capable as everyone else, wholly independently of education.’
200 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 72. She adds ‘lest one be reduced, in one’s own eyes, to what Kant calls a “speech machine.”’ Note that honesty here relates to personal integrity. It is about life lived in accordance with one’s speech. A further note: in describing a ‘speech machine,’ Shell writes that such a person would be ‘a mere “appearance” of a human being whose “determination” is so far from “purposive” as to be literally incapable of meaning anything.’ For a deeper discussion on this theme see also Ibid., 79 n 49 and her discussion of especially MM 429-30 and CJ 452-53 where she states that Kant held it important to ‘assume the existence of a moral author of the world, in order to avoid damage (Abbruch) to his own moral attitude.’ Shell discusses this in the context of our final purpose with regard to the moral law. If, for example, one, atheists take themselves to be the final purpose, then their honesty in the face of nature and evil will ‘[hurl] them [...] back into the abyss of the purposeless chaos of matter from which they were taken.’ For this reason one ought to assume the existence of God. What is noteworthy here too is that in following the moral law, Kant is very sensitive to our moral attitude (*moralische Gesinnung*). Our moods can affect our living of the moral law, as we saw with regard to the danger of despair. So it is important to take care of our whole being, including our moods. This bespeaks a fully ‘embodied’ notion of human beings and their rationality.
soul, for Kant, is replaced by or merges with conscientious striving or willingness to make an effort.\textsuperscript{201}

Shell maintains, furthermore, that for Kant we are not to judge others whose inner motives are not available for us to know. This does not mean he is oblivious to the need for civil punishment. Shell makes a statement regarding the accusation often levelled at the early liberals that they would be soft on moral standards (especially in the context of civil punishments). Referring to this she writes: ‘Kant’s affinity with earlier liberal notions of the imperviousness of the individual [...] to public scrutiny and condemnation has less to do with the weakening or abandonment of moral standards [...] than with an internalization that boosts those standards beyond the limits of space and time (and, in this sense, infinitely raises them) with a concomitant devaluation of public, political life as the arena of a freedom that is “merely external.” And yet public life, as the visible phenomenon of our moral relations with one another, remains the theater in which man’s moral destiny, in this life, is necessarily played out – and upon which [...] the “revelation” of our dignity, for Kant, at least partly draws.\textsuperscript{202}

Shell herself states that the emphasis on history (or mankind as collective subject) is new and a road that Kant himself did not travel on – ‘in no small measure from his rejection, on moral grounds, of a humanity conceptualized wholly historically.’\textsuperscript{203} In fact were we focussing just on ourselves, we might fall into the despair about which Shell spoke earlier, a despair that might prevent us from realizing our own

\textsuperscript{201} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 72, 79 n 48.
\textsuperscript{202} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 73.
\textsuperscript{203} Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 73.
dignity. The value of human life ‘both its goodness for us and our worthiness to enjoy it,’ was for Kant not ‘a foregone conclusion.’ In this sense Shell finds Kant rather melancholic: “The value of life,” he once said, if it is lived for the sake of mere enjoyment (i.e., happiness) is easy to estimate: “it sinks below zero.” In this vain Kant maintained that one would not want to relive a life aimed solely at enjoyment even if one devised this life for oneself.

The challenge for moral philosophy would be to overcome ‘a despair grounded in the judgments of esteem and contempt from which the moral impulse of the soul also arises.’ Shell, however, does not say how this is possible. She continues, though, to say that Kant’s conception of dignity could be seen as a ‘translation and transformation’ of biblical morality ‘especially suited to liberal-democratic times.’ She acknowledges that Kant would probably not put matters this way. In the end, however, ‘[h]uman dignity, for Kant, is grounded in a combination of self-exaltation and abasement, honor, and humility.’ In this tension the new emphasis on history is born and develops because man ‘in Kant’s view’ must justify creation itself – a task that earlier thinkers did not deem possible or necessary.

Looking at the current world where Kant’s emphasis on the ‘irreplaceability of the deserving subject’ is in practice overwhelmingly denied, can paradoxically lead us to

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204 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 72. See also her description on the next page (p 73) of ‘Kant’s hopes [that] were almost outpaced by his forebodings’.

205 See Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 73. She also adds that this new emphasis lead to the political disasters of the last century.
realize that ‘it is all that stands between us and a world in which anything can have a price and nothing has intrinsic value.’

In the end Shell asks whether this subject, this moral personality can bear the weight (philosophic and existential) placed upon it by Kant. And in honesty she answers with a ‘perhaps.’ Reasons in favor of its survival are, for one, the notion of desert which ‘strikes a deep and powerful chord’—especially with regard to the issue of ‘collective guilt,’ and, for another, Kant’s ‘prescientific sense of justice and nobility’ (perhaps not always appreciated by an earlier liberalism). Kant’s notion of dignity, which relates to the ‘capacity to have actions imputed to one’ offers ‘conceptual advantages,’ especially in the light of the collapse of the notion of knowledge of the good, which traditional philosophy and religion advocated. In the end, however, human dignity finds common cause among people in their immediate and ordinary experiences of moral indignation. These experiences are either directed ‘inward (as conscience) or outward (as punitive anger toward others).’ That we have to respect the freedom of the object of our anger and therefore owe him respect remains, as Shell confesses, ‘one jarring note.’ In the final analysis she finds the democratic aspects of Kant’s account of dignity highly attractive. ‘Dignity, for Kant,’ she says, ‘is necessarily equal as well as measureless. We transcend the realm of price by virtue of our shared capacity to obey the law of which we are ourselves the author.’

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206 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 74.
207 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 74.
208 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 74.
10. Concluding remarks

This has been a long chapter. We have seen how the question of human value, present from the early stages of Kant’s career, is intrinsically related to human dignity. We saw how Shell in her approach took the whole of Kant into account. She incorporated not only his early works, to which many tend to grant a lower status, but also the complications arising from the two perspectives arising from the critique of reason, viz. the noumenal and phenomenal world. Not surprisingly these two worlds intersect, according to Shell, in man. Her approach here is thus in keeping with her methodology.

Shell’s strength is her ability to relate Kant’s views to our ordinary experiences and especially in highlighting the unity of Kant’s overall project as an attempt to answer the question of mankind’s value. And her emphasis on Kant’s project as not merely intellectual but a matter of life-vocation gives one a flavor as to the embodied dignity that Kant spoke of. Her effort to show why the body is important is a further sign of her integrative anthropological reading of Kant.

We now turn our attention to the different approach of Oliver Sensen.
Chapter Three: Oliver Sensen on Kant and Human Dignity

Prelude

In studying Kant on human dignity, Oliver Sensen starts from the current dominance of this theme, as it appears in the latter half of the twentieth century. This is seen, for example, in the discourse of the founding of the United Nations where the inherent dignity of a person is seen as the description of an inherent value within that forms the ground for respect of the person and of her human rights. In support for this doctrine people often turned to Kant. Prominent Kantian scholars concurred with this. In his study of Kant, Sensen discovered, however, that Kant does not use dignity in this way at all. This led him to a thoroughly systematic study and analysis of all the instances where Kant uses this word ‘dignity’ [Würde]. The results of this brought him to a new interpretation of what Kant understood by dignity and put him at odds with many prominent Kantians. In his analysis Sensen enters into a dialogue with these Kantians as he explores the implications of this concept (and dignity’s ‘fellow concepts’) in Kant. In what follows we present Sensen’s new understanding of Kant on dignity.

1. Introduction

In his monumental work Kant on Human Dignity, Sensen tells this story about Kant as reported by his trustee and later biographer Wasianski. Near the end of his life
Kant’s physician came to visit him. Kant stood out of respect to his physician and refused to sit. The very weakened Kant would only sit after his physician had sat down. Sensen writes that when the physician ‘reacted with disbelief, Kant took all his strength to say: “The sense of humaneness has not yet left me.”’ Kant died three months later.

This almost iconic incident encapsulates not only much of Kant’s life, but also especially the essence of Kant’s thought on dignity, as Sensen interprets it. The miniscule scale of the action and especially the effort and personal cost it took from Kant to remain true to his principle only magnifies its power. If it is related to dignity then we can see all the key words of dignity in action: respect for self and others, the effort of will in this, and above all the sense of humaneness. These call forth, for Sensen, the philosophical questions as to what is understood by ‘dignity’ and wherein lies its power or its motivational force. It is clear that dignity has to do with value, but what is the nature of this value of humanity and what is the scope of its potency? For Sensen all of these key concepts are essential to dignity, as they are indeed to both Sullivan and Shell. And yet he interprets these differently. For him dignity does not refer to a metaphysical property within – a property which has, moreover, absolute value and in virtue of which we are obliged to respect others and ourselves. This he enfolds through a very thorough and systematic study, showing both why the one interpretation (the more traditional one put forward by Kantian scholars) does not do full justice to Kant’s texts and secondly by providing his own interpretation of dignity as ‘elevation’ or

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1 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 11. Wassianski was a very close friend of Kant’s especially towards the end of Kant’s life and acted as personal secretary. See Kuehn 2001, 7 ff.
‘sublimity.’ This is developed within the context of Kant’s philosophy where these concepts link into each other.

This difference is due to his specific methodology on the one hand and on the other his desire to bring Kant’s thought on dignity in line with the fundamental basis of Kant’s moral thought. Sensen’s methodology will become clear in the course of this presentation. I take his methodology to stand on two legs as it were. The first is that he follows an analytical approach and in this he is particularly focussed on the actual context of the passages where dignity and its related concepts appear, as well as the way Kant uses these concepts. In his exegesis of Kant this methodology takes precedence (i.e., looking for the use of a concept and the way it is used and then to interpret it in line with the rest of the associated themes as they appear in Kant’s writings). In all of this, Sensen desires to remain true to the integrity and unity of Kant’s system. The second leg would be his constant dialoguing not only with fellow Kantian scholars but also with history (as in for example his history of the concept of dignity). The insights he gathers here become central to his interpretation of the texts.

Key to his interpretation is the relationship (already seen, for instance, in Shell) between value and dignity. The correct understanding of the nature of value or worth is pivotal for Sensen’s understanding of dignity and goes moreover to the heart of Kant’s moral philosophy. For this reason, we start this chapter with an Interlude as to these important themes that might at first glance not seem directly related to dignity as such. Yet they feed directly into dignity as they address the questions of the meaning of ‘value’ and ‘worth’ and its relation to the requirement to respect others. This Sensen
explores by asking about whether value grounds and motivates the moral law and secondly by looking into the meaning of humanity (as this is also pertinent to the Second Formula).

After this interlude I present Sensen’s understanding of Kant’s notion of dignity. Sensen traces the history of this concept and finds different paradigms operative. Which paradigm was preeminent in Kant’s day and can we find in Kant evidence that he held to one paradigm in particular? In order to answer these we present Sensen’s brief history followed by his interpretation of Kant’s use of this concept. This is the central part of the chapter where Sensen presents his thesis that dignity is ‘elevation’ and not some inner value or property, metaphysical in nature. Given Sensen’s claims and the fact that his theory sets itself against the prevalent interpretation of Kant on dignity, which includes aspects of the interpretation of scholars like Sullivan and Shell, we need to allow for a full – and necessarily lengthy – exploration of its key elements. For the most I follow his major work *Kant on Human Dignity*.²

2. Interlude I: Critical Presuppositions

In this Interlude I shall present some themes that are central to Sensen’s understanding and interpretation of Kant’s concept of dignity. These form the

² See also Sensen, Kant’s Treatment of Human Dignity in the Groundwork 2008; Sensen, Kant’s Conception of Inner Value 2011; Sensen, Kant’s Conception of Human Dignity 2009; Sensen, Human Dignity in Historical Perspective: The Contemporary and Traditional Paradigms 2011; Sensen, Dignity and the Formula of Humanity 2009.
presuppositions, which he acknowledges, and they provide the broader background in which dignity is embedded and in light of which Sensen can interpret aspects of dignity that would otherwise – if treated in isolation from the rest of Kant’s thinking – leave us with a skewed understanding. This is in part due to some ambiguities in the odd turn of phrase here and there in Kant that leads to differences of interpretation among Kantians. Sensen sees it as his task to clarify this with regard to the notion of dignity; and for this reason these themes are pivotal if one is to gain access to his project and interpretation of Kant. Indeed as we shall see it provides a guiding interpretative principle in the light of which he approaches his exegesis of the word ‘dignity’ itself. The themes addressed are for the most part related to Kant’s understanding of ‘value’: is value in Kant a separate metaphysical property? Can it form the foundation of the moral law? And what does Kant mean when he uses the phrase ‘absolute inner value’ and then relate it to ‘dignity’? Finally, we shall look at the Formula of Humanity and the related subthemes active there, namely, the setting of ends and the understanding of ‘humanity.’ This is to help us understand precisely what Kant wants to be respected when he talks of ‘respecting the humanity in our persons,’ which he calls ‘dignity.’

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3 Sensen quotes four instances: In the *Groundwork* Kant talks of ‘inner worth, that is, *dignity*’ (G 435); and ‘dignity, that is, an unconditional, incomparable worth’ (G 436). And in *The Metaphysics of Morals* we read ‘*dignity* (an absolute inner worth)’ (MM 435); and ‘*dignity* [...] that is, of a worth that has no price’ (MM 462). See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 174.
2.1 Value as metaphysical property?

We saw in the last chapter that, at least for the early Kant, dignity was tied to the question of man’s worth. Another way to phrase this question is to ask after the value of humanity. In *Kant on Human Dignity* Sensen dedicates his first chapter to the nature of Kant’s use of the concept of value. Since most of his argument is based on a specific understanding of value, the discussion becomes pivotal to his thesis. Determining the exact nature of this notion is then a necessary condition for understanding his project.

Sensen points out that for Kant dignity is related to the command to respect myself and others. In fact as he says this is not true only in Kant: in our contemporary world dignity is understood to be the cornerstone of many constitutions of countries and certainly plays an important role in the United Nations’ documents such as the *International Covenants on Human Rights* (1966). There human rights derive their justification ‘from the inherent dignity of the human person.’ Perhaps no other definition captures this close interconnection between dignity, value and respect as does the definition Sensen presents from the German dictionary *Duden*. There, *Würde* (dignity) is defined as a ‘value inherent in human beings that commands respect.’ In other words because someone has ‘dignity,’ which is this value inherent in them, they are to be respected. Not only can they demand or require respect, but in fact respect is

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4 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 14-52.
5 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 1.
6 This is Sensen’s translation of ‘Achtung gebietender Wert, der dem Menschen innewohnt.’ See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 1 n 1.
their right as human beings. This right is grounded in their dignity. We have become so used to this idea of human dignity that we cannot think of any other way of seeing it. And yet another way of seeing it is precisely what Sensen came to as he turned his attention to Kant’s understanding of dignity. The problem is that many people turn to Kant for confirmation of the standard view of dignity. However, Sensen points out that holding this account of grounding the requirement to respect others on the value they possess gives rise to certain ‘puzzles’ in Kant, puzzles that would disappear if one were to change one’s perspective.7

After exploring the meaning of the question of value in Kant’s system,8 Sensen suggests that one possibility would be to consider that the value of human beings refers to the fact of ‘a distinctive property [that] all human beings possess,’ and that ‘in addition’ to the theoretical description of humans possessing the properties of body and

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7 Sensen names four puzzles: One, Kant says that all human beings should be respected, but the only thing that has absolute value is a morally good will. Yet, as he points out, not all people ‘have a morally good will.’ Second, he asks if value is the supposed ground for moral requirements, why does Kant insist that ‘no value can ground moral requirements’? Third, why does Kant say ‘humans beings have dignity because they should be respected’ (he refers to MM 462, 435) and not that ‘they should be respected because they have dignity?’ Fourth and last Sensen asks why does Kant not refer to value or dignity when he justifies moral requirements or summarizes his position? See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 1-2.

8 Sensen asks what exactly are we looking for when we enquire about value, which in Kantian literature is often presented as the ‘ground of the requirement to respect others.’ Do we refer to a feature in light of which humans have value (like freedom, or the capacity to set ends, or morality)? Does it refer to the capacity itself that has a certain value, or that something (that is precious) is perhaps added onto the capacity? Or, does it mean merely that the capacity is valued (that is, it is describing a state of affairs) or perhaps that this capacity should be valued? What is the nature of value? See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 14.
soul (under which he places freedom and the ‘property of being a self’), ‘one would also possess the value property of being precious’ [my emphasis].

Sensen is clear that, in his reading, Kant does not employ such an understanding of value. To be sure, he suggests that in spite of the resurgence of this theme of value in recent Kant scholarship, the literature does not address the question of the nature of value, and that those who do, reflect according to him a position influenced by the thought of G.E. Moore. In this vein value is taken as ‘a property a thing possesses inherently, i.e., a property that would belong to the thing even if it were the only thing that existed or if it existed in total isolation from everything else. Value would then be “part of the fabric of the world” [...] in the widest sense: a distinct property, substance, or an instance of a Platonic form.’ He adds then the following, ‘[t]o say that a human being has an absolute inner value, could refer to something inside a human being, an “inherent, intrinsic preciousness.”’

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9 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 14.
10 See his discussion at Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 14-17, see also 15 n 14 for a discussion of the positions in this regard of some Kantian scholars.
11 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 15. (In this quotation Sensen quotes respectively from Mackie 1977, 15 and Seifert 1997, 96.)

Sensen explores this further, for instance if Kant says the good will is like a precious jewel (G 394) does he imply this conception of value? Does the interiority of the value imply that it need not exist ‘out there’ in the ‘form of an objective value’ and that it might even not exist ‘independent of the mind’? He touches upon the question of moral realism and how it would relate in Kant to his understanding of the good vis-à-vis the Categorical Imperative. We are not entering into this debate here. For a fuller discussion see Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 15-16.
Sensen is in no doubt as to Kant’s position on this point. ‘Kant did not even entertain such a conception,’ he writes but ‘even if he had considered it [...] his arguments would rule it out.’¹²

We shall look briefly at how Sensen argues these points.

In the first place, Kant did not give thought to the idea that value could be a separate property or substance. Sensen notes that when Kant explicitly sets out to list ‘all possible’ conceptions of the good or value, he never lists this conception. This shows he did not even consider this conception as a possible interpretation of value. Sensen states that both ‘the good’ and ‘value’ are equivalent for Kant.¹³ According to Sensen the mature Kant always presents us with the same candidates as to what the good might be – namely, pleasure, moral feeling, perfection, or divine command. Sometimes Kant includes education and civil constitution as possible bases on which to build morality.¹⁴ The point, however, is that this expanded list ‘includes “all previous” attempts to ground morality on the good, as well as – more importantly – “all possible” attempts to ground morality.’¹⁵ If we take Kant seriously we would have to accept that he does not entertain a notion of value as substance or separate property.

There is another reason why this list would be exhaustive. Sensen shows how Kant forms a table with these four categories into which he classifies each ground

¹² Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 16.
¹³ In this regard he refers to the beginning section of the *Groundwork* (G 393 ff.) where Kant ‘seamlessly [...] switches between both expressions.’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 16 n 16.
¹⁴ Sensen refers here to Mrong 620; G 441 ff.; CPRR 39 ff., 64; Mrong 628; Collins 252-55; In terms of the addition of education and civil constitution he refers to CPRR 40; Mrong 621; Collins 252-55.
¹⁵ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 16. He refers to CPRR 40; G 432, 441.
mentioned in his list. Kant first divides the possible grounds for the good into two categories, those forming empirical (i.e., subjective) and those presenting rational (i.e., objective) grounds. Within each category a further distinction may be made, namely whether the grounds are external or internal. So, according to Sensen, this table will show that education and civil constitution form part of the empirical grounds that are external (with pleasure being likewise empirical, but from internal grounds/source). Perfection gets placed under the rational and internal field while divine command would be an example of external and rational grounds. Sensen writes that Kant ‘clearly thinks that these possibilities form a “table in which all possible cases are actually exhausted, except the one formal principle.”’ This principle is the moral law or Categorical Imperative. Kant here does not consider the good as a metaphysical property and similarly a value. Sensen points out that in Kant’s time Werth was an economic term, and even ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ did not point to an ontological distinction: they were all economic concepts related to the market price of an object and the latter distinctions would refer to the price inclusive or exclusive of human labor’s price added.

Returning to Sensen’s second point that, if Kant had considered value as a metaphysical property, his arguments would have prohibited him from holding it, Sensen asks us now to assume Kant’s response supposing he had encountered such a

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16 He refers to CPrR 40 and Mrong 620-29. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 17.
17 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 17.
18 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 17 and also n 17, where he mentions that in presenting his candidates for the good Kant does not include the Platonic Form of the Good.
conception of value. In a chapter entitled ‘On the concept of an object of pure practical reason’ in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant seems to deal with the question as to which objects a morally good reason ought to engage in. Sensen quotes Kant here: ‘By a concept of an object of practical reason I understand the representation of an object as an effect possible through freedom.’ For Sensen, Kant’s point here is that these ‘objects of pure practical reason follow from the principle of pure practical reason, the moral law or Categorical Imperative’ [my emphasis]. This points Sensen to the fact that Kant reverses the order of knowledge in the first two *Critiques*. In the first Critique theoretical knowledge starts from the senses, then moves on to objects, and finally yields principles. In the second *Critique* ‘practical insight starts from a principle, the moral law.’ And from there practical inquiry moves to the objects and then finally the senses. In this chapter Kant presents, in his own words, his ‘method of ultimate moral investigation.’ Sensen asks then in this regard: ‘Is the moral law to be derived from a prior conception of the good, or is the good to be determined by the moral law?’

In his answer to this question Kant presents two arguments. Sensen focuses on the first. It states that if a good were placed anterior to the law, nothing would be immediately good (as opposed to good as a means). The second one claims that if a good were placed anterior to the law, there would be no moral law. Sensen shows how

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19 For his response Sensen turns to CPrR 57-65. He also refers to CPrR 16. See Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 17-20.
20 Quoted from CPrR 57 by Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 17.
21 Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 18.
23 Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 18. The quote from Kant comes from CPrR 16.
both in the second Critique as well as the Groundwork, placing ‘any possible conception of the good [...] prior to and independent of the moral law [...] would yield heteronomy.’ The implications of heteronomy in this context reaches further than infringing upon the value ‘autonomy’. According to Sensen, even if one were to include a divine command, or a metaphysical value property, one would still ‘have to give an account of how one can discern this value, and why one should be motivated to follow it.’ And, for Kant, the only candidate through which one discerns and is motivated to follow the value discerned is a feeling of pleasure. Having said that, pleasure is ‘contingent and subjective,’ and, as Sensen indicates for Kant these cannot qualify as a ground for ‘a necessary and universal moral law.’

Sensen presents Kant’s argument as follows: Early in the second Critique, Kant stresses that the only way to relate to any external object (including any value properties others might possess) is by receptivity and sensibility and therefore not by the faculty of understanding or thought. ‘Pleasure,’ as Kant writes, ‘[insofar as] it is to be a determining ground of desire for this thing, is based on the receptivity of the subject, since it depends upon the existence of an object; hence it belongs to sense (feeling) and

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24 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 18. Sensen refers to CPrR 64; G 441.
25 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 18. The point is whether there could be a value, which is some good, like freedom, happiness or the dignity (preciousness) of a human being, that underlies the Categorical Imperative. According to Sensen some contemporary Kantians think this would add appeal to the Categorical Imperative by making it both more compelling to obey and being a motivator in obedience. See Sensen, Kant’s Conception of Inner Value 2011, 262-63.
26 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 18. He refers to CPrR 64.
Sensen reads this in light of the first *Critique*, where Kant asserts that we do not possess an ‘intellectual intuition.’ The manner we receive an object, is rather, ‘via sensibility.’ Sensen’s point is very concrete. As he puts it, if we assume that the good is ‘not a natural property that can be detected by one of the five senses (e.g. [what] one cannot see, feel, hear, touch or smell), then the only remaining avenue for sensibility to receive the object is a feeling of pleasure.’ For motivation to pursue this good or value one would also need, as we have said above, a feeling of pleasure. And for Kant we are motivated by either pleasure or an a priori law. Sensen quotes Kant here saying so beautifully that ‘the will stands between its a priori principle, which is formal, and it’s a priori incentive, which is material, as at a crossroads.’

Sensen draws attention to the fact that Kant reacts here against a Humean theory of motivation, which sees reason as the mere ‘slave of the passions,’ which are the only true motivators. This would render Kant’s a priori moral law powerless to enact anything in virtue of itself, making it rather contingent on antecedent and independent

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27 Taken from CPrR 22. Sensen makes this point in response to his question why the concept of the good could only be something that promises pleasure. This was the point of the following passage he quoted: ‘If the concept of the good is not to be derived from an antecedent practical law, but, instead, is to serve as its basis, it can be only the concept of something whose existence promises pleasure and thus determines the causality of the subject, that is, the faculty of desire, to produce it’ CPrR 58. See Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 18-19.

28 Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 19. He refers to CPR A 50 ff./B 74 ff.

29 Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 19.

30 Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 19. He refers to CPrR 63.

31 Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 19 n 18. Quote from G 400.
desires for its productiveness. For this reason Kant insists that one could ‘also be
motivated by a law of pure reason.’

Given the above Sensen states that were ‘the good or a value’ anterior to the law, it would leave the feeling of pleasure as the only possible motivator. As he writes:

‘If one follows Kant in this, the result is that “the concept of that which is immediately good would be directed only to that with which the feeling of gratification is immediately connected.”’ Moreover, the common way of talking about the good suggests that the good is gauged by reason and Sensen adds that by reason he means ‘concepts that can be universally communicated.’ Hence Kant (and Sensen’s) conclusion: ‘if the concept of the good were the basis of the moral law, then there would be nothing good absolutely.’

The upshot of all this is that for Sensen the same argument would apply if one were to hold value as a distinct metaphysical property whose presence within a person requires or necessitates and so motivates respect. How would we epistemologically be able to know it and how would it be able to motivate us? As with the good the only avenue open to us would be by means of the feeling of pleasure. As Sensen asserts: ‘In this context it is […] important to note that to human beings a metaphysical value property would not be known as such. The only access one would have to it is through a

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32 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 19. He refers to CPrR 15. As Sensen adds here, Kant is not concerned about ‘a third alternative’ besides pleasure or the a priori law. This adds weight to the earlier point that value is not considered by Kant as a value property.
33 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 19, with quotation from CPrR 58.
34 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 20.
35 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 20. Sensen refers also to CPrR 58.
feeling of pleasure. So even if value existed as a distinct metaphysical property, human beings could never know it as such; the only thing we would have is a feeling of pleasure. The assumption that there is a value of human beings out there therefore reduces itself ad absurdum. If there were this value, it would drop out of the picture. We could not know of its existence. This means Kant’s arguments also rule out the knowledge and relevance of metaphysical value properties for moral philosophy.36

There are two passages in the *Groundwork* that Sensen highlights, because they are often used by scholars in support of their ‘metaphysical reading of value.’ The clearest passage occurs near the opening section (one) of the *Groundwork*. Kant compares the good will to a jewel. In addition he here also uses the expression ‘absolute value’ and seems to address the nature of value. So, even if in spite of the greatest effort a good will achieved nothing, then still ‘like a jewel, it would shine by itself, as something that has its full worth in itself,’ says Kant. Is this, asks Sensen, ‘not an endorsement of value as a metaphysical property?’37 Sensen shows, however, this is not the case. This is an analogy and for Kant analogies signify similarity between relations and not between things.38 The emphasis in this analogy is on ‘shine’ and it

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36 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 20. To be sure, Sensen acknowledges that some might regards Kant’s argument as less than ‘watertight.’ For his discussion of these objections and a rebuttal, see Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 20-21.
37 Quote from G 394 and Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 21.
38 Sensen refers to Kant’s *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* where in the context of considering ‘the world as if it were the work of a Supreme Understanding and Will’ he employs analogies like watch, ship and regiment. About these Kant says these analogies intend to say nothing other than that they express ‘the same relation to the watchmaker, the shipbuilder, the commanding officer [...].’ Kant, Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics 1950, 106 (4:357-358). Sensen quotes from Kant’s note regarding analogy: ‘analogy, which surely does not signify, as the word is usually taken, an
means Kant wishes to stress that even if a good will seems ineffective (and we might say like a jewel, which does not achieve anything), it nevertheless shines like a jewel. For Sensen the intention is to stress the consequential respect that is demanded in this case from an observer. In fact, Kant testifies to this when he writes in his own person that ‘before a humble common man in whom I perceive uprightness of character [...] my spirit bows, whether I want it or whether I do not.’

The second passage Sensen discusses reads: ‘The essence of things is not changed by their external relations: and that which, without taking account of such relations, alone constitutes the worth of a human being is that in terms of which he also must be appraised by whoever does it, even by the supreme being.’ The issue here for Sensen is the fact that the sole determining influence in appraising a person’s worth (even from the divine perspective) is and remains the will of a person. And as he says, ‘the essence of a good will does not change with its external relations.’ Quoting from the Groundwork he writes: ‘the proper worth of an absolutely good will [...] consists just in the principle of action being free from all influences of contingent grounds.’ And again he quotes Kant who writes a few pages further: ‘That will is absolutely good which cannot be evil, hence whose maxim, if made universal law, can never conflict with imperfect similarity between two things, but rather a perfect similarity between two relations in wholly dissimilar things.’ Illustrating this Sensen says that if we say ‘4 is to 2 as 6 is to 3,’ we do not intend to say ‘4 is like 6’ but rather that the relation between the numbers is perfectly similar, being namely, ‘twice as much.’

39 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 21. Sensen takes this from CPRR 76.
40 Quotation from G 439. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 22.
41 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 22.
42 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 22. Quote taken from G 426.
itself.'43 This brings us into the presence of the Categorical Imperative. We become good only through following the Categorical Imperative for its own sake. And for Sensen the point of freedom from the contingent influences is exactly to follow the Categorical Imperative for the sake of the Categorical Imperative. This is the only way we can become good. Sensen encapsulates this point: ‘Kant repeatedly says that the worth of a human being is only the one he can give himself in being morally good.’44 Sensen points out that the sentence that precedes this one refers to the Categorical Imperative.45

Sensen lastly discusses whether Kant’s description of the ‘intelligible aspect of oneself,’ which he calls the ‘proper self,’ does not point to the fact that we possess a metaphysical value property.46 He notes, though, that the ‘ontological superiority of the proper self’ does not automatically imply a moral value. As he says, every object appearing in the phenomenal world ‘has an intelligible aspect,’ like a ‘proper table’; but this does not import moral value to a table. Moreover, Kant nowhere argues for the moral value of a proper self. Quite contrary, writes Sensen, ‘Kant […] directly argues that any knowledge of an intelligible self is impossible for human beings.’47 Knowledge of an objective value property insofar as the intelligible aspect of one’s self is concerned seems ruled out. Sensen indicates that talk about the ‘proper self’ serves to explain why

44 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 22. Sensen supports this with reference to the following: CJ 443, 208 ff.; G 439, 449 ff., 454; CPR 110 ff., 147 ff.
45 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 22. See G 439 (quoted by Sensen): ‘[E]ven this sole absolute lawgiver would […] still have to be represented as appraising the worth of rational beings only by their disinterested conduct, prescribed to themselves merely from that idea.’
47 This is part of a point Kant is making in his Paralogisms (CPR A 341/B 399 – A 405/B 431) to which Sensen refers. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 23.
the moral law should be of interest to us. As Kant says: ‘the law interests because it is
valid for us as human beings, since it arose from our will as intelligence and so from our
proper self.’ And as Sensen writes: ‘The law is valid because it has a genuine source
that is not external; an external source could not ground a necessary and universal
law.’

In conclusion Sensen finds that there is no good reason to believe that Kant’s
notion of the value of human beings entertained this as a distinct metaphysical property
possessed by all people. According to Sensen, phrases like ‘inner value’ in themselves do
not provide sufficient reason for justifying such a conception. In the next section he
elucidates Kant’s argument as to why value, conceived as a metaphysical property,
could not serve as a foundation for morality.

2.2 Value as Foundation?

In this part of the Interlude I shall focus on Sensen’s argument as to why Kant
rules out the possibility that a value could ground any moral requirements and
especially the demand to respect another. The passage of the second Critique discussed
above, does not deal with respect in the way the second Formula (the Formula of

48 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 23. Sensen quotes from G 461.
49 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 23. And as he adds: ‘There is no further
argument that an intelligible world has value.’ This seems to close the matter.
50 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 23.
Humanity, as Sensen refers to it) makes it explicit, but the argument as he puts it would be valid for the Formula of Humanity nonetheless.⁵¹

Sensen mentions Kant’s response to a reviewer of his *Groundwork*, who criticized him for not deriving the Categorical Imperative ‘from a prior conception of the good.’⁵² In his response, Kant felt the need to clarify his methodology for determining the moral law: ‘This is the place to explain the paradox of method in a *Critique of Practical Reason*, namely, that the concept of good and evil must not be determined before the moral law (for which, as it would seem, this concept would have to be made the basis) but only (as was done here) after it and by means of it.’⁵³ According to Sensen this shows that Kant’s focus is not about which good to pursue. He searches rather for the foundation and justification of the moral law. And it is not a metaphysical value – not even the value of human beings – however this may go against the grain of common thought that thinks (and expects) there should be a condition at the basis of the Categorical Imperative.

Kant further argues that if one were to start with a concept of the good ‘in order to derive laws of the will from it,’ one would be left without an ‘a priori law of the will such as the Categorical Imperative.’⁵⁴ We have seen this argument before. The only way to find out what the good is would, in that case, be through the experience pleasure.

And feelings of pleasure, which are dependent on experience, are a posteriori and not a

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⁵¹ As he puts it the Formula for Humanity, which ‘commands that one treat others never merely as a means, but always at the same time as an end in itself’ is also ‘a command of reason and a categorical imperative.’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 24.

⁵² Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 24.


⁵⁴ See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 24. He refers to CPrR 63.
priori as moral laws ought to be. Sensen writes: ‘If one does not begin with the moral law, then the good could be either pleasure or something external (e.g. God’s will, but also a metaphysically distinct value property).’\textsuperscript{55} This would again leave us only with pleasure, which cannot give the moral law, since it is ‘relative and contingent.’ The only signs of an a priori cognition are ‘necessity and strict universality.’\textsuperscript{56} And Kant claims that the moral law has to be a priori. In the beginning of the \textit{Groundwork} he says: ‘Everyone must grant that a law, if it is to hold morally [...] must carry with it the absolute necessity; that is, for example, the command “thou shalt not lie” does not hold only for human beings.’\textsuperscript{57}

In evaluating Kant’s argument\textsuperscript{58} Sensen emphasizes that the point for Kant remains that \textit{no} value ‘could ground the Categorical Imperative as the moral law: “It is on the contrary the moral law that first determines and makes possible the concept of the good, insofar as it deserves this name absolutely.”’\textsuperscript{59}

Sensen clarifies this relationship between value and the moral law with reference to Kant’s ‘Copernican Revolution.’ This concept from Kant’s theoretical philosophy served as illustration for Kant to elucidate the nature of the ‘revolution in

\textsuperscript{55} Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 25.
\textsuperscript{56} Sensen quotes CPR B 4: ‘Necessity and strict universality are therefore secure indications of an \textit{a priori} cognition, and also belong together inseparably.’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 25.
\textsuperscript{57} Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 25. He quotes from G 389, with references also to 412 and 425.
\textsuperscript{58} He points out that, as in the first argument, the crucial premise is that any external good is known only through a feeling of pleasure. A modern-day intuitionist might, contrary to the first \textit{Critique}, argue that we have ‘an intellectual intuition or sixth sense for discovering a metaphysical property.’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 25.
\textsuperscript{59} Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 25 ff. He quotes from CPrR 64.
our way of thinking’ he thought we needed.60 We think naturally that our knowledge must conform to the object. And it is likewise ‘a common way to think that human laws must conform to something that has value or is precious.’ Kant, however, ‘reverses both relationships.’ In terms of our knowledge his revolution had ‘the object [...] conform to a priori elements of human cognition.’ In his moral philosophy Kant’s revolution implied that ‘absolute value is dependent upon an a priori law of human reason.’61

Sensen identifies yet a deeper way in which the theoretical thought of Kant’s ‘Copernican Revolution’ affects his views on value. As Sensen says, taking value to be a ‘distinct metaphysical property’ is to make it an object ‘out there’ that first needs discovery and in this case then ‘knowing a value property would be no different from knowing any object as it is in itself.’ He quotes the Critique of Pure Reason thus: ‘If we let outer objects count as things in themselves, then it is absolutely impossible to comprehend how we are to acquire cognition of their reality outside us, since we base this merely on the representation, which is in us.’62

Thus, to start from a metaphysical property will keep us captive within the same problematic, namely, that the value, in itself, would be unknowable. What we would know, would be our ‘own subjective reaction to it.’ And that, as we saw above in the case of value, is the feeling of pleasure. And, as we also saw, that is not in accord with

60 For this ‘Revolution der Denkungsart’ he refers to CPR B xviii ff. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 26.
61 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 26. He refers to G 435 ff.; and also to MM 435 and 462; where we see the practical effect of this revolution: human beings are not to be respected because they have dignity; they have dignity because they should be respected (Ibid. 26 n 27).
62 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 26. The quote is from CPR A 378.
Kant’s moral thought. Treating value as a metaphysical property seems, furthermore, to be precluded especially in terms of the ‘Copernican Revolution’ in Kant’s theoretical philosophy.\(^{63}\)

If this is the case, how does Sensen interpret Kant’s concept of value? He discerns four possible understandings. One, as distinct metaphysical property, such that even if something existed in total isolation it would still possess this value inherently. Second, as relation between two things. This is understood in the way we might say ‘food is valuable for my health.’ It is beneficial or useful, and Sensen calls this the ‘instrumental relation.’ So to say that some behavior is fitting under these circumstances (e.g., etiquette) falls under this category. The third possibility is to understand value as subjective. Subjectivity refers to what we as subjects value, be it, for example, happiness or pleasure. These things are grounded as values in our desires and inclinations; something has value because we desire it.\(^{64}\)

Sensen opts for a fourth possibility. ‘[V]alue might not be a description of what a being values based on his desires, but it could be a prescription of what one should value. [...] To say that human beings have value would be to say that they should be valued and respected.’\(^{65}\) This prescription could have different sources. Sensen points out that these could be either external or internal. An example of an external source

\(^{63}\) To be sure, Sensen raises some further objections, which he treats successfully in later chapters. In terms of this chapter we will not go into these. See however Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 26 ff., 26 n 27, 53 ff., 96 ff.

\(^{64}\) For a more detailed treatment, including his refutation of these three possibilities, see Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 28-30. The second option Kant would judge to be hypothetical and not absolute and the third would be contingent. As we saw, these cannot ground the Moral Law.

\(^{65}\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 28.
would be a command from parents, society, or God. An internal source would be one’s rationality or the experience of conscience. As we saw above the Kantian framework does not permit of an external source. ‘Rather it would be,’ says Sensen, ‘a command of pure reason – or something a being would value if it were wholly governed by reason [...]. This prescription is what Kant presents as the Categorical Imperative.’

So, in other words, when the faculty of reason considers (that is, judges) a maxim or an action as necessary, Kant would say it has moral value. As Sensen trenchantly puts it. “‘Has value’ [is a shorthand] for saying “should value” or “would value if he were fully rational.”’

For this reason it is the moral law that determines the good. He continues by stressing that, even though he regards value as a prescription, it as such could not be the foundation (or rationale) of the moral law. The prescription is not grounded by an external factor (e.g. divine command) but in terms of a principle, which for Kant is the Categorical Imperative.

Sensen asks now whether his account of value could ground the Categorical Imperative. If, he says, it were dependent on something else one wants or desires, making the prescription then dependent on a condition (do ‘x’ in order to fulfill ‘y’), it could not in virtue of this ground an ‘unconditional and categorical imperative.’

However, he continues, even in the case where the prescription would be both necessary and unconditional, ‘in that it commands what one has to value simply,’ – even then it could not act as ground or justification of Kant’s imperative. And, for Sensen,

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67 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 30, (cf. 28 for the phrase ‘shorthand’).
68 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 30. He refers to CPrR 62 ff.; G 435 ff.
‘[t]he simple reason is that such a prescription would have exactly the same characteristics as the Categorical Imperative’ [emphasis mine]. Now a prescription that ‘commands necessarily,’ in other words, one that is ‘not conditioned on any ends one may set for oneself based on desires, can only prescribe the form of the law.’ Now, says Sensen, the form of the law is none other than the universalization of one’s maxim. And what is the universalization of one’s maxim other than the Categorical Imperative itself? Indeed: ‘That prescription would be the Categorical Imperative, and not a separate value. So in construing a prescription of what one should value, one would not thereby introduce a value that is prior to and independent of the moral law.’

In conclusion then, Sensen asserts that, while for Kant the positing of a value before and as ground to the moral law seems the natural way of thinking, it can never form the basis of morality; in fact, according to Sensen, Kant regards this as ‘the mistake of all previous moral systems.’ While this seems clear now, what remains is to show what Kant means by ‘absolute inner value.’

2.3 Kant’s Conception of Absolute Inner Value

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69 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 31.
70 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 31. He refers to G 420 ff.; CPrR 29 ff.
71 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 32. He refers to CPrR 39, where Kant writes: ‘If we now compare our formal supreme principle of pure practical reason (as that of an autonomy of the will) with all previous material principles of morality, we can set forth all the rest, [...] and thus we can prove [...] that it is futile to look around for any other principle than the one presented.’ Kant, Critique of Practical Reason (1788) 1996, 5:39.
Sensen points out that Kant raises the issue of value at prominent places. The two striking examples are at the beginning of the *Groundwork* (where he famously states that ‘only a morally good will could be called good without limitation’\(^72\)) and in the Second Section where he draws a distinction between ‘price and inner value.’\(^73\) Sensen has already shown conclusively that Kant does not hold value to be a metaphysical property, nor a description either of what one values subjectively or of a relation between two entities. These latter two are based on our inclinations that govern what we subjectively value, and Kant judges these as having ‘relative' value.\(^74\) Relative value is contrasted with absolute or inner value. ‘I shall argue,’ Sensen writes, ‘that for Kant the expression “absolute inner value” is nothing more than a *prescription* of what one should value independently of inclinations.’\(^75\) ‘Inner value’ is saying the same thing as ‘unconditional value.’ In other words to say x ‘has inner value’ is to say x ‘should be valued unconditionally.’ It is ordered thus by the Categorical Imperative, which therefore justifies it.\(^76\)

Referring to Kant, Sensen puts it thus: ‘Value in general is what reason judges (independently of inclinations) to be necessary: “the will is a capacity to choose *only that* which reason independently of inclinations cognizes as practically necessary, that

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\(^72\) G 393 ff. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 32.
\(^73\) G 434 ff. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 32.
\(^74\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 32. He refers to G 428.
\(^75\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 32.
\(^76\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 33.
is, as good.”⁷⁷ What ‘is good’ or what ‘has value’ express the same thing, namely, that which ‘reason deems [...] necessary’ and hence prescribes. This prescription comes in the form of an imperative.⁷⁸ Sensen reminds us that ‘good’ in the absolute sense is distinguished from good in the sense of our well-being [Wohl]. The absolute good is only established⁷⁹ by actions and the will, which carry them out. Both ‘good’ and ‘value’ are then dependent on reason’s judgment. Sensen introduces here Kant’s distinction between hypothetical and categorical commands. Kant writes: ‘Now, if an action would be good merely as a means to something else the imperative is hypothetical; if the action is represented as in itself good, hence as necessary in a will in itself conforming to reason, as its principle, then it is categorical.’⁸⁰ Hypothetical imperatives yield relative values, which are dependent on and conditioned by inclinations. The value associated with categorical imperatives is not relative, since it is not conditioned by inclinations; it is good in itself.

Considering Kant’s opening statement in the Groundwork (only a good will can be judged to be good absolutely), Sensen concludes that non-rational things have only

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⁷⁷ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 33. This quote is taken from G 412.
⁷⁸ Sensen quotes here from G 413: ‘All imperatives [...] say that to do or to omit something would be good.’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 33.
⁷⁹ Sensen’s term is ‘predicated.’ See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 33. He quotes from CPrR 60: ‘Thus good or evil is, strictly speaking, referred to actions [...], and if anything is to be good or evil absolutely (and in every respect and without any further condition), [...] it would be only the way of acting, the maxim of the will, and consequently the acting person himself as a good or evil human being, that could be so called, but not a thing.’
⁸⁰ G 414, as quoted in Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 33. Sensen mentions in his explication that good is defined here in terms of reason’s judgment as something necessary.
relative value. Likewise, when Kant talks about ‘absolute or inner value’ he refers to a *judgment* of reason and is not proposing that an ontological property of an existing thing has a distinct value. Sensen thus argues that Kant would use a phrase like ‘x has absolute inner value’ to mean that ‘reason deems x to be necessary simply and that reason’s judgment is not conditioned (e.g., by the consequences of x or one’s inclinations to x).’ The characteristic of necessity follows from its being in accord with the Categorical Imperative. Sensen clarifies his interpretation by stressing that “‘absolute inner value’ refers to how one has to *judge*, or to what reason deems necessary.” In support of this he quotes the opening lines of the *Groundwork*. The quote takes on special significance because of his added emphases. They give a clue as to his reading of this important passage. I quote in full. ‘Kant says that it is “impossible to *think*” of anything that “could be *considered* good without limitation except a good will” [...]. He [Kant] goes on to say that an “*impartial rational spectator* can take no delight” in seeing happiness without a good will. Even secondary virtues lack much of what “would be required to *declare* them good without limitation,” and he notes that the coolness of the scoundrel makes him “more abominable *in our eyes*” [Sensen’s emphasis throughout].

As Sensen says, all this has to do with how we judge. Finally, ‘to say something has an absolute inner value expresses that reason judges an action to be necessary

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81 This is because the will is the practical aspect of reason.
82 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 34.
83 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 34.
84 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 34. Quote from G 393 ff.
regarded for itself.' Sensen takes this as being independent of inclinations, usefulness, functions and circumstances, and so forth. ‘Inner’ and ‘absolute’ become equivalent to each other. As Kant says: ‘The word absolute is now more often used merely to indicate that something is valid of a thing considered in itself and thus internally [innerlich].’ ‘Inner’ and ‘absolute’ then refer to a judgment that is made in the same way, namely ‘in abstracting from all relations.’ It means considering the object one looks at ‘in isolation,’ thus making the judgment ‘unconditional.’ For Sensen this is alluded to by Kant’s remarks at the beginning of the *Groundwork*, where he asks whether one judges talents of mind, temperament, happiness, secondary virtues, etc. to be good ‘in every respect or only under the condition of a good will.’ Ultimately the good will alone is unconditionally good: ‘A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes, [...] but only because of its volition, that is, [...] regarded for itself, [it] is to be valued incomparably higher than all that could merely be brought about by it in favor of some inclination.’

Sensen summarises this way ‘A judgment about absolute inner value is accordingly a judgment of what is to be valued irrespective of any condition (inclinations, consequences, etc.). This judgment is made in accordance with the Categorical Imperative, and therefore follows from it. Value is not the ground of it.’

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85 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 34.
86 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 34. Quote from CPR A 324/B 381.
87 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 35. He refers to G 393 ff.
88 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 35. Quote taken from G 394.
89 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 35.
2.4 The Formula of Humanity

There are two themes Sensen discusses and which I shall mention briefly. They address Kant’s concept of humanity especially as we find it expressed in the Formula of Humanity\(^{90}\) and the subsequent theme of the ‘setting of ends.’ Sensen claims that Kant provides a justification for the requirement to respect others in a section of the *Groundwork* summarizing the Formula of Humanity.\(^{91}\) The Formula reads: ‘So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.’\(^{92}\) This requirement is already incorporated in the Formula of Universal Law or Categorical Imperative, which makes the two Formulas ‘at bottom the same.’\(^{93}\)

In line with his argument thus far Sensen holds that there is no prior or independent value that could form the basis for the moral law. Any such grounding would introduce contingency and nullify the ‘necessary and universal nature of morality.’\(^{94}\) He says, furthermore, that there is ‘no non-moral activity, such as the setting of ends, that commits one to valuing others.’\(^{95}\) Sensen points out that while we should value the good will, even this good will is not in itself the ground or reason to respect others. We naturally respect the moral law we see in others but even this

\(^{90}\) In keeping with Sensen’s way of speaking, I shall refer to the Second Formula here as the Formula of Humanity.


\(^{92}\) G 429, as quoted by Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 97.


\(^{94}\) Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 96.

\(^{95}\) Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 96.
feeling of respect is not to be confused with the maxim requiring us to respect others. In fact, this requirement, for one thing, draws no distinction between a criminal and a holy person, since one owes each of them equal respect. Sensen leaves no doubt that the one and only ground for respecting another – ever – is ‘that it is a direct command of reason’ which is the case because this is the ‘way reason necessarily functions.’ And what this expresses is none other than the Categorical Imperative.

Kant, however, expresses the requirement to respect others in terms of the Formula of Humanity. But this, Sensen argues, is for Kant ‘at bottom the same as the Categorical Imperative.’ Sensen acknowledges that the claim regarding the link between the Categorical Imperative and the Formula of Humanity is not new; it has been held by prominent Kantian scholars, among whom he mentions Sullivan. What is new in his argument is that one can find within the Formula of Humanity the universalizing maxim to respect others. He argues that the Formula, as such, is not justified in terms of value but in terms of respect, which is a direct command of reason.

Sensen provides a detailed analysis that spans many pages. I shall not go into that here. At issue is the desire of some scholars to find an argument, which is both ‘different from and independent of the Categorical Imperative.’ The key question for

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96 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 96.
97 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 96. Sensen refers to G 436, 437.
98 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 96 n 77. We have discussed this point above in Sullivan.
99 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 96 ff.
100 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 97. I shall call this the alternative interpretation.
him pivots on the understanding of Kant’s phrase within the passage leading up to the
Formula: ‘The ground of this principle is: *rational nature exists as an end in itself.*’ The
alternative interpretation takes this ‘end in itself’ to refer to a ‘special moral status,’
which is ‘a value one should always respect.’ Scholars tend to combine this with Kant’s
reference to this being ‘a *subjective* principle,’ which is then taken to denote a
possession of ‘moral status’ which demands respect. This is the alternative
interpretation of the Formula of Humanity.102

In characteristic fashion, Sensen presents us with a thorough-going analysis of
Kant’s usage of the notion ‘end in itself.’ It occurs roughly twenty-nine times in his
published writings103 and is contrasted with a thing in nature, which is ‘a means to
another.’104 A human being, in contrast, is an end in itself, insofar as he is ‘not fully
determined by causal laws.’105 ‘End in itself’ is for Sensen ‘a technical term that gets its
meaning from its contrast to “mere means,”‘ and describes a metaphysical fact that
human beings are free.106

Sensen writes in conclusion: ‘For Kant, then, the Categorical Imperative is a
direct command of reason. It is an operating principle of a reason that has freedom. As

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101 See G 428 ff. The full passage reads: ‘The ground of this principle is: *rational nature exists as an end in itself.* The human being necessarily represents his own existence in this way; so far it is thus a *subjective* principle of human actions. But every other rational being also represents his existence in this way consequent on just the same rational ground that also holds for me;* thus it is at the same time an *objective* principle from which, as a supreme practical ground, it must be possible to derive all laws of the will.’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 97.
102 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 97.
103 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 103 n 79.
104 *Naturrecht Feyerabend* 1321. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 102.
105 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 103.
106 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 103.
reason tries to overcome contradictions or seeks the unconditioned, so it is under the moral law or Categorical Imperative. The imperative does not have to be grounded in a normative reality (e.g., a value). Rather it is the first normative reality. One can say that ancient Greek philosophy insisted that the good is more fundamental for human beings than the right or the moral law. However, in the Judeo-Christian tradition the law was taken to be the first normative reality. [...] The primacy of laws was maintained in the natural law traditions [...]. For Kant too the first normative reality is a law. This he has in common with, for instance, divine command theories. However, Kant is quick to argue that this law cannot be a law that comes from an external source, e.g. from God, the state or other human beings.¹⁰⁷ Both the Categorical Imperative and the Formula of Humanity share for Sensen the same justification and similarly express the same requirement (the willing of one’s maxim as universal law). This means that one may use the less strict method provided for by the Formula of Humanity (rather than that of the Categorical Imperative) ‘to derive concrete duties.’¹⁰⁸ These duties for Kant relate to the requirement of respect.¹⁰⁹ And here too Sensen states explicitly that ‘Kant does not [...] think that the Categorical Imperative and the requirement to respect others differ essentially.’ In fact they ‘can be seen as one command put in different ways.’¹¹⁰

In the final section of this Interlude we look briefly at what Sensen makes of Kant’s usage of the term ‘humanity.’ This pertains to exactly ‘what’ ought to be respected or never treated as a ‘mere means.’ Sensen reports that based on a careful

¹⁰⁷ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 117-18.
¹⁰⁸ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 118.
¹⁰⁹ See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 118-22.
¹¹⁰ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 123, 124 respectively.
reading of *The Metaphysics of Morals* (*The Doctrine of Virtue*) and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* Kant may be said to have drawn distinctions between our animality, humanity and personality. Our *animality* refers to that aspect we share with all non-rational living beings. Our *humanity* denotes our reason with its capacity to set ends. However, we are to be mindful that reason, insofar as it is governed by our inclinations, is a slave to our passions. *Personality*, finally then refers to human beings under the moral law and as such is ‘a reason that can be practical by itself, i.e., one not conditioned by inclinations but free.’ Sensen points out that Kant’s later distinctions between our animality, humanity and personality, are not to be projected back into the *Groundwork*. He argues on the contrary that this threefold distinction is not presupposed by the *Groundwork*. In the Formula of Humanity Kant envisages ‘humanity’ as freedom. ‘As freedom brings with it the moral law,’ he writes, ‘what should be respected is freedom or the *capacity* to be morally good.’ Sensen points out that this is what Kant in his later writings would call ‘personality,’ but that he also expresses it by other means, using especially the distinction between *homo phenomenon* and *homo noumenon*. This is a distinction that appears in the *Lectures of Ethics* (*Vigilantius*) but according to Sensen’s reading also in the *Groundwork* and *Metaphysics of Morals* and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.

This distinction, off course, is not meant to be a metaphysical one depicting separate entities. *Homo phenomenon* ‘is “man in the state of sensibility”, that is a

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111 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 128. He refers to MM 434; Rel 26-28.  
112 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 128.  
113 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 128.
human being as he experiences himself in introspection.’ *Homo noumenon*, on the other hand, is ‘merely man “as an ideal, as he ought to be and can be, merely according to reason.”’\(^{114}\) This second form presents the idea of ourselves as morally good and functions both as idea and ideal.\(^{115}\)

Sensen quotes Kant in showing now how humanity in one’s own person is called ‘personality.’ Thus: ‘Personhood, or humanity in my person, is [...] that which distinguishes man in his freedom from all objects under whose jurisdiction he stands in his visible nature. It is thought of, therefore, as a subject that is destined to give moral laws to man, and to determine him: as occupant of the body, to whose jurisdiction the control of all man’s powers is subordinated. There is thus lodged in man an unlimited capacity that can be determined to operate in his nature through himself alone, and not through anything else in nature. This is freedom.’\(^{116}\) So when we say we should respect the humanity in another person we respect the *homo noumenon* and that is ‘just another way of saying one should respect freedom.’\(^{117}\)

In reference to the *Doctrine of Virtue* Sensen elucidates another dimension of what ought to be respected in others. This is their self-esteem. Each one is under the obligation to esteem himself. This means that others similarly fall under this obligation

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\(^{114}\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 129. Sensen quotes from Vigil 593.

\(^{115}\) Sensen refers to Vigil 610. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 129.

\(^{116}\) Quoted from Vigil 627 with reference to 579; in Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 129. Sensen also refers to MM 239, 418; Rel 28; for evidence of this understanding elsewhere (Ibid., 130).

\(^{117}\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 131. For Sensen this freedom is nothing other than ‘the capacity for morality.’ A few sentences on we read: ‘The *homo noumenon* is freedom or the capacity for morality’ (Ibid., 131).
toward self-esteem. And, all alike can achieve to moral worth (i.e., esteem). Sensen writes: ‘One can achieve this worth in respecting the moral law: “simply respect for the law is that incentive which can give actions a moral worth” [...] Respecting the law is the same as respecting the idea of oneself as being morally good, i.e., the *homo noumenon*: “Our own will insofar as it would act only under the condition of a possible giving of universal law through its maxims – this will possible for us in idea – is the proper object of respect.” In this quote Sensen ties together the notions of *homo noumenon*, freedom, self-esteem (worth) and the moral law as they pertain to respect.

Sensen has now established that Kant did not view value as a metaphysical, ontological reality within a human being and that a value could neither ground the moral law nor motivate one’s adherence to it. Respect for humanity is furthermore the result of obeying the Categorical Imperative and does not ground it. These interpretations will form the principles that will guide him in his search to determine Kant’s understanding of the concept of dignity. We now turn to Sensen’s historical analysis of this concept.

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118 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 131. Sensen refers to MM 462 and quotes Kant: ‘But just as he cannot give himself away for any price (this would conflict with his duty of self-esteem), so neither can he act contrary to the equally necessary self-esteem of others, as human beings.’
119 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 132. Sensen quotes both times from G 440.
3. Three Paradigms of Dignity

Sensen divides thinking about human dignity historically into two phases, the contemporary, and what he calls the traditional paradigm. Within the traditional paradigm he distinguishes between the origin of the traditional paradigm, the so-called archaic or aristocratic paradigm and the traditional one proper. \(^{120}\) We shall briefly capture the essence of each paradigm and then proceed with Sensen as he draws philosophical distinctions between the contemporary and traditional models of dignity.

3.1 The Contemporary Paradigm

Sensen proposes that Kant ‘uses a fundamentally Stoic conception of dignity.’ \(^{121}\) Sensen calls it ‘Stoic’ after Cicero, who first applied the concept ‘dignitas’ in reference to Stoic doctrines and, furthermore, because Kant himself in the opening section of the second part of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* refers approvingly to the Stoics’ conception of dignity. There Kant discusses the contribution of the Stoics to the moral life with regard to their notion of *virtue*. \(^{122}\) In order to explain exactly what this

\(^{120}\) For a list of scholars who wrote on the history and development of the idea of dignity, see Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 152 n 132. He makes clear that he does not pretend to ‘present a history of ideas’ and that it is important to bear in mind that he is interested in establishing patterns of thought in so far as different notions of dignity are concerned. Ibid., 152, 153 n 133.

\(^{121}\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 143.

\(^{122}\) It is important to note that this occurs in the context of Kant’s discussion of the moral life as requiring constant battle with the ‘active and opposing cause of evil’ within. The
means and how it relates to Kant’s understanding of dignity Sensen presents what he calls ‘three paradigms of dignity.’ This allows him to determine not only where Kant stands vis-à-vis our contemporary notion of dignity but also to highlight the difference between the contemporary notion and his own understanding of Kant’s notion. There is an implicit hermeneutical question in the background: namely, to what degree is our understanding of Kant’s notion of dignity colored by the contemporary notion? It is Sensen’s belief that the standard view of ‘Kantian’ dignity takes more from the contemporary model than from Kant himself.

In our previous chapter we saw that if we were to search for a question to which the answer would be ‘dignity,’ a possible candidate might be: What is, or, more precisely, wherein lay the value of human being? Thus we established a link between dignity and value or worth [Werth].\(^{123}\) For the contemporary paradigm this association is central.

Sensen looks at contemporary documents in support of his understanding of the contemporary paradigm. In fact, he states that the contemporary model is basically a product of the twentieth century.\(^{124}\) He builds this model by looking at some documents mature Kant has not diminished the early Kant’s notion of the struggle, and the effort required for struggle. It is in this context that Kant refers to the Stoics and in a note, to which Sensen refers, he writes: ‘These [Stoic] philosophers derived their universal moral principle from the dignity of human nature, from its freedom (as an independence from the power of the inclinations), and they could not have laid down a better or nobler principle for foundation. They then drew the moral laws directly from reason, the sole legislator, commanding absolutely through its laws.’ Kant, Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason (1791) 1996, 6:57n.

\(^{123}\) According to Sensen Kant only uses this word Werth to express the English ‘worth’ or ‘value.’ See Sensen, Kant’s Conception of Human Dignity 2009, 311 n 8.

\(^{124}\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 152.
stemming from the United Nations and some scholars. He starts, however, with the authoritative German dictionary *Duden*, which defines dignity [*Würde*] as ‘a “worth inherent in human beings that commands respect.” For a full philosophical expression Sensen turns to Josef Seifert who writes: ‘When we speak of the dignity of human life, we mean an objective and intrinsic value. We speak of a value and intrinsic goodness greater than, and different from, a modest aesthetic value of an ornament or the intellectual value of a chess player […], which do not directly impose moral imperatives on us. Instead, when we speak of human dignity, we speak of morally relevant value, one which evidently imposes on us a moral call and an obligation to respect it.’ Sensen points out that this value is judged to be a ‘distinct metaphysical property,’ that, as such, is not subject to any change. Moreover, this value is again, in the words of Seifert, ‘incommensurably higher’ than any other value; and, it is both ‘intrinsic’ and ‘objective.’ According to Sensen, Seifert held that we know this dignity

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125 Scholars he refers to are Wood, Jones, Paton, and Lo, among others. For these Kantians dignity has ‘moral implications.’ It grounds the respect I owe others. In what would be an apt summary of the position Sensen has argued against, he writes: ‘In justifying why one should respect others, the good (here understood as an inherent value of the individual) is seen as prior to the right (the principle that demands respect for others), and the rights of those affected are seen as being prior to the duty of the agent.’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 147, and 147 n 119, for the list of scholars.

126 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 147.

intuitively (i.e., ‘by intuition as direct recognition’), and this view of dignity as ‘an ontologically distinct value property’ reveals ‘a stark form of value realism.’

Sensen turns next to various documents of the United Nations, particularly the Introduction to the (founding) Charter of the United Nations (1945), and the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), as well as the two Covenants on rights (adopted in 1966), namely, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, from the International Covenants on Human Rights (1967), whose preambles declare that human dignity is the basis for human rights.

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128 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 148. Sensen elaborates by quoting Seifert: ‘As life, and human life, this value called “dignity” is an ultimate and irreducible phenomenon which cannot be defined properly speaking but can only be unfolded and brought to evidence.’

129 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 148. He points out that not every proponent of the contemporary paradigm follows an ‘intuitionist epistemology.’ As such he shows how some contemporary Kantians argue for the absolute value of human beings. Sensen thinks of Christine Korsgaard, Allen Wood, Paul Guyer, Richard Dean and Samuel Kerstein, whom he discusses in an earlier chapter. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 55f, 69f, 75f, 79f, 88f, 92f, and 148. With reference to some problems regarding the form of value realism with distinct ontological and epistemic properties, see Ibid., 148 n 121.

130 ‘We the peoples of the United Nations determined […] to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, [and] in the dignity and worth of the human person.’ Listing dignity and worth together leads to the association of dignity with worth or value. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 150, 150 n 128.

131 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 149-152. Sensen quotes the opening statements of both preambles and I highlight only one sentence: ‘The States Parties to the present Covenant, Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, Recognizing that these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person […], Agree upon the following articles: […]. [Sensen’s emphasis].’ (Ibid., 151).
Sensen summarises the contemporary paradigm of dignity very well when he states: ‘Today dignity is widely conceived of as an inherent value property on the basis of which one can claim respect from others: One is justified in making this claim because of one’s intrinsic and objective preciousness. In justifying moral claims, the good (dignity) is prior to a principle stating what is right; and one’s claims as entitlements – which are justified by the good – are prior to the duties of the agent.’

3.2 The Traditional Paradigm

‘Human dignity, in the traditional conception’ writes Sensen, ‘is in the first place the answer to the theoretical question of the place of human beings in the universe.’ To determine their place human beings thought about their distinctiveness in the face of nature, which, according to the traditional paradigm lay with ’certain capacities’ they possess, especially reason and freedom. ‘The term “dignity” is used to express this special position or elevation.’ The moral significance of dignity came later as a result of the adoption of a ‘further moral premise,’ which articulates ‘the duty to realize fully one’s initial dignity.’ Sensen calls this second stage ‘realized dignity’ as opposed to the

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132 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 148 ff.
133 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 153.
134 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 153.
first stage’s ‘initial dignity.’ This is the two-fold conception of dignity characteristic of the traditional paradigm.\(^{135}\)

### 3.2.1 The Aristocratic Paradigm: the Origin of the Traditional Paradigm

There is a ‘third and older’ paradigm of dignity, the aristocratic or archaic paradigm.\(^{136}\) This model is the prototype of the traditional paradigm. The name ‘aristocratic’ indicates its meaning and usage. It is related to the ancient Roman concept of *dignitas*. As such it was a political concept that gave expression to ‘the elevated position of the ruling class.’ Moreover, as a ‘term of distinction’ it pertained only to the few (Sensen names the senator and the consul) and was procured through political office, which itself could be obtained by merit, birth or wealth. It could also be lost and even regained. This office brought with it both ‘powers and privileges’ and ‘duties to behave appropriately to one’s rank.’\(^{137}\)

\(^{135}\) See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 153, and 153 n 133, where he acknowledges that not all of the thinkers holding this paradigm would necessarily acknowledge these ‘two separate stages.’

\(^{136}\) In an earlier work Sensen speaks of the *archaic* paradigm. See Sensen, Kant’s Conception of Human Dignity 2009, 312. *Archaic* possibly refers to the origin. *Aristocratic*, on the other hand, which he abides by in his major work *Kant on Human Dignity* reflects the fact that dignity is essentially for the aristocratic, that is, for the few. See Sensen, Human Dignity in Historical Perspective: The Contemporary and Traditional Paradigms 2011, 75-76.

\(^{137}\) See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 153. Sensen points out that this notion would have been familiar to the ancient Greeks and could be seen, for instance, in Aristotle’s notion of the magnanimous person. Magnanimity, for Aristotle, had to do ‘with great things’ and the magnanimous person was one ‘who thinks himself worthy of great things and is really worthy of them.’ Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics 1985, IV, 1123b. Sensen refers to the whole section in the *Nichomachean Ethics* IV, 1123b-1125a.
Sensen notes the multi-faceted dimensions active within the Latin notion of *dignitas*. It could at the same time refer simultaneously to all, or some, of the following: high office (rank) in society, worthiness of it, excellence at it, as well as one’s being esteemed for it.\(^{138}\) To be accorded dignity did not mean that *all* these characteristics necessarily and simultaneously referred to one and the same person. Some elements might have been missing. The later *Notitia dignitatum* (a list of the highest ranking officials), which came into use in the late Roman Empire, emphasized only the office that one was appointed to by the emperor. As such one became ‘a dignitary.’ The above-mentioned associations of esteem and excellence played no necessary or essential role in these cases then, and it referred to ranks and titles. Sensen concludes that ‘[t]he essential component is that dignity expresses a *relation*, an elevated standing of something over something else.’\(^{139}\)

We see here that we need not understand dignity as a ‘distinct metaphysical value property human beings possess’ and it does not ‘necessarily refer to a *moral* order, or an order in value.’\(^{140}\) It can refer merely to an elevation of rank that, moreover, has nothing to do with one’s worthiness of occupying the rank. This is an

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\(^{138}\) A look at the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* reveals these four groups of possible translations. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 154.

\(^{139}\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 154. Sensen indicates that when Kant uses dignity in this *aristocratic* sense it is used explicitly as specifying rank. He refers to MM 328, 464 and Anthr 127.

\(^{140}\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 154.
important point in understanding the difference between the contemporary and traditional paradigm.

3.2.2 Cicero and the Traditional Paradigm

Although he doesn’t express it in these terms, my impression is that Cicero is, for Sensen, a bridge-figure within the traditional paradigm between the aristocratic and the traditional (proper) paradigm. That is, he transformed the aristocratic paradigm. To be sure his work reveals many examples of the aristocratic usage of the Roman dignitas, to which we referred above as meanings recorded in the Oxford Latin Dictionary. In this sense dignity refers to the ‘elevated place’ of human beings in the universe. However, Cicero universalized dignitas in that he brought it to bear upon all human beings. This dignity, ‘rank or elevated position’ is expressed foremost in terms of our ‘superiority or dignity’ over animals. This is seen in the fact that animals are ruled by their instincts and sensual pleasure. Humans are in possession of reason. Sensen shows how some of the conclusions Cicero draws from this lead to a fuller account of dignity. Cicero argues that our natural feelings of shamefulness when we are caught out ‘indulging in pleasure,’ reveal that in the light of our superiority [excellentia] we (i.e., our nature)

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141 In fact, Sensen points out how the four usages of the word dignitas that the Oxford Latin Dictionary determines are all taken and illustrated with quotes from Cicero. He mentions that there was before Cicero only one usage in existence and found in both Plautus and Terence. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 155 n 136.
142 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 155.
143 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 155; Sensen, Human Dignity in Historical Perspective: The Contemporary and Traditional Paradigms 2011, 76.
deem such a life ‘unworthy.’ Our elevated position (due to reason), ‘demand[s] a life in which one’s lower desires are governed in accordance with reason.’ Nature equipped all of us with reason. According to Sensen, Cicero’s move to argue from the fact of reason to duty depends on his addition of a teleological premise to his original one: the first is that nature has given us reason, and the second is that we should act in accord with nature. Although these premises flow into each other, Sensen highlights this as an illustration of how fact (all beings are equipped with reason) becomes obligation (live a life according to reason) through the addition of this teleological principle that Sensen expresses as follows: ‘nature gave one the end of self-control and restraint that one should act this way.’ It would be pointless to fight nature on this – she has endowed us with what is most fitting to our lives and our dignity. As he quotes Cicero as saying, ‘the fitting is what is consistent with man’s excellence in the respect in which his nature differs from all other living creatures.’

This is for Sensen a beautiful example of the traditional paradigm: we are special because we have the capability for reason. This bestows on us dignity. And this dignity

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144 Sensen quotes from Cicero’s *De officiis*: ‘[S]ensual pleasure is quite unworthy of the dignity of man and [...] we ought to despise it and cast it from us; [...] And if we will only bear in mind the superiority and dignity [excellentia et dignitas] of our nature, we shall realize how wrong it is to abandon ourselves to excess and to live in luxury and voluptuousness, and how right it is to live in thrift, self-denial, simplicity, and sobriety.’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 155 ff.
145 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 156. He continues with another quote from Cicero: ‘We must realize also that we are invested by Nature with two characters, as it were: one of these is universal, arising from the fact of our being all alike endowed with reason and with that superiority which lifts us above the brute. From this all morality and propriety are derived, and upon it depends the rational method of ascertaining our duty. The other character is the one that is assigned to individuals in particular.’
146 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 156.
147 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 157.
(elevation) places upon us the obligation to behave in accordance with the worth that is bespoken by our dignity.

### 3.2.3 Leo the Great

Sensen turns next to St. Leo the Great, who reigned as Pope Leo I from 440 to 461 A.D. He is thought to be the first Christian thinker to use the Latin concept of *dignitas*. His sermons reflect, moreover, the ‘traditional two-fold conception of dignity.’ Sensen quotes ‘one famous passage’ from Leo that is even quoted in the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: ‘Realize [agnosce], o Christian, your dignity. Once made a “partaker in the divine nature,” do not return to your former baseness by a life unworthy [of that dignity].’ One becomes a ‘partaker in the divine nature’ in virtue of one’s creation in the image of God.

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149 As quoted in Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 157. He points out that this quote serves as the ‘opening sentence’ at the point where the Catechism turns to discuss concrete Christian life, i.e., the ethical implications of faith. He refers to Catechism of the Catholic Church 1999, § 1691.
150 Sensen refers to two Bible passages, *Genesis* 1:26-28, and *Psalm* 8: 5-10 that bear upon the notion of being created in the image of God. In addition he quotes two more passages (from Leo) to underscore the point. Both are noteworthy in terms of the two-fold structure characteristic of the traditional concept of dignity. The first passage reads: ‘Wake up then, o friend, and acknowledge the dignity of your nature. Recall that you have been made “according to the image of God.”’ In the second passage Leo writes: ‘People should acknowledge their own dignity, and see themselves as “made in the image and likeness of” their Creator.’ See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 157, 157 n 141. Note in the first quote we *have* dignity but have to *acknowledge* it. For this we need to ‘wake up’ – the knowledge brings with it a certain responsibility. The two-fold structure in the second quote is clearer: We are made in the image and likeness of
Sensen explains that ‘we are an image of God’ because we ‘have a soul’ and this leads to our elevation (i.e., dignity) above nature and animals and especially over our bodies and its passions. ‘[L]et the soul, which properly is constituted as ruler of the body under the direction of God, retain the dignity of its mastery,’ writes Leo. Sensen explains that the dignity of this mastery resides for Leo in the capability of the soul to ‘govern itself independently of bodily desires.’ This governance is implemented through reason. Reason is thus the key to a ‘well ordered leadership’ of the body in submissiveness to its Ruler (God).

Being independent from bodily desires through reason grounds our freedom and our elevation over nature. In this Leo follows Cicero, although Sensen points out it is envisaged with reference to God – we are to ‘imitate God.’ The structure of their understanding of dignity is similar: we have capacities (freedom and reason) that distinguish us from the rest of nature and these obligate us to make proper use of them.

God. Likeness, meaning literally to be like someone, carries with it an ethical responsibility to imitate God and it is a lifetime’s ‘occupation.’ This reflects the two-fold structure beautifully.

151 As quoted in Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 158.
152 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 158. This ‘independence’ reveals the possibility (and ability) to take distance from one’s desires and passions. In other words it is the capacity to be free from the control or influence of in this case our bodily desires. The key in this dynamic is reason and here we see how freedom and reason belong and work together for Leo in mastering oneself.
153 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 158.
154 Sensen quotes: ‘If we reflect upon the beginning of our creation with faith and wisdom, dearly beloved, we shall come to the realization that human beings have been formed according to the image of God precisely with a view that they might imitate their Designer. Our race has this dignity of nature, so long as the figure of divine goodness continues to be reflected in us as in a kind of mirror.’ Sensen adds that for Leo the image of God in us resides also in our ability ‘to do justice and be merciful.’ See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 158, and also 158 n 145.
The first would be our initial dignity and the latter the realization of our (initial) dignity.

Sensen points out that where Cicero took recourse to teleological nature to motivate dignity’s realization, Leo found it in a providential God who commands us to imitate Him.\footnote{He points out that for Cicero, God too created the soul and that our virtues reflect the likeness of God. For Leo, though, humanity lost its earlier dignity in Adam’s fall but it was ‘restored in Jesus’ death.’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 159 n 148.}

3.2.4 Pico della Mirandola

Sensen moves next to the Renaissance, a period in which human dignity as a theme enjoyed considered attention.\footnote{See Sensen, Human Dignity in Historical Perspective: The Contemporary and Traditional Paradigms 2011, 79-80; Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 159-161.} This prominence was in part the result of the backlash caused by a work by Cardinal Lothario dei Conti (or Segni), who would later become Pope Innocent III, called \textit{De Miseria Humanae Conditionis}, addressing the misery of the human condition. Sensen focuses on Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494).\footnote{Besides Pico, others addressed this topic as well. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 159 n 150.}

His work \textit{Discourse on the Dignity of Man} (1486) exemplifies the traditional model of dignity.

Pico attempts to appraise man’s position within the ‘universal order.’ He does this with reference to the ‘chain of being,’ which considers all being, from God, the Highest Being, to the lowest forms of existence, as being linked to each other while occupying a (fixed) place within a determined hierarchy – i.e., a ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ place.
Pico claims that ‘the initial dignity of man consists in having no fixed place in that chain.’ This is because human dignity consists in our capability to choose, or determine, our own place in this chain. Sensen quotes Pico’s imaginary address (of God to Adam) after his creation: ‘Constrained by no limits, you may determine it for yourself, according to your own free will, in whose hand we have placed you. [...] It will be in your power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish; you shall have the power, according to your soul’s judgement, to be reborn into the higher orders, which are divine.’

Our dignity lies in the fact that we were given both freedom and reason. We are free to live brutishly; but with our souls, which possess reason, we are ‘able to grow toward the divine.’ This self-determination places upon us a duty to fully realize our ‘initial dignity.’ Our ‘upward’ or ‘downward’ movement on this chain of being depends on the degree to which we have realized our dignity. According to Pico God has implanted in us all that we need to reach the highest orders of being. We reach these by cultivating reason and intellect and thus ‘become a heavenly animal’ and ultimately ‘an angel and a son of God.’ Neglecting this, by cultivating our lower capacities, we become brutish and even lower.

Our dignity lies in the ability of freedom to choose a way of life. This elevates us above nature and animality. As Sensen puts it ‘human beings are superior to animals in the capacities they possess, though not necessarily in how they choose to exercise these

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158 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 159-160.
159 Quoted from Discourse on the Dignity of Man §4.20 and 23 in Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 160.
160 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 160.
capacities.’ What is important in this dynamic though is that one should not yield to mediocrity but kindle ‘a holy ambition’ to ‘strive for the loftiest,’ for this is what God wishes from us. Sensen remarks that Pico’s use of ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ does not refer to a ‘value property,’ as it would in the contemporary paradigm, but to the ‘chain of being.’ He points out that while ‘higher’ can be indicative of ‘being better’ or ‘having more worth,’ it refers ontologically, to having ‘more being.’ Pico’s thought exemplifies the traditional paradigm as well. We are elevated in terms of our capacities and our morality is related to our duty to do our best in developing our initial dignity.

We shall now look at Sensen’s presentation on the differences between the contemporary and traditional conceptions of dignity.

### 3.3 The Differences between the Two Conceptions

Sensen identifies four principal differences between the two conceptions, that is, between the contemporary and traditional conceptions or paradigms of dignity. The aristocratic or archaic paradigm was treated as part of the traditional one, to which it was the earlier precursor. Sensen finds that in the traditional understanding dignity is not viewed as a distinct metaphysical, non-relational value property; it exhibits a two-

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161 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 160.
162 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 161.
163 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 161 n 155.
fold structure; it does not in itself form the ground for rights; and, it is, first and foremost, concerned with duties toward oneself.  \(^{164}\)

### 3.3.1 Dignity is not a value

In the traditional paradigm, dignity denotes the ‘elevated position of human beings in the universe.’ It does not refer to ‘an inherent value property.’  \(^{165}\) Sensen talks also of dignity’s not being ‘a non-relational value property human beings possess.’  \(^{166}\) In other words, it is not seen as a metaphysical property, intrinsically internal, which makes us special. It is relational, and as such, relative to whatever it is being related to. This means, for instance, that animals are higher than plants, and at the same time, lower than humans.  \(^{167}\) We might take this to be comparative category. Sensen points out, however, that the notions of ‘elevated’ and ‘higher’ are not intended to signify ‘a hierarchy of value’ as such but on the contrary ‘a hierarchy in being’ – as we have seen in Pico, for instance. \(^{168}\) Reminding us that the origin of this traditional paradigm lies

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\(^{164}\) See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 161-64; Sensen, Human Dignity in Historical Perspective: The Contemporary and Traditional Paradigms 2011, 83-85; Sensen, Kant's Conception of Human Dignity 2009, 313-14.

\(^{165}\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 162.

\(^{166}\) Sensen, Kant's Conception of Human Dignity 2009, 313. He also defines non-relational as being separate. See Sensen, Human Dignity in Historical Perspective: The Contemporary and Traditional Paradigms 2011, 83.

\(^{167}\) Sensen refers among others here to Aristotle, On the Soul 1994-2009, 414a29-415a13, where he makes the point that different kinds of beings (like plants, animals and humans) have different capacities (like nutrition and growth, perception and motion, and reason and choice). See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 162 n 157.

\(^{168}\) In this regard Senzen mentions Arthur Lovejoy who drew attention to the fact that this view of a ‘hierarchy in being’ remained influentially present from the time of Plato
within the aristocratic conception of *dignitas*, with its understanding of and application to the senator, for instance, who is elevated in rank and status above others, without implying thereby a ‘distinct metaphysical value property,’ Sensen recalls that Cicero took this notion and *universalized it* to include all people. Our elevated status comes from ‘having certain capacities’ – even if these were ‘intrinsic features’ like reason and freedom.\(^{169}\)

### 3.3.2 Dignity is a two-fold notion

According to the contemporary model, we have dignity because we possess a certain fixed value. This means, as Sensen puts it, ‘one either has or does not have dignity.’\(^{170}\) In the traditional model dignity exhibits a two-fold structure, meaning it consists of two stages, an initial dignity, which then requires completion. Failure to effectuate one’s dignity leads to its being wasted. Initial dignity comes with our capabilities – like reason and freedom – and in this sense all have initial dignity. Proper use of these capabilities leads to the full actualization of our dignity. In the traditional paradigm ‘dignity’ refers to both dimensions.\(^{171}\)

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\(^{169}\) Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 162.

\(^{170}\) Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 162.

\(^{171}\) Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 162-63.
3.3.3 Dignity does not yield rights

In the traditional paradigm the main focus is on duties and not on rights. Sensen writes aptly: ‘The thought is not that one can make claims on others because one has freedom and reason. Instead, having reason or freedom is said to yield the duty to make a proper use of one’s capacities.’\(^\text{172}\) This duty, however, does not follow automatically from the mere presence of these capacities: a further premise is required. In this regard Sensen showed how a teleological view functioned, in the dialectical move that we ought to use the human capabilities which nature (or God) bestowed on us. Kant will use a separate principle – the Categorical Imperative. The important point with regard to the entitlement of one’s rights is, as Sensen says, that when it comes to its justification ‘they are grounded on the further normative premise, not on dignity itself.’\(^\text{173}\)

This contrasts with the contemporary model, which grounds human rights on an inherent metaphysical property – one that is imbued with absolute value. Having this value entitles one to claim rights.

\(^{172}\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 163.
\(^{173}\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 163. In the next paragraph Sensen says this ‘further normative premise’ includes the duty ‘to fully realize one’s initial dignity.’ With regard to Kant, Sensen quotes MM 239. Kant asks: ‘But why is the doctrine of morals usually called (especially by Cicero) a doctrine of rights, even though rights have reference to duties?’ He answers: ‘The reason is that we know our own freedom (from which all moral laws, and so all rights as well as duties proceed) only through the moral imperative, which is a proposition commanding duty, from which the capacity for putting others under obligation, that is, the concept of right, can afterwards be explicated.’ As quoted in Sensen, Human Dignity in Historical Perspective: The Contemporary and Traditional Paradigms 2011, 84.
Sensen notes that for the protagonists of the traditional paradigm the space devoted to the entitlement of one’s rights does not compare favourably with the protagonists of the contemporary model. He suggests that one reason might be the result of ‘perfectionism,’ which is commonly connected with this model.

3.3.4 Perfectionism

The fourth difference lies for Sensen in the fact that for the traditional model the focal point is ‘not on the dignity of others, but on the realization of one’s own dignity.’ Sensen points out that when the three thinkers referred to above – Cicero, Leo and Pico – speak of dignity, the emphasis is on the agent’s responsibility to actualize his/her own initial dignity. Speaking generally about dignity they are wont to speak about the privilege of being human, given one’s capabilities and how to use these to perfect oneself. As Sensen points out there is an underlying idea of perfectionism at work here, whose focus is on ‘how [to] perfect oneself, not how one should treat others.’

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174 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 164.
175 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 164. See also Sensen, Human Dignity in Historical Perspective: The Contemporary and Traditional Paradigms 2011, 84-85.
3.4 Kant and the Traditional Paradigm

Sensen has established the typical thought-patterns of the three paradigms he identified in the history of Western thought. The first two (aristocratic/archaic and traditional) are in such a close proximity with each other, given that the second grew and developed from the first, that they can both be classified under the traditional model. Even so, when we speak of the traditional paradigm we need to keep in mind that we intend the fully developed meaning that goes far beyond the initial aristocratic pattern of thought. Sensen places a lot of emphasis on the differences because, as he points out, distinguishing between especially the traditional and contemporary model is important for determining Kant’s own position. It is important for a few reasons. One is, as we said above, the contemporary model is prevalent today and the danger is that if, erroneously, we were to read this model back into Kant we not only misread him but fail to understand what Kant meant by dignity. This could lead to various distortions of Kant. A second reason is that both systems require each a different set of normative justifications for their validity. This means that the different paradigms are embedded in different value systems and whichever one we attribute to Kant would have implications for the way we argue and justify our (or his) position of dignity and it would involve other themes of his thinking as well and once we again face the danger of serious distortions. For this reason we turn now with Sensen to see how Kant fits within the traditional paradigm.

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176 See Sensen, Kant's Conception of Human Dignity 2009, 313.
177 Sensen, Kant's Conception of Human Dignity 2009, 313.
Sensen proceeds to show just how Kant uses ‘dignity’ in accordance with the traditional paradigm. He shows this with reference to examples from Kant’s writings. In these we shall see how those typical thought patterns particular to the traditional model are all present in Kant. In this sense ‘dignity’ is applied to certain vocations. He shows, for instance, how Kant talks of ‘the worth of the teacher,’¹⁷⁸ or indeed of ‘jesuitical casuistry [which] is beneath the dignity of a ruler, just as [it is] beneath the dignity of his minister.’¹⁷⁹ He even talks of the dignity of mathematics. In these loci he employs the notion of ‘dignity’ in use in the aristocratic sense.¹⁸⁰ These are a few examples of the aristocratic paradigm. The point is to show that Kant was familiar with the traditional paradigm. For Sensen Kant ‘both knew and approved of [...] the traditional paradigm of dignity.’¹⁸¹

Kant’s approval of this paradigm is seen in the following quote from Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: ‘These philosophers [Stoics and others] derived their universal moral principle from the dignity of human nature, from its freedom (as an independence from the power of the inclinations), and they could not have laid down a better or nobler principle for foundation. They then drew the moral laws directly from reason, the sole legislator, commanding absolutely through its laws. And so was

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¹⁷⁸ Kant, Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason (1791) 1996, 6:162; as referred to in Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 164.  
¹⁷⁹ Kant, Toward a Perpetual Peace (1795) 1996, 8:344; as referred to in Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 164.  
¹⁸⁰ See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 164.  
¹⁸¹ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 165.
everything quite correctly apportioned.’\textsuperscript{182} But Sensen goes further and shows how each of the four elements particular to the traditional model, and which we discussed above, is present and operative in Kant’s understanding and presentation of dignity.

\textbf{3.4.1 Dignity as elevation and not a value}

Sensen points out that dignity for Kant, in the first place, ‘refers to an elevation and not a value per se.’\textsuperscript{183} As he says, ‘for Kant dignity is not itself a value human beings possess; dignity is rather the sublimity or elevation (\textit{Erhabenheit}) of something over something else.’\textsuperscript{184} Sensen shows that Kant is quite consistent in his use of dignity in this sense throughout his writings. Conceiving of dignity then as rank or as sublimity \cite{Sensen2011} affirms that Kant thinks in line with the Stoic conception of dignity. Sensen refers to writings that stretch over Kant’s entire published output. So in work as early as his \textit{The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God} and his \textit{Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy}, both from 1763, to his work one year later in 1764, namely, the \textit{Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime}, this concept is used in a similar way, even though the topics they address differ vastly from each other. Other works Sensen refers to are \textit{Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals} from 1785; \textit{Critique of Practical Reason} from

\textsuperscript{182} Quoted by Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 165; from Kant, Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason (1791) 1996, 6:57 note.
\textsuperscript{183} Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 165; see also 165-68; Sensen, Kant's Conception of Human Dignity 2009, 316 ff.
\textsuperscript{184} Sensen, Kant's Conception of Human Dignity 2009, 316.
1788; both the *Doctrine of Right* and the *Doctrine of Virtue*, together forming the *Metaphysics of Morals* published in 1797; and the *Lectures on Logic* from 1800.\(^{185}\)

‘For Kant dignity refers to an elevation, not a value per se.’\(^{186}\) As Sensen puts it, Kant, with this concept, wishes to show ‘that something is elevated or uplifted over something else.’ As he explains, ‘X has dignity’ means ‘X is elevated over Y’ or ‘X is higher than Y.’\(^{187}\) This expresses the essential relationality that is involved in and foundational to, Sensen’s understanding of dignity as *Erhabenheit*. As he says:

‘Ontologically “dignity” refers to a relational property of being elevated, not a non-relational value property.’\(^{188}\)

Sensen turns next to a discussion of Kant’s notion of sublimity and its relation to dignity. Significant for him is Kant’s understanding of sublimity (*Erhabenheit*) as the ‘highest form of elevation.’\(^{189}\) He writes that *Erhabenheit* (sublimity) in Kant means ‘that which is absolutely great or great without comparison,’ which can also be translated as ‘exaltedness.’\(^{190}\) For example, the ‘dignity of a monarch’\(^{191}\) refers to the king’s ‘elevated

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\(^{185}\) For a list as well as specific passages he references see Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 165 n 163.

\(^{186}\) Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 165.

\(^{187}\) Sensen, *Kant’s Conception of Human Dignity* 2009, 310. Here Sensen says: ‘“X has dignity” is another expression for “X is elevated over Y”‘ [my emphasis]. I take this to mean that these two expressions are linguistically equivalent to each other. This point serves to draw attention to the fact that Sensen approaches this from an analytic perspective. See also Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 166.

\(^{188}\) Sensen, *Kant’s Conception of Human Dignity* 2009, 310.

\(^{189}\) Sensen refers to CJ 248. See Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 166. So, Sensen writes here that when we say ‘X has dignity’ (keeping the meaning of sublimity in mind), we say ‘X is raised above all else.’ (Ibid., 166).

\(^{190}\) See Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 166 n 164. He points out too that when Kant uses the adjective *erhaben* (as, for instance, in his work on physical geography) it is
position' vis-à-vis the state. Similarly, when Kant talks of the 'dignity of humanity' he puts into words the idea that 'human beings are elevated over the rest of nature in virtue of being free.' There are also instances where he talks of dignity in relation to morality. By this Kant indicates that 'morality is raised above all else in that morality alone should be valued unconditionally.'

Sensen remarks that the notion of sublimity is not exhaustively explored in the Kant literature. Usually it is understood as feeling of the sublime in reference to Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* of 1764. However, with support from Shell, he points out that sublimity does not always refer to a feeling. The following passage, which he presents, is a case in point. Kant writes in the *Groundwork*:

‘[I]t is now easy to explain how it happens that, although in thinking the concept of duty we think of subjection to the law, yet at the same time we thereby represent a certain sublimity and *dignity* in the person who fulfils all his duties. For there is indeed no

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192 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 166, see also 166 n 165, for instances where Kant uses dignity in this way. Sensen refers to G 439, 440; CJ 273; Rel 80, 183; MM 420, 429, 436, 449, 459, 462; and Ed 488, 489.
193 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 166 n 166. He refers to G 440, 11; CPrR 147 ff.; MM 464 ff., 483.
194 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 166. Sensen also writes: ‘When he talks about dignity in connection with morality he is saying that morality is raised above all else in that morality alone should be valued unconditionally. While it is indeed central to Kant’s moral philosophy that all human beings should be respected, “dignity” is not the term he uses to express that view.’ Sensen, Kant’s Conception of Human Dignity 2009, 310.
195 He does mention some authors, like Guyer, Shell, Clewis, among others, who have made seminal contributions to our understanding of this concept and especially in relation to dignity. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 166, 166 nn 167-169.
sublimity in him insofar as he is subject to the moral law, but there certainly is insofar as he is at the same time lawgiving with respect to it and only for that reason subordinated to it [...] and the dignity of humanity consists just in this capacity to give universal law, though with the condition of also being itself subject to this very lawgiving.\textsuperscript{196}

This passage is a clear indication for Sensen that Kant sees dignity in terms of sublimity, which is contrasted with subordination. Sensen identifies two elements that are elevated here, the ‘morally good person’ and ‘humanity as the capacity to be moral.’\textsuperscript{197}

In the \textit{Critique of Judgment}, Sensen finds further support for his thesis that sublimity is more than ‘just a feeling.’ Toward the beginning of Book Two, ‘Analytic of the Sublime,’ Kant starts by looking at the mathematically sublime, which is ‘the sublime in terms of quantity.’\textsuperscript{198} Sublimity is defined here as that which is ‘great beyond comparison.’ Kant introduces this section on defining sublimity by saying ‘We call \textit{sublime} that which is \textit{absolutely great}.’\textsuperscript{199} Sensen points out that Kant clarifies what he

\textsuperscript{196} G 4:439 ff. as quoted in Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 166-67.
\textsuperscript{197} Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 167. Sublimity in this context expresses not feeling but rather that ‘something (e.g., a person who fulfills all his duties) is elevated over something else (namely, a being which is not lawgiving) on a certain scale – specifically, in terms of morality.’ Two dimensions are highlighted here: the obedience to the law (which does not in itself carry dignity) and legislating the moral law, in which dignity as capacity is revealed as sublime. When one yields to the law, because one also legislates it, one carries dignity within.
\textsuperscript{198} See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 167. Sensen talks of ‘quantity.’ For a discussion as to the best possible translation of ‘\textit{eine Größe sein},’ which Guyer and Matthews translates by ‘magnitude’ see Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment 2000, 5:248, esp. 131 note g.
\textsuperscript{199} Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment 2000, 5:248 as quoted in Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 167.
means by ‘absolutely great,’ by saying it is ‘that which is great beyond all comparison.’ Sublimity here then refers to infinity ‘as an idea of the mind.’ Sensen points out that in a parallel way ‘the dynamical sublime’ – the sublime applicable to quality – ‘the truly sublime [...] is the power to overcome nature and sensible impulses.’ Sublimity then is not feeling but elevation; and consideration of elevation can awake a feeling of the sublime.

200 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 167. CJ 248. Quantity is related to mathematics (CJ 251). It is a numerical concept and can be thus be calculated and determined. Determination, however, comes only as a result of a measurement that is itself determined through comparison (CJ 251). Kant writes: ‘Now for the mathematical estimation of magnitude there is, to be sure, no greatest (for the power of numbers goes on to infinity); but for the aesthetic estimation of magnitude there is certainly a greatest; and about this I say that if it is judged as an absolute measure, beyond which no greater is subjectively (for the judging subject) possible, it brings with it the idea of the sublime, and produces that emotion which no mathematical estimation of magnitudes by means of numbers can produce (except insofar as that aesthetic basic measure is vividly preserved in the imagination), since the latter always presents only relative magnitude through comparison with others of the same species, but the former presents magnitude absolutely, so far as the mind can grasp it in one intuition.’ Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment 2000, 5:251.

Here, in this context, we see that the concept of absolute (as it is related to the notion of the infinite) is neither determinable nor measureable, i.e., not grasable and knowable, in the objective sphere. Subjectively, however, we can approach it or grasp it intuitively only when we have literally reached the end or limit of our (subjective) possibility and capability to determine (or, as here, of calculating infinity in measured units). In this situation we confront the absolute. This is presented to us as a subjective experience whose content is something akin to a ‘beyond, which no greater is subjectively possible to judge.’

201 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 167. One can see the moral implications of overcoming one’s nature here. Sensen refers to CJ 246 in comparison with CJ 260 ff. Sensen quotes Kant (CJ 264): ‘Thus sublimity is not contained in anything in nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of being superior to nature within us and thus also to nature outside us (insofar as it influences us).’ (Ibid., 167).
3.4.2 The Two Stages of Dignity

The two-fold structure endemic to the concept of dignity was the second hallmark Sensen identified as characteristic of the traditional paradigm of dignity. He now shows how Kant’s usage reveals the same two-fold pattern. We all share dignity alike in virtue of our freedom and our capacity for morality (which is linked to freedom). This is our initial dignity and one leg of the two-fold structure. The second leg, our realized dignity, however, depends on how we use our freedom in actually becoming morally good. Quoting from one of the Reflections in Notes and Fragments, Sensen writes: ‘The dignity of human nature lies only in its freedom [...]. But the dignity of one human being (worthiness) rests on the use of his freedom’ [Sensen’s translation]. In the Metaphysics of Morals, freedom is regarded as ‘the innate dignity of a human being’ and in the Conflict of the Faculties, Kant refers to this as the ‘initial dignity [ursprüngliche Würde].’ But, adds Sensen, it is ‘only if one makes proper use of one’s freedom [that] one in fact lift[s] oneself over the rest of nature.’ Upon this use depends the realization of our initial dignity. And this is dignity’s two-fold structure in operation, which is found throughout Kant’s oeuvre.

Keeping this structure in mind helps one, according to Sensen, to make sense of some ‘puzzling features,’ which might at first glance seem to be inconsistent. Examples Sensen mentions are, for instance, remarks of Kant to the effect that dignity lays in

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202 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 168, 168 n 170. He quotes from Kant, Notes and Fragments 2005, 19:181; (i.e., Refl 6856) and refers also to Ed 488.
203 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 168. Sensen quotes from MM 420 and CF 73.
one’s ‘capacity for freedom (or morality),’ while elsewhere he asserts it is in effect ‘being morally good’ that bears this dignity. Sensen refers to the passage discussed under the previous heading where this structure can be seen to resolve an apparent tension. There Kant spoke of the ‘dignity in the person who fulfills all his duties’ (reflecting an ‘actually morally good’ person, i.e., one with realized dignity) versus ‘the dignity of humanity [that] consists just in this capacity to give the universal law,’ which articulates one’s initial dignity that refers to one’s ‘capacity for being morally good.’

Two notions that are associated with dignity through the notion of freedom, namely, ‘being an end in itself’ and ‘having autonomy’ exhibit for Sensen a similar two-fold structure. Both serve to emphasize ‘different aspects of freedom.’ Freedom means one is an end in oneself (and not ‘a means to someone else’s will’), one is autonomous (i.e., ‘self-governed’) and thus has dignity (one is elevated over nature). He shows the two-fold structure operative when Kant will for instance say ‘every rational being exists as an end in itself,’ but the also that ‘morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in itself.’ The tension between ascribing ‘an end in itself’ to all rational beings and then only to those who are morally good (which not all are) is resolved if one holds to the two-fold structure: ‘All rational beings have the capacity for freedom (i.e., they exist as ends in themselves), however, only if one makes (proper) use of one’s freedom is one actually an end in oneself (i.e., is really free: “end in itself” is

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204 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 168. He refers to MM 420 and G 435.
206 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 168-69.
207 He refers to G 428. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 169.
208 Sensen refers to G 435.
foremost not a normative term, but merely describes freedom.' 209 This same structure is
likewise discernable in Kant’s use of ‘autonomy.’ At times it refers to one’s ‘capacity for
self-governance’ and other times it relates the ‘actual giving of universal law.’ 210 We
next look how the third characteristic of the traditional paradigm is reflected in Kant’s
understanding of dignity.

3.4.3 Dignity, Duty and Rights

The third element in the traditional paradigm relates for Sensen to the fact that
dignity is for Kant not a distinctive attribute – like ‘a value’ – that ‘by itself generates
rights.’ Rights follow rather ‘from the duties of the agent.’ 211 He backs this up with
reference to The Doctrine of Virtue in Kant’s Metaphysics of Morals. There Kant writes:
‘But why is the doctrine of morals usually called (especially by Cicero) a doctrine of
duties and not also a doctrine of rights, even though rights have reference to duties? –
The reason is that we know our own freedom (from which all moral laws, and so all
rights as well as duties proceed) only through the moral imperative, which is a

209 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 169. This goes together with Sensen’s reading
that dignity does not rest on a value as metaphysical property inhering humanity, which
is often how the Formula of Humanity (G 427-29) is approached. Sensen specifically
reads the phrase ‘end in itself’ as being a descriptive and not a normative phrase for
Kant. ‘It describes human beings as free, i.e., not a mere plaything of nature or the
means to the will of another, [...] Kant does hold that free beings should be treated as if
they are free (i.e., human beings treated as an end in itself).’ Sensen, Kant on Human
Dignity 2011, 98, see also 100-104.
210 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 169. He refers to G 446 and 435
respectively.
211 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 169.
proposition commanding duty, from which the capacity for putting others under obligation, that is, the concept of right, can afterwards be explained.\textsuperscript{212} It is for Sensen clear that in Kant ‘the concept of duty’ precedes ‘the concept of claim rights.’ So the only way that I am able to stand on my rights and to claim them (not to mention enforcing them) is by ‘reminding’ others – the agents – of ‘[their] duty to follow the Categorical Imperative.’\textsuperscript{213} Therefore, to quote Sensen again, ‘the “innate right of each” is a right to freedom that can coexist with the freedom of everyone else in accordance with a universal law.’\textsuperscript{214} The Categorical Imperative as the universal law of freedom is the only restriction to be placed upon our freedom. If another violates this freedom one’s recourse is to the Categorical Imperative. But the nature of the imperative is that it legislates for oneself. Thus one can only remind them of their duty to obey the imperative.

Thus the ground of dignity, according to Sensen, is our freedom. And freedom is concomitant with the moral law. The moral law expresses our duties, and in following

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{212} As quoted in Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 169; from MM 239.
\footnote{213} Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 169.
\footnote{214} Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 169. Sensen refers here to Kant, On the common saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice (1793) 1996, 8:292 ff., where Kant writes that in terms of our abilities and possessions all individuals within a state are not equal to each other and there is a relative dependence one upon the other that is required (for example, one necessarily has to be obedient to another, or to serve another) but also ‘in terms of right (which, as the expression of the general will, can be only one and which concerns the form of what is laid down as right [Rechens] not the matter or the object in which I have a right), they are nevertheless all equal to another as subjects.’ Kant describes this process which guarantees equal rights as a dynamic involving public law, through which we both ‘coerce’ others to follow suit (to grant us our rights) but also to resist them ‘in like measure.’ This brings Kant to say no-one should be denied the possibility to attain any level of rank in society of which he is capable.
\end{footnotes}
the moral law we actualize or effectuate our initial dignity (freedom) resulting as he says
in ‘truly elevating oneself over the rest of nature.’ Dignity is in this way ‘connected to
duty and only indirectly to rights.’ Sensen now proceeds to show how duty, for Kant, is
first of all ‘a duty to oneself.’

3.4.4 Dignity and Duties toward Oneself

The fourth feature of dignity that Sensen highlights relates to the previous point
that duty is primordial to right and in fact grounds it. Sensen shows that like the
traditional model duty is primarily turned toward the self. Dignity’s association with
freedom leads Kant to this inevitable conclusion: freedom requires responsible usage.

As Sensen says: ‘Having freedom yields a duty (in the first instance to oneself) to
make a proper use of one’s freedom.’ In the Lectures on Pedagogy, Kant discusses
duties toward oneself. Sensen quotes: ‘These [duties] do not consist […] in seeking to
satisfy his cravings and inclinations […]. But they consist in his being conscious that man
possesses a certain dignity, which ennobles him above all other creatures, and that it is
his duty so to act as not to violate in his own person this dignity of mankind.’

This ‘ennoblement’ (elevation) occurs in virtue of our freedom, which means
concretely that we are ‘not necessarily being determined by [our] inclinations.’ So the
question becomes how one ought best to preserve and then realize one’s initial dignity

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215 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 170.
216 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 170.
217 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 170; as quoted from Ed 488.
218 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 170.
(i.e., freedom). For Sensen the sole guidance and justification for this is yielded by the Categorical Imperative. For Kant the (only) ‘primary duty is to follow the Categorical Imperative’ and so to obtain a good will. Sensen argues that this duty (to self) grounds (all) duties to others since they too are expressed by the Categorical Imperative. In support he quotes Kant: ‘I can recognize that I am under obligation to others only insofar as I at the same time put myself under obligation, since the law by virtue of which I regard myself under obligation [the Categorical Imperative] proceeds in every case from my own practical reason; and in being constrained by my own reason, I am also the one constraining myself.’ Sensen concludes: ‘To realize one’s initial dignity, to elevate oneself in following the moral law, is therefore in the first instance a duty towards oneself.’

This is also the case with regard to respect. Sensen refers to a passage that seems to contradict his point here but a close reading reveals that it in fact supports it. In *The Metaphysics of Morals* Kant writes: ‘The respect that I have for others or that another can require from me [...] is therefore recognition of a dignity (dignitas) in other human beings.’ Sensen suggests that one read this by taking the reference to dignity here as pointing to ‘what should be respected’ instead of why respect another. And what should be respected is the other’s striving to actualize his/her dignity to the full. This is for Sensen in line with Kant’s intention as shown in the next paragraph of this same text. Kant continues: ‘But just as he cannot give himself away for any price (this

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220 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 171.
221 Quoted from MM 462 by Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 171.
would conflict with his duty of self-esteem), so neither can he act contrary to the equally necessary self-esteem of others, as human beings, that is, he is under obligation to acknowledge, in a practical way, the dignity of humanity in every other human being.\textsuperscript{222}

Consequently, if my duty is to bring my initial dignity to full fruition, I am to respect another human being’s self-same striving to actualize his/her dignity.

Sensen writes that Kant ‘repeatedly uses “dignity” in this context of duties towards self to express that a proper moral motive is respect for the higher aspect of one’s person (freedom and rationality). Dignity expresses that this aspect is higher, ennobled or more important. Kant does not say that this aspect is more important because of a value property adhering to it, but because it is the seat of the moral law which alone expresses what duty is.’\textsuperscript{223}

According to Sensen, this usage of dignity is also expressed in the previously referred to (and quoted) passage from the Lectures on Pedagogy. Kant spoke there about our duties to the self which ‘consist in his being conscious that man possesses a certain dignity, which ennobles him above all other creatures, and that it is his duty so to act as not to violate in his own person this dignity of mankind.’\textsuperscript{224} Linking this way of speaking about dignity in the context of duty to self, related to ‘the proper moral motive,’ with other places in Kant’s oeuvre, has Sensen identify it (i.e., the linking of these notions together and thus forming a cluster of ideas belonging together) as a recurrent pattern of thought in Kant. Referring to The Metaphysics of Morals for

\textsuperscript{222} Quoted from MM 462 by Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 171.

\textsuperscript{223} Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 171. With regard to this last statement he refers the reader to MM 225 and 393.

\textsuperscript{224} See Ed 488 as quoted in Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 171.
instance, he quotes Kant on the ‘morally commanded’ as ‘real self-esteem (pride in the
dignity of humanity in one’s own person).’ In the same work Kant writes that ‘unless the
dignity of virtue is exalted above everything else in one’s actions, the concept of duty
itself vanishes and dissolves [...], since a human being’s consciousness of his own nobility
then disappears.’ Sensen quotes another passage earlier from the same work where
Kant asserts that one should never allow the insignificance of our animality (i.e., being
‘human animals’) to violate the consciousness of our dignity as ‘rational beings’ and one
should not repudiate our ‘moral self-esteem.’ What one should rather do, says Sensen,
is to ‘pursue one’s end by “not disavowing his dignity,”’ and this occurs, Kant writes, by
‘always [living] with consciousness of his sublime moral disposition.’ Sensen proceeds
next to cite Kant’s remark following our just-quoted passage: ‘True humility follows
unavoidably from our sincere and exact comparison of ourselves with the moral law [...].
But [...] from the (natural) human being’s feeling himself compelled to revere the
(moral) human being within his own person, at the same time there comes *exaltation* of
the highest self-esteem, the feeling of his inner worth (*valor*), in terms of which he [...] possesses an inalienable dignity (*dignitas interna*), which instills in him respect for
himself (*reverentia*).’

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225 See MM 459 and 483 respectively; as quoted in Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 171. With reference to consciousness, Sensen addresses a subject we have discussed in Shell’s interpretation, where it played a pivotal role.
227 Quoted from MM 436 by Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 172. We have quoted extensively here but it is important to note the close connection between dignity and consciousness (which includes consciousness of our dignity as rational beings), and rationality, the moral law, the following of which (duty) is linked with and yields self-esteem. The presence of the moral law grounds reverence for self.
Commenting on this Sensen writes: ‘The proper moral motive is respect for the moral law or the idea of a moral human being.’ In this quote Sensen explicitly equates ‘the idea of a moral human being’ with ‘the moral law.’ These two dimensions are like two sides of a coin – they belong together in one dynamic unity, which we might name ‘dignity.’ He writes: ‘Dignity expresses the idea that this aspect is higher or to be preferred (since the moral law says so, and strikes down any self-conceit opposing it).’

Although feeling does not play a primordial, foundational role in motivating one to follow the moral law (as we saw earlier), Kant does allow feeling its rightful place. It is important to see the correct order: it is only after engaging in the dynamic of following the moral law in accordance with the pure moral motive (to follow the law for the sake of the law) that we get to feel our dignity. Sensen quotes from the *Critique of Practical Reason* that ‘the pure moral motive [...] teaches the human being to feel his own dignity [...] and the greatness of soul to which he sees that he is called.’ However, it does not remain with the feeling of one’s dignity. This feeling is like an instrument of teaching – it reveals and makes us see the greatness of soul, the sublimity to which we are called.

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228 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 172.
229 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 172. He refers to CPrR 73. Although he does not mention this explicitly he touches upon a theme that has already been introduced in the quote from MM 436 above. The theme is that of honesty or truth. In the reference Sensen provides (CPrR 73) Kants states clearly that self-conceit is struck down by the law ‘since all claims to esteem for oneself that precede accord with the moral law are null and quite unwarranted because certainty of a disposition in accord with this law is the first condition of any worth of a person [...] and any presumption prior to this is false and opposed to the law.’ Kant, Critique of Practical Reason (1788) 1996, 5:73.
230 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 172. He quotes CPrR 152. The legitimate place of feeling was also stressed by Sullivan. See Sullivan 1989, 193.
Reminding us that Kant uses ‘sublimity’ and ‘dignity’ sometimes interchangeably, Sensen quotes: ‘This is how the genuine moral incentive of pure practical reason is constituted; it is nothing other than the pure moral law itself insofar as it lets us discover the sublimity of our own supersensible existence and subjectively effects respect for their higher vocation in human beings.’

Respect, then, expresses the moral motivation and for Sensen Kant takes this to be respect for the ‘sublimity of the moral aspect within, i.e., the moral law.’ Sensen argues that this is the same idea expressed in the *Groundwork*. Respect is related to self-respect and to the duty I owe myself to follow the moral law because the moral law will lead to my becoming a moral person. Self-respect is the feeling that results from the sublimity of this realization. This is not automatic but a process.

In conclusion, Sensen takes Kant’s emphasis on dignity’s use within the context of duties toward oneself as a sign that he understands dignity in terms of the traditional paradigm. The proper moral motive for our actions toward ourselves and toward others is not because of our or their dignity as such but because of ‘the dignity of the moral law.’

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231 Quote taken from CPrR 88 by Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 172.
232 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 172. This sentiment brings Sensen very close to Shell’s position insofar as she takes conscience to be the elevating factor of human beings, as we saw above.
233 Sensen quotes the passage he refers to (G 434) where Kant writes that ‘a morally good person universalizes its maxim “from the idea of the dignity of a rational being, who obeys no law other than that which he himself at the same time gives.”’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 172.
234 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 172. He refers in support of this point to Rel 183 and CF 58.
4. The Appearance of ‘Dignity’ in Kant’s Works

Sensen presents an overview of the word ‘dignity’ [Würde] in Kant’s published works and especially of the way in which he uses this concept. These he listed and classified according to their usage. This research establishes for Sensen the fact that Kant uses ‘dignity’ in line with the traditional paradigm. I present the results of his analysis here.

The term ‘dignity’ appears 111 times throughout Kant’s published writings. To these Sensen adds four instances where Kant mentions ‘Menschenwürde’ (human dignity) as opposed to the more usual ‘Würde der Menschheit’ (dignity of humanity). Sensen found in addition one lecture and two reflection notes. There are eighteen published works that mention dignity at least once. He ordered these works according to the number of times ‘dignity’ makes an appearance.

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235 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 177; see also 177 n 176. Sensen lists the four references to Menschenwürde. Three occur in the Doctrine of Virtue, to wit MM 4:429.24, 4:436.29, 4:465.17; and one in Anthr 7:295.19.
236 He refers to Naturrecht Feyerabend 1319-1322. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 177 n 177.
238 In Sensen’s references he differentiates between the two books, the Doctrine of Virtue and the Doctrine of Right. These two books are known as the Metaphysics of Morals [MM]. I have treated and notated both of them together throughout this work. Here, however, I follow Sensen since his approach allows for greater specificity.
239 These he lists as follows: the Doctrine of Virtue (twenty-one times); the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (seventeen); Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason (eleven); the Lectures on Pedagogy (ten); Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime (ten); Critique of Pure Reason (seven); The Conflict of the Faculties [or: Contest of Faculties] (six); Critique of Practical Reason (five); Doctrine of Right (five); Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (five); Toward Perpetual Peace (four); Critique of the Powers of Judgment (three); The Only Possible Argument in Support of a
One trend Sensen identifies is that throughout his writings and in different contexts ‘Kant consistently elucidates dignity as sublimity (Erhabenheit) or [...] (the highest form of) elevation.’ In this regard ‘elevation’ reflects both the aristocratic and the traditional notion of dignity. When he talks about the dignity of the monarch, the regent or minister and again of mathematics or of the philosopher he reflects the aristocratic notion, which ‘indicate[s] some aspect of rank.’ The sense and actual ‘exclusivity’ implied in this use is important here – hence Sensen’s choice of the phrase ‘the aristocratic notion.’ These often relate to political and/or authoritative structures that are reflected in relationships and where one person, (a dignitary for whatever reason, e.g. a member of a class), or a group (e.g., ‘civic dignities’), is superior. Sensen states, however, that ‘[this] superiority is not a moral quality, but merely the “relation of a commander (imperans) to those who obey.”’ Counting thirty-nine instances of this ‘exclusive and hierarchical’ usage points for Sensen to the aristocratic notion of dignity.

Demonstration of the Existence of God (twice); Lectures on Logic (twice); Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy (once); An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? (once); On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy (once); Kraus’s Review of Ulrich’s ‘Eleutheriology’ (once). See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 177, see also n 179. He also lists Essays Concerning the Philanthropin (once). (See Ibid., 180 n 184).

240 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 178.
241 Sensen refers respectively to CF 7:19.26; PP 8:344.06-08. Kant also speaks of ‘kingly dignity’ (Anthr 7:131.09). Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 178.
243 He refers to Rel 6:328.33; MM 6:468.09; and Anthr 7:127.09. Sensen points out that when Kant uses ‘dignity’ explicitly related to rank he uses it also in the plural (‘dignities’) as is seen, for e.g., in Rel 6:315 and 328. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 178.
244 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 178.
In juxtaposition to this usage that emphasizes distinction and exclusivity by means of rank Sensen identifies a very democratic usage where Kant talks of ‘the dignity of all human beings, or – as he often puts it – the “dignity of humanity [Würde der Menschheit].”’245 The dignity of humanity is embodied in its freedom, which is defined as its ‘capacity to act independently of inclinations.’246 Because freedom grounds morality Kant presents dignity as ‘the capacity to act morally,’247 which gives humanity ‘a prerogative [...] over the rest of nature.’248 Sensen points out that in these instances dignity is not associated with ‘value’ or ‘worth,’ although he refers to it at times as ‘innate’ and ‘inalienable [unverlierbar].’249 These forty-one instances Sensen calls ‘initial dignity [ürsprünliche Würde].’250

The third trend Sensen identifies sees Kant speak of dignity in relation to morality – not in relation to its possibility, as in its ‘initial’ stage, but rather in reference to an actual living out of the moral law. This evinces for Sensen the ‘realized dignity’ of the traditional model. Kant speaks in this regard about the ‘dignity of virtue’251 and of

245 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 178-79.
246 Sensen refers among others to Rel 6:57.27, 6:138.24; MM 6:420.22; CF 7:73.03; Refl 19:181. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 179.
249 He refers to MM 6:420.22 and 6:436.12 respectively. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 179.
250 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 179. Sensen takes this after Kant’s own use in CF 7:73.03.
251 Sensen refers to Observations 2:216.29 and MM 6:483.03. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 179.
the ‘dignity’ of ‘the moral law,’\textsuperscript{252} or of the ‘concept of duty.’\textsuperscript{253} He also speaks of the ‘sublimity and \textit{dignity} in the person who fulfills all his duties.’\textsuperscript{254} Here the intention is to emphasize that ‘morality is to be valued above all else.’ Sensen notes that it is only in this group of passages that we find instances where Kant uses ‘dignity’ together with ‘worth.’\textsuperscript{255} What is elevated in these passages is morality ‘because of its independence from inclination.’\textsuperscript{256} Sensen quotes Kant: ‘[T]he sublimity and inner dignity of the command in duty is all the more manifest the fewer are the subjective causes in favour of it.’\textsuperscript{257} There are thirty-one passages that use dignity in this realized understanding of dignity (as opposed to the initial stage) and of these thirty-one only eight passages relate dignity with worth.\textsuperscript{258}

Using the results together with the references that Sensen provide I present the following schema. Starting from the book that mentions dignity most I shall present each reference Sensen has identified. I shall indicate by means of the font type how Kant uses dignity here, that is, to what trend it corresponds to (i.e., according to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{252} He refers to CPrR 5:147.17 ff.; MM 6:464.18. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 179.
\item \textsuperscript{253} He refers to Rel 6:23.23 ff. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 179.
\item \textsuperscript{254} Sensen refers to G 4:440.01 ff. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 179.
\item \textsuperscript{255} Sensen refers here among others to G 4:435.04 ff. and MM 6: 435.02. These passages will be treated in greater depth below. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 179.
\item \textsuperscript{256} There is a subtle difference between initial and realized dignity. With initial dignity, Sensen described the ‘dignity of humanity’ as the \textit{capacity} ‘to act independent of inclination.’ Here in realized dignity, the ‘dignity of morality’ consist in \textit{being} independent ‘from inclinations.’ See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 179.
\item \textsuperscript{257} Quoted from G 425. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 179.
\item \textsuperscript{258} Sensen refers here to G 4:435.04 & 25, 4:436.03, MM 6:435.02, 6:436.10-12, 6:462.12 ff.; Anthr 7:295.19; and CPR 3:322.29. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 179 ff., 180 n 185. With regard to ‘worth’ Sensen notes: ‘What is striking is how seldom “dignity” appears in conjunction with “worth.”’ (Ibid., 177).
\end{itemize}
Sensen’s classification). Normal script denotes the instances where dignity is associated with sublimity or the highest form of elevation with the sense of exclusivity associated with it and hence these reflect the aristocratic notion of dignity. **Bold script** refers to the *initial dignity* that all people possess and *cursive script* indicates *realized dignity*. There are only eight instances where dignity is related to *worth* and these I indicate by **underlining** the reference. I have arranged each subgroup also in order of its appearance (with the exception of CPR).

- **Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime**: 2:241.18, **2:212.11, 2:217.17, 2:219.11, 2:221.29, 2:221.35, 2:241.18
- **Critique of Pure Reason**: 3:81.22, 4:203.08, 3:322.29, 3:323.09, 3:419.20, 3:549.32, 4:159.33, **3:322.29
- **The Conflict of the Faculties [or: Contest of Faculties]**: 7:19.18 & 26, 7:34.10, 7:52.22, **7:58.20, 7:73.03 & 06
- **Critique of Practical Reason**: 5:25.06, 5:71.21, 5:327.14, **5:88.07, 5:152.28, 5:147.17 ff.
- **Doctrine of Right**: 6:315, 6:327.27, 6:328.33, 6:329.33 & 36, 6:363.27
- **Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View**: 7:127.09, 7:131.09, 7:316.05, **7:295.19 & 22
- **Toward Perpetual Peace**: 8:344.06-08, 8:365.14, 8:368.27
- **Critique of the Powers of Judgment**: 5:327.14, 5:336.10, **5:273.14
- **The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God**: 2:117.35, 2:123.06
- **Lectures on Logic**: 9:30.12, 9:30.12
- **Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy**: 198.02, 212.01, 215.20
One will note how some references are entered twice; this indicates those cases where the use coincides both with the aristocratic paradigm and with the realized dignity, which justifies a distinction, insofar as not all people use their initial freedom and dignity equally well. This schema gives us an idea of the spread of Kant’s use of the term ‘dignity’ in his published works. It supports Sensen’s thesis that dignity in Kant is used in the classical sense of the word and not according to the contemporary way of thinking. The question might be put that, even if Kant used dignity in the classical way, did his use of dignity in conjunction with value not perhaps imply a change of mind in his thinking at least in these cases? In order to show that this is not the case Sensen presents an exegesis of these passages as they occur respectively in the *Groundwork* and in the *Doctrine of Virtue*.

5. Dignity in the *Groundwork*

5.1 Introduction

Kant uses the term ‘dignity’ altogether seventeen times in the *Groundwork*. Sensen notes that if Kant had held to the contemporary paradigm one would have
assumed him to use the concept in conjunction with the Formula of Humanity\footnote{Sensen refers to G 426-431. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 181.} and the respect owed to others, and in the Third Section of the \textit{Groundwork}\footnoteref{footnote260} where Kant justifies his moral philosophy and especially the Categorical Imperative.\footnote{Sensen refers to G 446-463. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 181.} One would have expected ‘a sustained treatment’ especially in the Third Section, but it is strikingly absent: ‘Kant neither uses the term “dignity” in the Third Section, nor does he present an argument for an absolute value of human beings there.’\footnote{Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 181, see also 181 n 187, where Sensen points out that the phrase ‘inner worth’ occurs once (G 454.37) where it relates to morality (and is certainly not proclaimed to be a value of all people). Kant uses the phrase ‘absolute worth’ three times in conjunction with the Formula of Humanity (G 428.04, 15 and 30), and here it ‘receives only passing mention.’}

Sensen lists the following loci: ‘Dignity’ appears eight times in a ‘peripheral addition’ to the Formula of Autonomy and of the Kingdom of Ends.\footnote{Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 181. He refers to G 434.20-436.07.} And in the presentation of the synopsis of his argument with regard to these formulas it appears four times.\footnote{Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 181. He refers to G 438.08-440.13.} Sensen identifies next five ‘isolated occurrences scattered throughout the \textit{Groundwork}.’ These do not pertain to \textit{human} dignity, but to morality, which enjoys an ‘elevation [...] over other forms of behavior.’\footnote{Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 181. He refers to G 405.17, 411.02 and 13, 425.28, 442.29.} There are three passages where ‘dignity’ and ‘worth’ are linked with each other and all of these appear in the addendum to the Formula of Autonomy. Here Kant uses the word ‘dignity’ eight times. In order to further
prove his thesis and offset the notion that Kant might have held a contemporary notion of dignity (where dignity is a value property), Sensen presents an in-depth analysis of the entire section (i.e., the addendum to the Formula of Autonomy) in which these passages occur. I shall present Sensen’s analysis here, if only to give a flavor as to how he treats and interprets Kant’s texts. He later submits a central passage of the *Metaphysics of Morals* to a similar treatment;\(^{266}\) but these I shall not present in the same detail.

Sensen starts by saying that the addendum passage\(^ {267}\) considers ‘moral motivation in the widest sense’ and does not attempt to provide any ‘justification of moral requirements.’ It addresses the question why one should adhere to (i.e. observe) the Categorical Imperative as it is expressed in the Formula of Autonomy, especially given the fact that this formula actively precludes all interest when it comes to moral motivation.\(^ {268}\) ‘Kant’s answer,’ Sensen claims, is that ‘one should abide by the Categorical Imperative because following the imperative, that is, morality, has an elevated worth (i.e., morality alone should be pursued unconditionally).’\(^ {269}\) This echoes Kant’s ‘familiar claim’ in the *Groundwork*, namely, that ‘only a morally good will can have an unconditional worth.’\(^ {270}\)

\(^{266}\) See Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 191-202. Sensen discusses two passages that occur in the *Doctrine of Virtue*.

\(^{267}\) G 434.20-436.07.


\(^{269}\) Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 181.

\(^{270}\) Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 182. He admits one could (‘in a modest sense’) read ‘dignity’ as a definition of ‘unconditional worth’ as a ‘prescription’ of what ought to be valued. This would make it ‘inconsistent’ with the way Kant uses it elsewhere and for Sensen ‘lose the special meaning’ advocated here, which is: “‘Dignity” expresses the
5.2 The Context of the Passage

This passage follows Kant’s discussion of the Formula of Autonomy and the Formula of the Kingdom of Ends. Sensen points out that in Kant’s discussion he ‘switches back and forth’ between these two formulas. When he introduces the Formula of Autonomy Kant does so by calling it ‘the idea of the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law.’ The reason Kant introduces this formula, according to Sensen, is because he wants to leave no room for doubt as to ‘the categorical nature of the Categorical Imperative,’ which is, ‘to indicate in the imperative itself the renunciation of all interest, in volition from duty, by means of some determination the imperative contains.’ Sensen points out that what makes something categorical is its being essentially tied into and promulgated as universal law. Something categorical is thus ‘not dependent upon something else one wants (by inclination).’ Moreover, a universal (or ‘supreme’) legislator ‘cannot be governed by inclinations.’ If dependency were allowed, the will would need another law ‘to limit the interest of its self-love.’ Sensen points out that behind this lies Kant’s notion that ‘all inclinations propel self-love.’ The idea of the Formula of Autonomy leads to the idea of the kingdom of ends, sublimity of morality, in that this worth is higher than or to be preferred over other worth: Morality, and not the objects of one’s inclinations, should be sought above all else’ (Ibid., 182).

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273 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 182 n 198. He refers to G 432.08-11 and CPrR 22-25.
which is ‘a systematic union of various rational beings through common laws.’ If everyone were to act according to the Categorical Imperative this ‘ideal’ of the kingdom would become real.

In the final paragraph (just before the beginning of the ‘addendum passage’ that Sensen analyses), Kant concludes with a reference to the kingdom of ends and then immediately follows that by reformulating the requirement of the kingdom of ends as the requirement of the Formula of Autonomy. I shall quote the full passage with the transition. Kant writes: ‘Morality consists, then, in the reference of all action to the lawgiving by which alone a kingdom of ends is possible. This lawgiving must, however, be found in every rational being himself and be able to arise from his will, the principle of which is, accordingly: to do no action on any other maxim than the one such that it would be consistent with it to be a universal law, and hence to act only so that the will could regard itself as at the same time giving universal law through its maxim.’

Sensen points out that this is the first time Kant expresses the Formula of Autonomy in

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275 Sensen refers to G 438.29-32. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011,182.
276 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 183. Sensen remarks that this move has someone like Paton classify the Formula of the Kingdom of Ends as a sub-formula of the Formula of Autonomy. See Ibid., 183 n 191.
277 Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 4:434.07-14. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 183. I have quoted the full passage even though Sensen did not. He writes though that Kant’s reformulation stems from ‘the requirement to universalize must be able to arise from the agent’s will without looking at the scope of concern of the requirement’ (Ibid., 183). This point relates to the previous one where a universal lawgiver cannot allow personal interests. It emphasizes a deeper aspect that Sensen mentioned earlier; what remains the only unconditional good for Kant is a good will. I see herein that Sensen expresses how Kant with this reformulation introduces measures that will protect the will from anything ‘outside’ and so from any contamination.
this way and more importantly that it is to exactly this law that the passage about
dignity that we are about to study refers.

5.3 The Passage

In looking then to this passage (where ‘dignity’ occurs eight times), Sensen
reminds us of the immediate context and of his presuppositions in approaching this one-
and-a-half pages of text. The context, as we saw, is that this is an addendum to the
Formula of Autonomy, which in effect purifies moral motives by excluding inclinations
and that the justification of moral requirements is not immediately at issue. Sensen tells
us this is a ‘very dense and complicated passage,’ not least because ‘four key concepts’
are addressed and brought into relation with each other, and, as if this were not
enough, Kant expresses each differently over the length of the passage. These concepts
are: ‘autonomy,’ ‘morality,’ ‘dignity,’ and ‘worth.’ For Sensen they are linked in the claim
that ‘a morally good person is autonomous (or abides by the Formula of Autonomy)
because morality has an elevated worth.’278 As to his approach here, Sensen shows how
reading the respective sections in context affirms the traditional understanding of
dignity.279

The passage begins as follows:

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278 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 183.
279 Sensen puts his position in a nutshell: ‘I shall [...] point out, first, that for Kant the
good is dependent upon the right; second, that it is not humanity as such that has an
absolute inner worth, but morality; and, third, that Kant does not conceive of worth as a
distinct metaphysical property.’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 183-84.
Occurrence 1: ‘The practical necessity of acting in accordance with this principle [...] does not rest at all on feelings, impulses, and inclinations [...]. Reason [...] does so not for the sake of any other practical motive or any future advantage but from the idea of the dignity of a rational being, who obeys no law other than that which he himself at the same time gives.’

Sensen points out that ‘autonomy,’ ‘morality’ and ‘dignity’ are linked here. The point is that a ‘morally good being’ adheres to the Formula of Autonomy solely and purely from ‘the idea of the dignity (or sublimity) of a morally good being,’ and not out of any inclination or thought of his own advantage, and this includes ‘being moved by any liking of himself as a morally good person or any thoughts about the advantages that it might yield in the eyes of others.’ Sensen describes a ‘morally good being’ as ‘a being who abides by the Formula of Autonomy, or – as the last phrase puts it – “who obeys no law other than that which he himself at the same time gives.” Reading this in light of Kant’s summation of his argument presented later in the *Groundwork* confirms for Sensen that Kant’s intention here is to address ‘the dignity of the agent’s own morally good will.’ The summary he refers to reads: ‘Our own will insofar as it would act only under the condition of a possible giving of universal law through its maxims – this will possible for us in idea – is the proper object of respect’ [Sensen’s

281 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 184. He refers to G 397.19-32.
282 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 184.
emphasis]. That ‘the dignity or sublimity of one’s own morally good will’ can be the genuine (and proper) moral motive is not foreign to Kant. But as Sensen shows, even here the focus is not on my good will (i.e., how others will see me as a morally good person), but on a will that is really purified, and that is good. This brings us into the domain of morality. Hence, it is really the ‘dignity of morality’ that motivates us and ‘accounts for the practical necessity to abide by the Formula of Autonomy’ [emphasis mine].

The next two occurrences shed light on dignity as elevation:

Occurrences 2 and 3: ‘In the kingdom of ends everything has either a price or a dignity. What has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; what on the other hand is raised above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent has a dignity.’

We see here that dignity is presented ‘as sublimity or the highest form of elevation.’ For Sensen, Kant here treats of two forms of elevation. In the one case we find an elevation over things with a fixed (designated) price and which as such can be

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284 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 184, 184 n 194. Sensen refers to the following texts MM 483, 495; CPR 152; Rel 183; CF 58.
285 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 184. Sensen’s talk of ‘practical necessity’ shows that the Formula operates as what one might call an instrument of purgation, or purification.
286 Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 4:434.31-34. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 184.
287 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 184.
traded for other things of equal value. But what is ‘elevated above price and what has an *elevated* worth is morality.’  

288 This is borne out in the next two occurrences:

**Occurrences 4 and 5:** ‘What is related to general human inclinations and needs has a *market price*; [...] but that which constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself has not merely a relative worth, that is, a price but an inner worth, that is, *dignity*.’

‘Now morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in itself [...]. Hence morality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality, is that which alone has *dignity*.’  

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‘Morality,’ ‘dignity’ and ‘worth’ are here brought into connection with one another. According to Sensen’s reading, that which has an inner worth here is morality. As he says: ‘Kant uses “inner” to express how one has to judge something in isolation, i.e., *independently* of any relation that may hold’ [emphasis mine].  

290 Having already determined that for Kant ‘worth’ functions as a ‘prescription of what one should value’ [emphasis mine],  

291 Sensen sees Kant here as emphasizing that *morality* should be valued unconditionally. This means it should be pursued without paying any regard to one’s own inclinations or of any other factors (like usefulness) that might effect or influence one’s moral actions. Sensen writes, ‘It is in this respect that moral worth is

288 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 185.
290 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 185. Sensen refers to CPR A 324 ff./B 381 ff. The words I emphasized give a clue as to Sensen’s reading: what is at stake is the conditions under or in which one judges something.
291 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 185.
elevated over relative or conditional worth [which means] that something should be valued because something else holds."²⁹²

Sensen writes that ‘dignity’ could be taken here merely as ‘inner worth’ (in the meaning we described above). This would, however, not do justice to the many other ways Kant uses the word – uses that we saw in Sensen’s compilation above. This spurs him to delve deeper. He starts by returning to the broader context, recalling Kant’s question as to why a morally good person would adhere to the Formula of Autonomy. He finds that Kant is trying to point out that morality is higher (i.e., elevated or more important) ‘than other value’ and ‘dignity’ is the concept he uses to express this.

“Dignity” is exactly the term’ Sensen writes ‘[that Kant] uses throughout his writings in order to express that something is raised above all else (in a certain respect).’²⁹³ Sensen now suggests that by this phrase ‘inner worth, that is, dignity’ Kant does not mean to define ‘dignity.’ Kant is making a statement that “inner” is more important than or elevated over “relative.”²⁹⁴ Sensen paraphrases this sentence accordingly: ‘Morality has not just a subordinate relative value (a price), but an elevated inner worth (a dignity in worth).’²⁹⁵ Sensen points to a certain discrepancy with regard to the way ‘dignity’ is brought to bear upon morality and humanity respectively. Different meanings are

²⁹² Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 185. He refers to G 428.
²⁹³ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 185. If one reads this statement it might seem as if there is a hierarchy of value, and that the supreme value is given the title ‘dignity.’ If one were to be very dogmatic with this one could say mathematics has dignity, as do a teacher, etc. so which is the higher etc. However, that would not be a nuanced reading. Here Sensen honors this nuance by adding ‘in a certain respect.’ Sensen later adds that the demand to value something unconditionally ‘is not a necessary connotation of Kant’s usage of “dignity.”’ See also Ibid., 186 n 195.
²⁹⁴ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 185.
²⁹⁵ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 185.
intended. Using it with regard to morality Kant wants to say that ‘[morality] should be sought above all else’ and with regard to humanity it refers to the ‘sense of [humanity] being elevated over the rest of nature in being capable of morality.’ For Sensen this is in line with the two-fold structure of the traditional paradigm with its ‘two stages of elevation.’ The initial dignity of humanity (in virtue of our moral capabilities) elevates us above nature, but this dignity is only realized in accordance with the real use of our moral capabilities, which results in observance of the moral law. In this part of the *Groundwork* Kant is focussed on ‘realized dignity,’ which Sensen describes as having ‘a morally good will.’ This becomes clearer in the next instance:

**Occurrence 6:** ‘Skill and diligence in work have a market price; [...] fidelity in promises and benevolence from basic principles (not from instinct) have an inner worth. [...] Such actions [...] present the will that practices them as the object of an immediate respect [...]. This estimation therefore lets the worth of such a cast of mind be cognized as **dignity** and puts it infinitely above all price.’

In this passage Kant addresses moral themes (morality) which he then relates to dignity. It is therefore morality (the moral life) that is ‘raised above all else.’ In other words Kant stresses that ‘moral worth is raised above all price’ and ought to be ‘valued unconditionally.’ Sensen adds that Kant specifies the moral life (morality) here in terms of ‘a morally good will,’ which he equates with ‘a moral cast of mind,’ bringing it

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297 Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 186.
299 Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 186.
in this way into proximity with the opening lines of the *Groundwork* (First Section) which state that ‘only a good will could be called unconditionally good.’ Sensen paraphrases again as follows: ‘Kant says that it is a morally good cast of mind that has inner worth, and is therefore elevated over other talents and casts of mind which do not have this special worth (i.e., which should not be valued unconditionally).’ And this is for Sensen an apt expression of the ‘realized dignity of a morally good person,’ and is, moreover, in accordance with the traditional model of dignity.

The final two occurrences Sensen discusses justify morality’s elevated worth by considering the notion of autonomy.

**Occurrences 7 and 8:** ‘And what is it, then, that justifies a morally good disposition [*Gesinnung*], or virtue, in making such high claims? It is nothing less than the *share* it affords a rational being *in the giving of universal law* [...] For, nothing can have a worth other than that which the law determines for it. But the lawgiving itself, which determines all worth, must for that very reason have a *dignity*, that is, an unconditional, incomparable worth [...] *Autonomy* is therefore the ground of the *dignity* of human nature and of every rational nature.’

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300 See G 393. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 186.
301 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 186.
302 Sensen writes, apropos the phrase ‘*dignity*, that is, an unconditional, incomparable worth,’ that it does not necessarily have to be taken as a *definition* of dignity. ‘It should be read as saying: “morality has an elevated position (dignity), in that it should be valued above all else (it has an incomparable worth).”’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 187 n 196.
Here Sensen claims that Kant links four concepts, ‘autonomy,’ ‘morality,’ ‘dignity,’ and ‘worth’ to the claim that a morally good person lives in accordance with the Formula of Autonomy because ‘morality has an elevated worth.’ Kant provides his justification for this claim by relating ‘morality,’ ‘dignity’ and ‘worth’ to ‘autonomy,’ which he ‘shortens’ – as Sensen calls it here – to ‘lawgiving.’ Kant begins the passage with the question as to why the ‘moral cast of mind,’ (which we saw is equivalent to the ‘morally good will’) would possess ‘an absolute worth’? Sensen formulates it this way too: ‘why is [a moral cast of mind] elevated over other casts of mind (i.e., has a dignity)?’ And Kant’s answer is because it ‘affords us a share in universal lawgiving or autonomy.’

Sensen unpacks Kant’s claim regarding the elevated worth of lawgiving. His argument runs as follows: The moral law, which in Kant is ‘a principle of right,’ is, as we have seen earlier, pre-existent or anterior to the good. As such the law ‘determines’ the morally good, and ‘all (moral) worth.’ Now, if the law determines all moral worth, obeying it results in our being not only morally good, but also having moral worth. (We might say, one travels through the law to moral worth.) Obeying the law, i.e., expressing in concrete actions what it commands, involves for Kant first of all the giving of the law (legislating). That is, we can only ‘do’ after the law ‘says’ what we are to do. And this

304 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 183, 187.
305 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 187. Sensen writes: ‘To act with autonomy is to regard the adoption of one’s maxim as giving a law for all others.’ See G 432 ff.
306 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 187. We saw in the previous passage that other casts of mind refer to, for instance, one’s talents and those things ‘which should not be valued unconditionally’ (Ibid., 186).
307 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 187.
‘lawgiving’ is, as Sensen mentioned, just another word for ‘autonomy.’ For Sensen, Kant is saying here that ‘it is the lawgiving that has an unconditional [...] or an elevated worth (i.e., a dignity in worth),’ which means, therefore, that ‘it is autonomy that is the ground of the (realized) dignity of human beings. Autonomy is the ground of the high claim a moral cast of mind can make [of] possessing dignity.’\footnote{See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 187.} This is the answer to Kant’s opening question above.

Sensen points out that the sentence ‘the lawgiving itself, which determines all worth, must for that very reason have [...] an unconditional, incomparable worth’ is in itself a justification for the primordiality of the law or the elevated worth of morality.\footnote{Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 187. He points out that these arguments are to be found in the \textit{Critique of Practical Reason} and in the First Section of the \textit{Groundwork}.} This is also not an argument that claims we are owed respect because of a value we possess.\footnote{See Sensen’s refutation of this interpretation and why it does not work. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 53-69.} The topic here addresses why a morally good person would adhere to the Formula of Autonomy and why such a disposition is special. And in answering Kant links different concepts to autonomy and the latter to moral motivation.

\textbf{5.4 Dignity as a Virtue}

For Sensen Kant writes on dignity from within the framework of the traditional notion. The contemporary notion uses many of the same core phrases like ‘inner worth, that is, dignity,’ (occurrence 4 above) or, ‘worth [...] be cognized as dignity,’ (6) and ‘dignity, that is, an unconditional, incomparable worth’ (7). These might reasonably
induce one to read Kant as flouting the contemporary notion of dignity! Sensen adds that when one combines this understanding of ‘dignity as inner worth’ with the notion that ‘humanity has dignity’ (5), one will conclude that ‘humanity has inner worth’ and consequently come to the conclusion that ‘one should respect humanity because it has an inner worth.’ Sensen thinks that he has – at least for the *Groundwork* – laid the ghost of the contemporary notion in Kant to rest. In order to bring this home he presents us with three points pertaining the notion of ‘dignity as a value’ especially (and mostly) according to the *Groundwork*.

The first is that the good depends and is conditioned by the right. Kant writes clearly: ‘For, nothing can have a worth other than that which the law determines for it.’ Sensen continues: ‘There is therefore no independent worth that could ground the requirement to respect others, but for Kant the relationship is the other way around: One should respect others because it is commanded by the Categorical Imperative in the Formula of Humanity. It is in virtue of the moral law – and not because of an inner worth of human beings – that one should respect them.’

The second point Sensen makes is that for Kant ‘absolute inner worth’ is ‘(almost) exclusively tied to morality and not to human beings as such.’ This is evident from the opening of Section I in the *Groundwork* (where Kant says that only a good will

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311 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 188.
313 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 189. This in essence is Sensen’s thesis beautifully put.
can be considered absolutely good) but also in the dignity passage discussed above. It is furthermore in line with his other writings too. Inner worth, as Sensen explains, is something a human being can ‘only give himself in being morally good.’ As Kant says, ‘[I]t is the value that he alone can give to himself, and which consists in what he does, in how and in accordance with which principles he acts, not as a link in nature but in the freedom of his faculty of desire; i.e., a good will is that alone by means of which his existence can have an absolute value.’\(^\text{315}\) So, our ‘absolute worth’ is subordinate to and contingent upon a morally good will. As Sensen showed earlier, Kant’s ethics is not based on the worth of human beings just as rights are not based on the value they possess.\(^\text{316}\)

Sensen’s final point is that worth is not a ‘distinct metaphysical property’ that grounds respect from others. Sensen notes how Kant in fact presents ‘inner worth’ in the Groundwork passage ‘merely negatively.’ He writes, ‘inner worth is “raised above all price”, “admits of no equivalent” (occurrence 3), “has not merely a relative worth” (4),

\(^{315}\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 189-90. As quoted from CJ 443. Sensen refers also to G 439, 449 ff., 454; CPR 110 ff., 147 ff.; and CJ 208 ff. He mentions that some would argue given Kant’s notion of evil humanity would not as such be able to claim ‘absolute value’ (Ibid., 190 n 199).

\(^{316}\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 190. His argument is: We should respect all humans (their right); not all humans have a morally good will; since absolute worth is tied to a morally good will, not all have therefore absolute worth; yet, all should be respected nonetheless (MM 239). Therefore the requirement to respect others (their right) cannot be based on absolute worth. Even criminals deserve respect. Sensen refers to the following passage where Kant writes: ‘I cannot deny all respect to even a vicious man as a human being; I cannot withdraw at least the respect that belongs to him in his quality as a human being, even though by his deeds he makes himself unworthy of it.’ Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:463.
but an “unconditional, incomparable worth” (7)’ [Sensen’s emphasis]. As he argued earlier (as we saw in our Interlude) he reads ‘inner worth’ as expressing ‘what one should value, independent of its usefulness, or something that one would value if one were fully governed by reason.’

### 6. Dignity in the Metaphysics of Morals: Doctrine of Virtue

Sensen says that even if we accept what he has advocated for in his exposition of the *Groundwork* we might still wonder whether Kant had not perhaps changed his position later by the time he wrote the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Sensen draws attention to two passages from the *Doctrine of Virtue* where Kant writes that ‘a human being regarded as a person [...] possesses a dignity (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world.’ And later we read: ‘The respect that I have for others or that another can require from me [...] is therefore recognition of a dignity (dignitas) in other human beings, that is, of a worth that has no

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317 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 190.
318 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 190, see also nn 202-03 where he shows how this reading is in accord with other scholars’ interpretation too. Sensen points out that it would be possible to read G 434-36 as an instance where Kant takes dignity as ‘a value in the more modest sense, meaning that it is a ‘prescription of reason.’ He acknowledges that this is the more ‘natural reading’ in virtue of the way Kant structures his argument here. He refers namely to the parallel that seems to be established between ‘two types of value, price and dignity’ and between ‘relative worth and inner worth.’ Even if this were the case, it would not affect his overall argument, since Kant is not establishing value as a justification for the duty to respect other human beings. See Ibid., 190 ff.
price, no equivalent for which the object evaluated [...] could be exchanged.' Sensen asks whether these passages do not suggest that Kant changed to the contemporary paradigm of dignity. Sensen then discusses these passages in the same thorough way he did the *Groundwork* passages. Here I shall only mention his results and refer the reader to his actual presentation and exegesis.

All in all Kant uses ‘dignity' in the *Doctrine of Virtue* twenty-one times. These occur ‘isolated and scattered’ throughout without following any ‘systematic pattern.’ In fact this ‘scattered and sparse’ usage has Sensen wondering ‘whether Kant considers “dignity” to be a key concept for the *Doctrine of Virtue*.’

Sensen lists the way ‘dignity’ is used as follows: Three instances refer to the aristocratic paradigm where the elevation does not imply a moral ranking (i.e., elevation above other values). Three times he refers to the ‘dignity of morality’ (of virtue, of reason’s moral interest and of one’s morally practical reason). The other fifteen times refer to the ‘dignity of humanity.’ Sensen finds that Kant uses ‘humanity’ here to indicate ‘the sense of one’s idea of a morally good being.’ This means that ‘humanity’ is seen ‘as ideal or *noumenon*’ as we saw earlier. Humanity does then not refer to someone who has fully realized his or her dignity in terms of ‘actually being morally

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319 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 191. He quotes from MM 434 ff., and 462; respectively.
321 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 192 n 204. Sensen lists MM 6:420.16 and 22; 429.16 and 24; 435.2 and 15 and 19; 436.12 and 16 and 29; 449.28; 459.23; 462.12 and 21 and 24 and 30; 464.18; 467.25 and 26; 468.09; 483.03.
322 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 192.
323 He points out that this is the older German ‘*Würde der Menschheit,*’ which is comparable to today’s ‘*Menschenwürde.*’ See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 193.
good.’ It refers rather to ‘the capacity for morality, which for Kant is the same as free will.’ And ‘being free’ means the same as ‘being under the moral law.’ 324

Sensen notes that Kant defines ‘the “dignity of humanity in his person” as the “prerogative of a moral being, that of acting in accordance with principles, that is, inner freedom.”’ 325 ‘Dignity’ is, furthermore, used to give voice to the idea that human beings are elevated ‘above the rest of nature.’ As Kant says: ‘his dignity […] by which he raises himself above all other beings in the world.’ 326 It is freedom that gives us ‘a prerogative,’ i.e., elevates us over the rest of the world and this Kant calls ‘inner freedom, the innate dignity of a human being.’ 327 This ‘form of dignity’ pertains to all human beings ‘innately.’

There are only three instances (out of twenty-one) where Kant uses ‘dignity’ in conjunction with ‘worth.’ 328 They occur in two passages whose context is with regard to the first two instances, the duty against false humility and the introduction to the duties of respect owed to others. 329 Sensen’s conclusion after thorough exegesis is that even here Kant’s uses ‘the dignity of humanity’ to refer to ‘the capacity to be moral.’ He writes: ‘Throughout the Doctrine of Virtue Kant’s point is that one should not deprive oneself of the prerogative of being able to act freely (i.e., in accordance with morality).

324 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 193.
325 Quoted from MM 420.16. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 193.
327 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 193; quoting MM 420.22.
329 See MM 434-36 and 462-64 respectively.
This is not a new justification or application of morality, but is just a different way of saying that one should act as the Categorical Imperative commands.\(^{330}\)

Sensen remarks that the duties Kant discusses here in the beginning of the *Doctrine of Virtue* (against the vices of lying, avarice and servility) are duties we have toward ourselves merely as mortal beings. By this Kant regards the human being without reference to his animality or bodily nature. In a move that reminds one of Shell’s argument concerning the importance of the body (with regard to Kant’s prohibition of suicide), Sensen says these vices are forbidden because they ‘directly violate the moral law in its form.’ This means, in the words of Kant that ‘[t]hey adopt principles that are directly contrary to his character as a moral being (in terms of its form).’\(^{331}\) He points out that Kant defines a character as ‘a law of causality.’ And if we ask what the causal law of a moral being might be, Kant’s answer would simply be ‘the moral law,’ i.e., ‘the Categorical Imperative.’\(^{332}\) In this sense then these vices defy the heart of an existing moral command, viz. according to Sensen, ‘to act on universalizable principles and thereby to be free,’ and for Kant this means ‘they make it one’s basic principle to have no basic principle and hence no character.’ These vices then result in someone ‘depriving himself of the *prerogative* of a moral being, that of acting in accordance with principles, that is, inner freedom.’ This deprivation of the prerogative amounts for Sensen to a denial of one’s dignity of being able to act true to principle, which in the words of Kant makes oneself ‘a plaything of the mere inclination and hence

\(^{330}\) Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 193.

\(^{331}\) See Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 194. He quotes from MM 420.

\(^{332}\) See Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* 2011, 194. He refers respectively to CPR A 539/B 567 and G 446 ff.
a thing.’ According to Sensen then, Kant employs the notion of ‘dignity’ here to restate that one should act true to the Categorical Imperative.

Sensen looks next at this passage from the *Doctrine of Virtue* that opens the section ‘On Servility.’ I quote the first two two paragraphs.

In the system of nature, a human being (*homo pheanomenon, animal rationale*) is a being of slight importance and shares with the rest of the animals, as offspring of the earth, an ordinary value (*pretium vulgare*). Although a human being has, in his understanding, something more than they and can set himself ends, even this gives only an *extrinsic* value for his usefulness (*pretium usus*); that is to say, it gives one man a higher value than another, that is, a *price* as of a commodity in exchange with these animals as things, though he still has a lower value than the universal medium of exchange, money, the value of which can therefore be called preeminent (*pretium eminens*).

But a human being regarded as a *person*, that is, as subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price; for as a person (*homo noumenon*) he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in itself, that is, he possesses a *dignity* (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts *respect* for himself from all other rational beings in the world. He can measure himself with every other being of this kind and value himself on a footing of equality with them.

Sensen states that no new conception of ‘value’ is being offered. He notes that Kant uses here the language of ‘lower’ and ‘higher.’ It relates to sublimity (i.e., our dignity), and as such to the elevation of what is of most (i.e., of highest) importance, and which is directly related to our self-esteem and self-abasement. The issue is to reveal the highest point of importance (worth) on which self-esteem is based. This is, namely, that we *can* attain this highest (sublime) importance, to wit ‘a good will as commanded

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333 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 194-95. These last quotes were all from MM 420.
334 Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 195.
by the moral law.\footnote{Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 196. Sensen puts is beautifully here too with reference to Kant: ‘This aspect of oneself is therefore higher in importance: It is sublime in its importance and can exalt oneself over the rest of nature. This is how Kant puts it in his discussion of the vice of false humility: “In the system of nature, a human being [...] is a being of slight importance [...].” However, “his insignificance as a human animal may not infringe upon the consciousness of his dignity as a rational human being”. A human being therefore “should not disavow the moral self-esteem of such a being”, and should maintain this esteem “with consciousness of his sublime moral predisposition”. This means that “from our capacity for internal lawgiving and from the (natural) human being’s feeling himself compelled to revere the (moral) human being within his own person, at the same time there comes exaltation of the higest self-esteem”. The moral aspect of human beings is connected with a “feeling of his inner worth (valor), in terms of which he is above any price (pretium) and possesses an inalienable dignity.”’ Quoted from MM 434-36.} ‘Dignity,’ which has ‘an absolute inner worth’ comes from one’s being a subject of ‘a morally practical reason.’\footnote{Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 196. This is another way of saying we are under the Categorical Imperative. Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 196.} Sensen writes: ‘As the subject of a morally practical reason, a human being is subject to the Categorical Imperative and can acquire a good will. This will is the only thing that is worth striving for unconditionally (i.e., it “has” an absolute inner worth).’\footnote{Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 196.} Kant calls this whole process also under the rubric of one’s ‘moral calling.’\footnote{Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 197, and 197 n 205. According to Sensen this ‘moral calling’ is used ‘in the sense of personality’ by Kant. He refers to Vigil 627; MM 459; G 434. See Kant, Kant on the Metaphysics of Morals: Vigilantius’s Lecture Notes 1997, 27:627 where this falls under the heading: ‘The duty to govern oneself.’} This self-esteem is then the pride we take ‘in the dignity of our moral calling.’

The second text that Sensen explores and which relates to the requirement to respect others reads as follows: ‘The respect that I have for others or that another can require from me [...] is therefore recognition of a dignity (dignitas) in other human beings, that is, of a worth that has no price, no equivalent for which the object
evaluated [...] could be exchanged.'\textsuperscript{340} The context reveals this not to be an instance reflecting the contemporary notion of dignity. Human worth is tied to morality. Sensen explains, ‘the passage is merely about what one should respect in others’ and this is, namely, ‘their striving for morality and an absolute worth.’\textsuperscript{341} He mentions later that ‘worth’ refers also to ‘self-esteem,’ meaning here then that one should ‘acknowledge the self-respect the other is justified in placing on himself.’\textsuperscript{342} Sensen analyses Kant’s phrase ‘[h]umanity itself is a dignity,’ which Kant justifies in saying: ‘for a human being cannot be used merely as a means [...] but must always be used at the same time as an end.’\textsuperscript{343} This is related to the Formula of Humanity, which demands that others are to be respected and not degraded through treating them as mere means. Sensen relates this to the previous argument with regard to self-esteem and our moral calling.\textsuperscript{344} Sensen explains Kant’s saying that respecting others is to respect their dignity as follows: ‘As one is oneself under the duty of moral self-esteem to realize one’s initial dignity and form a morally good will, so everyone else is under the same duty. If one should respect others – as is commanded by the Formula of Humanity – then one should respect them in their striving to realize their dignity and form a morally good will.’\textsuperscript{345} This again does

\textsuperscript{340} MM 462; as quoted by Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 197, (cf. 197-202 for a detailed discussion).
\textsuperscript{341} Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 198.
\textsuperscript{342} Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 199.
\textsuperscript{344} See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 199-201.
\textsuperscript{345} Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 200.
not introduce a new value-based justification. Rather: ‘Dignity is explicitly said to follow
from the demand of the Formula of Humanity, it is not the ground of it.’

7. Concluding Remarks

After studying the history of the concept of dignity, Sensen identifies three main
paradigms of dignity, operative at least in the Western way of thinking. The aristocratic
and traditional paradigms bear affinity with each other while the contemporary
paradigm is particular to the twentieth century. His thesis is that Kantians often read the
contemporary paradigm back into Kant’s notion of dignity. This is seen when dignity is
identified as a value, or with metaphysical properties that ground the moral law or the
Categorical Imperative.

Kant uses dignity, in a way akin to the aristocratic notion, in accordance with the
traditional paradigm. Here dignity indicates ‘elevation’ or ‘sublimity.’ This is related to
'value' insofar as the value expressed in terms of dignity is incomparable and hence
absolute. It is not possible to measure or calculate it scientifically as with some
measuring instrument, like a yardstick. It is truly immeasurable. We saw that even
though Kant describes dignity, and at times the moral law and one’s inner life, as
imbued with such incomparable value, he cannot have meant it in any way as referring
to a metaphysical property within. If, for argument’s sake we were to take dignity as
such an ontological reality, knowledge of it would have been precluded from us in virtue

\[346\] Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 201.
of Kant’s epistemology. We can know ourselves only as we appear and not in another way. Sensen has provided other arguments and exegetical evidence from Kant’s works to support his thesis. Most important would be that nothing could ground the moral law nor motivate its execution but the command of pure practical reason in the form of the Categorical Imperative. So there can be no talk of dignity (or any other value) grounding or motivating respect. What is to be respected is the moral law, and its possibility within us comprises our first stage or initial dignity. We have to become worthy of this dignity by living according to the dictates of the moral law (of the Categorical Imperative which also grounds the Formula of Humanity) and this expresses our second stage or realized dignity. Respect and treating others with dignity is the result of the demands of the Categorical Imperative and they have dignity because the Imperative demands from me to treat others with respect. This is Sensen’s thesis and he has provided ample evidence in support of it. He acknowledges that many Kantians do not hold this view and that it is therefore new. Now that we have seen his position clearly it remains to put the three positions we have studied into comparison and dialogue with each other.
Conclusion: A Phenomenology of Dignity?

1. Introduction

In this final chapter I will present the respective methodologies of the three Kantians we have studied. Secondly I will place them (and especially Shell and Sensen) into a conversation with each other. This I shall do in the following way: I propose to use Shell’s methodology and approach to develop a kind of ‘phenomenology’ of Kantian dignity. That is to say, I shall try to determine whether it is possible to approach our understanding of Kant’s concept of dignity through his own experience. Off course, since we do not have direct access to his experience, we rely on texts – texts which speak of his experiences and recount the biographical data available to us. By ‘phenomenology’ I then mean simply a focus on the lived experience that might have given Kant the raw data he could very well have mined in order to formulate a philosophical and conceptual understanding of dignity. Kant would obviously have filtered his experiences through the strictures provided by his own philosophical system. But I hope this phenomenological mining will bring to light two factors important for the dignity of persons – namely, transcendence and – for want of a better word – the good. I will then show how both Shell and Sensen address these issues, and how one can, through using their insights, better understand what I call the ‘phenomenology’ of dignity. This will lead us to a better position in which to ask whether Kant’s philosophy of dignity can give full expression to his experience of it.
2. Sensen: Clearing the playing field and clarifying the concepts.

According to Sensen’s thesis, Kantians in the latter part of the twentieth century mistook the contemporary notion of dignity for Kant’s own notion and, as it were, read it back into Kant. As he writes: ‘In this context human dignity is often assumed to be an inherent value all human beings possess; as such, it is thought to be a value that grounds the requirement to respect other human beings.’¹ Sensen has in mind Kantian scholars like Allen Wood, who, for instance, in discussing ‘[e]nds in themselves and existent ends,’ writes that in terms of ‘[v]alue conceptions,’ Kant gives an ‘account of the value he will ascribe to humanity or rational nature.’² Looking at a passage in the Groundwork,³ Wood discerns ‘three distinct value conceptions:’ ‘end in itself,’ ‘existent end’ and ‘absolute worth.’ Suggesting that ‘absolute worth’ may relate to relative worth he writes that nonetheless ‘Kant also ascribes to rational nature an “absolute worth” in the sense of a dignity, a value that cannot be compared to, traded off against, or compensated for or replaced by any other value. […] “Absolute worth” in this passage may be an allusion to the dignity of rational nature. Strictly speaking, […] Kant ascribes dignity not to “humanity” but to “personality,” that is, not to rational nature in general but to rational nature in its capacity to be morally self-legislative.’⁴ Here, in short, we have the classical (Kantian) expression of Kant’s notion of human dignity. This resulted

¹ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 1.
² Wood 1999, 114. He acknowledges though that this account is ‘entirely hypothetical.’
³ G 428: ‘Supposing, however, that there were something whose existence in itself had an absolute worth, which, as end in itself could be the ground of determinate laws, then in it and it alone would lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative, that is, a practical law.’ Quoted by Wood 1999, 115.
⁴ Wood 1999, 115. He refers to G 434.
in a notion of dignity regarded as a value that is, moreover, an inherent metaphysical property – one that gives a special status to human beings; one that grounds the requirement to respect them. This Sensen calls ‘the contemporary view of human dignity’ and it coincides with a tendency in some Kantian scholars to ‘humanize’ the Categorical Imperative by seeing as its basis a value-property tied essentially to human dignity.

Using the tools of the analytical methodology, that is, analysis of words and their meanings in the context of arguments and especially of their historical usage, allows Sensen to establish that dignity is not seen or used by Kant as an inherent value property and that, consistent with his mature philosophy, such ‘value’ can ground neither respect nor the moral law. Indeed, respect is to be rendered not as an extra or addition to the moral law, but because the moral law itself commands it. As such it is part of the moral law.

Sensen’s interpretation is highly original. He brings something new to the table: he explains why values cannot ground morality; he also provides a new understanding that challenges the notion, dear to orthodox Kant scholars, of dignity. The traditional Kantian notion (e.g. Woods’ notion) shares many features with the contemporary notion of dignity, as found for instance by the United Nations and in contemporary ethical thought. Although Sensen does not state this explicitly, his writing prompts the question

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5 Sensen acknowledged, however, that not all the Kantians would hold that value is a metaphysical property. Some sees it like him as a reference to what should be valued. His argument with them though is that value per se cannot ground an imperative. See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 5.
whether for the last sixty years, scholars have perhaps been reading contemporary notions back into Kant.

Apart from the immense scholarship he brings to the field, as well as originality and lucidity, Sensen’s main contribution is, to my mind, fourfold: First, he brings conceptual clarity to the main notions associated with dignity. In this he provides us with a new way of looking at notions appropriate to the Formula of Humanity, namely, ‘end in itself,’ ‘respect,’ and of course ‘humanity.’ He brings this same clarity to his penetrating analysis of the individual concepts in the phrase ‘absolute inner value,’ highlighting each concept’s mutual relationship with the others and bringing the results of his analysis into relationship with ‘dignity.’ All this is immensely valuable. Secondly, he shows how these notions (and his interpretations of them), associated with ‘dignity,’ fit within the overall structure of Kant’s mature thought. Sensen takes the famous Kantian ‘Copernican Revolution’ of the First Critique and applies it to Kant’s Practical Philosophy. He finds, for instance, that we do not respect another because of his or her value, as some would argue, but because the moral law, that is, the Categorical Imperative demands it. This ‘Copernican Revolution in morality’ has also implications for our understanding of the relationship between duty and rights. He brings clarity and focus on the singular importance of the moral law; and his insights can be applied to other areas of Kant’s moral philosophy as well. Thirdly, Sensen provides a framework within which to understand dignity. In terms of the history of the concept of ‘dignity’ in the West he has managed to extract core ideas associated with the concept and by

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6 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 7 ff.
7 See Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 2, 4 ff.
means of these has identified some patterns of thought revealing the structure of the concept’s meaning as well as its implications. He discerns three basic models operative in western history. The contemporary model on the other hand does not see dignity in the first instance as a judgment of worth or value but as a metaphysical property within each person: A property whose presence grounds one’s value and worth and justifies therefore respect and human rights. Fourthly, Sensen has analysed and classified each and every instance of Kant’s use of this ‘dignity.’ He identifies three main ways Kant uses the concept Würde and from this he identifies and then systematically describes the essential structure of what Kant means by it. In light of his historical analysis of the history of the notion of dignity he finds that Kant’s understanding fits within the traditional model of dignity. In this Sensen has provided a systematic framework within which we may understand Kant’s use of the term and this allows us also to branch out to other areas of Kant’s philosophy.

Kant uses ‘dignity’ not as a metaphysical property, but to express elevation and sublimity. One might say it is a stylistic instrument whereby Kant would typically place (two) notions alongside each other and signifying the one that is judged to be of higher value by means of describing it as having dignity. Most helpful is his presentation of dignity’s two-fold structure: an initial dignity, which each human being has, and which is the condition of the possibility of morality, and secondly, realized or actualized dignity, which is not something all have and depends on how one uses one’s initial dignity. In the concrete it comes down to one’s obedience to the moral law. Ultimately Sensen
finds that for Kant it is really the moral law itself where dignity is found. This means that what one really respects in another is the moral law.

In the end Sensen concludes that for Kant, who uses the concept sparsely, dignity is ‘a secondary concept.’\(^8\) He concludes: ‘The place of human dignity in Kant’s framework, on my reading, is more modest than it is often taken to be; but it is not insignificant. Human dignity does not ground moral imperatives, but human beings have dignity because they are free and so bound by moral imperatives.’\(^9\)

The spirit of Sensen’s presentation is somewhat different from Sullivan’s and Shell’s. Not only does he discuss the works of other Kantians on dignity in Kant but he also does this at ‘a distance,’ or on a meta-level, where he judges the interpretations of his predecessors. His presentation is therefore like a ‘second generation’ Kant scholar confronting the problem of dignity. This dialogue with fellow scholars lends great power and credence to his claims and clarifications. It allows his readers to see the problem from a very wide angle of vision and to determine how it fits coherently within Kant’s system.

3. Sullivan

Both Sullivan and Shell would according to Sensen be proponents of the traditional Kantian understanding of dignity, even though Sullivan and Shell differ from

\(^8\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 202.
\(^9\) Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 213.
each other, not least in their methodologies but also with regard to central philosophical themes they choose to relate to dignity in Kant.

Sullivan gave a solid presentation from the perspective of Kant’s moral philosophy. His strengths are numerous. For one, he presents human dignity in Kant not as an individual theme but places it in the context of Kant’s moral thought and presents it systematically as it fits into ‘the greater whole’ of Kant’s thought.10 His approach is somewhat analytical.11 In this he differs from Shell, and stands closer to Sensen. His Kantian methodology is that Kant respects ordinary moral consciousness and that Kant’s philosophy does not propose something new, that is, something that is not already inherent in people’s moral thinking. These ‘people’ are ordinary folks and not specialists or philosophers.12 This establishes some connection between him and Shell’s approach (more on this further on). He relates dignity, in the third place, directly (and almost exclusively) to the Second Formula, which he even calls: ‘the Formula of Respect for the Dignity of Persons.’13 He does not present this Formula as standing apart from the Categorical Imperative but as flowing from the Imperative and in fact being just a different expression of it.14 This, oddly enough, places him close to Sensen and his aim to bring everything (e.g., moral motivation) back to the Categorical Imperative and to relate duties to the same. Sullivan presents dignity in relation to (moral) personhood. He interprets Kant’s phrases regarding a person as ‘an end in himself’ and ‘an object of free

12 Sullivan 1989, 4-6. On this note he appreciates the influence of Pietism on Kant as well (cf. Ibid., 6 ff.).
choice’ as concerned with persons who should, in accord with their own and others’
dignity, never be instrumentalized. He adds: ‘Persons as “self-existent” (selbständig),
[have] intrinsic and objective worth simply by the fact that they exist, apart from any
and all subjective prudential considerations.’\footnote{Sullivan 1989, 196.} In this Sullivan’s is the classic expression
of the traditional Kantian interpretation, and one can see how it lends itself to being a
basis for the contemporary model of dignity (as understood by Sensen). The question
though is how we take this principle of life, which is itself the ‘intrinsic and objective
worth’ Sullivan refers to. Do we take it as a metaphysical reality which would make of
dignity a self-standing metaphysical property? Or, do we remain on the purely analytical
level and say the concepts pertaining to dignity neither refer to, nor include, any such
‘fact’ of life? In the fourth place, Sullivan argues that although ‘morality cannot
ultimately be based on feelings, only on reason alone’ \footnote{Sullivan 1989, 196.} he states
nonetheless that ‘respect or reverence is a special kind of moral feeling.’\footnote{Sullivan 1989, 198.} Respect
cannot be sanctioned by any external authority, yet we have to ‘cultivate and act on this
disposition’ – hence Kant’s calling it ‘a duty of virtue.’\footnote{Sullivan 1989, 198.} This raises the problem of how
one is to understand respect for others as an emotion. The problem is not only that it
might open the door to moral sentimentalism but also that in determining courses of
action in thorny ethical issues disputes can arise resulting in people using the phrase
‘respect for people’ with ‘its powerful emotional connotation,’ as an emotional
‘sledgehammer.’ Rational argumentation has then all but disappeared. Here Sullivan
anticipates the problems to which Sensen’s interpretation offers a solution. In fact he even refers to the sanity of the ‘strict method’ that is the Categorical Imperative as a way out.  

Although there are certain elements in Sullivan (like the two-fold structure of dignity) that remind one of Sensen, his is an expression of the classic Kantian notion of dignity. Dignity becomes a motivational force for morality. Sullivan writes: ‘the second formula […] emphasizes why we must be moral: to live up to the dignity we have by virtue of being rational beings, to sustain the right we and all other persons have to moral self-esteem.’

4. Shell

Shell’s presentation starts with a question. She asks: ‘What does it mean to speak of “human dignity” or the dignity of man as man?’ Her methodology is not analytical but what I would call for want of a better word, ‘anthropological.’ By this I mean that she follows an integrative approach where Kant’s biography and his texts are brought to bear upon one another. She tries to bring the human experience behind Kant to life and her interpretation returns constantly to this experience. In doing so she does not shy away from either the epistemological or metaphysical dimensions. Both Sensen and Sullivan tend to be shyer with regard to the metaphysical. Shell goes further though in that for her ‘these two realms are joined, however mysteriously, by a common

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20 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 53.
inhabitant – man. Her great strength is that she opens the way to discover Kant, the man, in and behind his texts. She also manages to bring him home to the contemporary world.

Apart from these she brings unique elements to bear on the understanding of dignity. Her scholarship into the early and pre-critical works of Kant, together with her gift of allowing the man himself, in his humanity, to speak, is groundbreaking and without equal. In this she manages to show how the roots of Kant’s thinking lie in the questions that plagued him in response to the events of his day, the new scientific discoveries and new theoretical knowledge of the day. What is, secondly, of great importance is the way in which she shows how Kant’s early philosophy gradually became more concerned with the question of the meaning of human life and how this question was framed as a question of humanity’s value: a question about the dignity of man, and wherein this dignity was to be found. Thirdly, Shell uniquely addresses those concepts in which dignity is embedded, namely freedom and autonomy, imputability, personality, God, religion, history, and politics in relation to rights and government. Her work on the pre-critical Kant is invaluable here. She traces the development of Kant’s thoughts in a way that allows us to see how the key concepts that became the intellectual tools with which Kant thinks through the issue of humanity’s value are formed. We see, for instance, how concepts like value get related to meaning and worth; how interiority is not assumed but develops; how freedom becomes a cornerstone; how other people have moral implications for one’s own life; how Kant’s

own life-changing history brought him to rank morality higher than knowledge. I have not discussed all these themes in the chapter devoted to Shell, but her works address them. This shows that even though dignity is a ‘secondary concept’ it has a far reach in its influence and applicability. The most important point, though, is that it is intimately related to morality. Fourth, Shell links dignity to human consciousness and to the conscience. The latter is the awareness of the moral law within. Finally, her linkage of dignity with the body and ethical issues relating to the body is very valuable and relevant in our world today.

Sensen suggests that Kant’s understanding of dignity is Stoic. And in presenting a short history of the concept Shell makes the same point – namely that Stoic, as well as Judaic-Christian influences, weighed heavily with Kant. Nevertheless, she says, Kant brings something new to the picture, namely, autonomy. Autonomy has to do with obeying the law, which we also legislate. In this process human consciousness of the moral law, which we can also call our conscience, plays a pivotal role.

It is especially in her analysis of consciousness that I find her thought richly suggestive. She gives the impression that there must be more, that there is more, and yet we cannot grasp it directly. She finds in history the ultimate judge of our collective value. But even so she is open for ‘a glimpse of the eternal—a glimpse available to us by

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23 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 54.
She does not state this dogmatically, yet this is a possibility opened up by consciousness, the moral law and dignity, which somehow express the sublimity that is appropriate to these experiences and that is, moreover, particular to man.

In the final section of this conclusion I would like to place these three philosophers into a dialogue or conversation. I believe that especially between Shell and Sensen we can find common ground, not so much in forcing them to an agreement with each other’s positions, but as enriching each other. However, I shall first provide some background, taken from following an anthropological approach, as Shell does. We learn from Shell how to think with Kant. Let us imagine him then and try to see where thinking with him from his life experience (in so far as we know it) would take us. What would the experience, or phenomenology, of dignity look like, if there is indeed such an experience?

5. The Experience of Dignity

5.1 Definitions

Philosophers like definitions. But there is no one neat definition of dignity. Here Sensen is most helpful in that he clarifies the basic concepts and provides not so much a definition as an uncovering of the inner structure of dignity. Dignity is elevation. Dignity has a two-fold structure: an initial dignity, in which all share, and which is nothing other

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24 Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 70-71.
than that which makes moral life possible. Realized dignity is our responsibility and requires a life of effort to live in accordance with the moral law. We could also say:

Dignity involves living authentically autonomous lives. In this sense not all people have the same level of actual dignity. But Sensen goes further: in the end, he says, it is really not human beings that are the locus of dignity, but the moral law.

Associated with dignity is the command to respect others. As the meaning and dynamic of this respect is teased out it becomes clear that I first respect the moral law. In a footnote in the *Groundwork*, Kant explores the notion of ‘respect’ and remarks (against a possible objection that respect is ‘an obscure feeling’) that, ‘even though respect is a feeling, it is not one received through any outside influence but is, rather, one that is self-produced by means of a rational concept; [...] What I recognize immediately as a law for me, I recognize with respect; this means merely the consciousness of the subordination of my will to a law without the mediation of other influences upon my sense. The immediate determination of the will by the law, and the consciousness thereof, is called respect, which is hence regarded as the effect of the law upon the subject and not as the cause of the law.’

The effect of the mere presence (or possibility) of the moral law (e.g., to treat others in a certain way) produces this *feeling* of respect. But it is a respect for the *law* and not for the other as such. To put it in another way: the presence of the moral law awakens this respect.

So, Sensen and others determine that the real object of respect in oneself and others is not directly persons *per se* but the moral law. What I respect in others is the

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presence of the moral law. In so far then as we saw that the concept of person pertains to the moral law – which means that a person is one under the law, responsible to obey what he legislates, and thus the one who makes the concrete expression of the moral law possible and actual – we can say we respect the person and thereby actually mean we respect the moral law.

In Sensen’s whole presentation it is as if he moves, systematically and determinately, to present a vision of dignity as being actually the highest elevation and worth of the moral law. And in the execution of the moral law, in following it, he ever so deliberately excludes all possible motives that might intrude, be they hypothetical conditions or even values (as some would regard ‘dignity’ to be). The highest form of dignity (as even the concepts ‘inner,’ ‘absolute’ and ‘value’ show) is truly expressed thus: that what should be valued for itself is the law and nothing but the law. This relates to Kant’s notion of the absolute good as a good will, which means a will that acts only for sake of what it wills and for nothing else; and what it wills has no other external reference and is nothing other than the law itself. We are to value the law for the sake of the law alone (no other motivations reach the sublimity of the law). Similarly, the only pure good is the will that chooses the good (the law) for the sake of the law as an act of pure will, with no other external or internal motivation. The sublimity of the will mirrors the sublimity of the law.

This is a vision that presents a search so pure for something so pure that it reminds one of a mystical search for the Divine. A sentiment like the following might
apply: ‘Nothing matters: all that suffices is God for the sake of God alone.’ It is as if Sensen were to say: ‘Nothing matters: all that suffices is the Law for the sake of the Law alone.’ I do not mean this as a criticism. Just the opposite. Indeed, if one looks at the above quoted footnote, it appears just before Kant states the Categorical Imperative for the first time in the *Groundwork*. Moreover, the footnote is attached to a text where Kant talks about the moral worth of an action. It is only through the rational will that ‘the highest and unconditioned good can alone be found.’ He continues by saying ‘Therefore, the pre-eminent good which is called moral can consist in nothing but the representation of the law in itself, and such a representation can admittedly be found only in a rational being insofar as this representation [...] is the determining ground of the will. The good is already present in the person who acts according to this representation, and such good need not be awaited merely from the effect.’

My impression is that Sensen senses this ‘goodness,’ which is something given; it is as if it is there before we act on it, even as we also legislate it. I understand Kant here to imply that we become the incarnators of the Good through the moral law, through the process of the Categorical Imperative. In these speculations then I admit that I go beyond both Sensen and Shell.

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26 See for instance the motto of St Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716) whose motto was ‘God Alone.’ His collective writings are published under this title. See Grignion de Montfort 1988.
27 See G 402.
28 Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* 1981, 4:401. Even this phrase ‘the highest good alone’ reminds one of a sentiment like ‘God, for God alone, suffices.’
29 Sensen does not pursue this line of thought. He states clearly at the end: ‘One has to explain why freedom as a descriptive metaphysical property (the ability to determine oneself independently of nature) should yield a moral law.’ And he clearly admits:
I intend to present now a phenomenology of dignity. What I mean by this is a presentation of Kant in accordance with his biography and some writings that reflect his biography in a way that highlights how his experiences feed into the concept of dignity. Experiences we take to be subject to the phenomenological realm (hence a ‘phenomenology’ of dignity); but I intend to show how Kant’s own descriptions seem to point to the experience of transcendence (something Shell highlighted); I next intend to show that the noetic purity of the concept of dignity, as presented by Sensen, has its roots in an experience paralleling religious experience and which, for want of a better word, I would call the Good. My question at the end remains the same to both Shell and Sensen: whether their understandings describe the same reality albeit from different points of view and thus leave open the possibility that in dignity we experience or are witness to something pointing beyond phenomena even as we are bound to them. This is parallel to our autonomy, which involves both our legislating and obeying what we legislate.

5.2 The Importance of Kant’s own experiences

The assumption of Sullivan’s approach to dignity is that it is part of Kant’s moral philosophy and that Kant, especially in the expression of the second formula of the Categorical Imperative, the Formula of Respect for the Dignity of Persons as he calls

‘These questions were not the subject of this book.’ Sensen, Kant on Human Dignity 2011, 214.
it, intends deliberately to ‘bring an Idea of reason ... nearer to feeling.’\textsuperscript{30} To affect this Kant uses ‘emotional language’ deliberately in order to stress ‘that the subjective foundation of human morality consists of the dispositions of self-respect and respect for others.’\textsuperscript{31} Sullivan’s purpose in writing his book is to present ‘a synoptic and detailed exposition of Kant’s entire practical theory.’\textsuperscript{32} He admits that he has no particular theme through which he approached Kant’s practical philosophy, except a conviction that there is ‘an overall wholeness to Kant’s practical philosophy.’\textsuperscript{33} He confesses to being ‘more at home within the Anglo-American analytic tradition than [...] with Continental phenomenology.’\textsuperscript{34}

In spite of his analytic proclivity, he does allow himself a few pages on Kant’s personal life in his introductory chapter. I refer to two insights he finds worth mentioning. Referring to the enforced training in piety in his youth, he states that Kant’s mistrust of ‘soft’ sentimental feelings find their origin here. Kant respected emotions ‘recommended by the ancient Stoics [that reflected and promoted] a strong will and high principles.’ Sullivan remarks how Kant in fact strengthened his own ‘frail constitution’ by ‘a stern discipline’ that steadfastly refused himself to allow any ‘ease and indulgence.’ This was even the case in his personal relationships, where he maintained a ‘certain reserve.’\textsuperscript{35} We can see in this brief sketch how struggle and high ideals and a strong will (as lived realities for Kant) have a practical application; and when

\begin{itemize}
\item[31] Sullivan 1989, 193.
\item[32] Sullivan 1989, xi.
\item[33] Sullivan 1989, xiv.
\item[34] Sullivan 1989, xv.
\item[35] Sullivan 1989, 2.
\end{itemize}
we meet them in his philosophy we can see them to be much more than theory. It is noteworthy that the last paragraph Sullivan devotes to Kant’s personal life is devoted to dignity. I quote the poignant paragraph in full: ‘In Kant’s moral theory the dignity of persons and their right to respect is grounded in their freedom – their ability to subordinate their particular desires and inclinations to the universal law of morality. To live up to this freedom is the meaning of integrity, and so it is understandable that more than anything else Kant treasured intellectual and moral integrity, both in himself and in others. He is remembered by those who knew him as the best model of his own moral doctrines: He valued the impersonal universal in all those with whom he dealt more than their individuality or particularity. An incident occurred about a week before his death that has often been used to illustrate how Kant guided his relationships with others by the disinterested interest of moral respect, which he nonetheless called the “courtesy of the heart.” Desperately weak, mentally unable to concentrate, and virtually blind, Kant insisted on rising and remaining standing until his doctor had seated himself. With great effort Kant then remarked that at least “the sense of humanity has not yet abandoned me.”’

We have already seen that Sensen refers to this same incident. While Shell goes into the life of Kant in a depth that the other two do not, their reference to this personal incident nonetheless highlights that however much one might focus on the analytical aspects of Kant’s thought with regard to dignity, the personal cannot be ignored. When Kant thinks of dignity, it is not so much about theory, but about life lived in a certain

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36 Sullivan 1989, 2-3. Even here we may ask how we are to understand this phrase ‘the impersonal universal’?
way; about character, about respect. The question is what is the true object of respect; and what is the way life is to be lived; and in the sketch from Sullivan we have seen (what was already clear in Shell) the effort, which is a personal effort or cost involved in the attainment or execution of respect associated with dignity. Finally the true object of this effort or cost is not in the first place the other, but the self. This is the dynamic involved in the lived reality of dignity. Kant reflected this in his practical writings and in his philosophy. Shell referred to Herder’s accusation regarding Kant, that Kant saw his life as a ‘spiritual invention’ or as Shell puts it as an experiment. This means he puts his ideas into practise but also that his practise informs his ideas. Something of this is in fact evident in his moral philosophy, as can be seen in his insistence on the use of the word ‘principle.’ Shell has shown that throughout Kant’s life –especially in his early life – theoretical questions had their basis in his personal life. Not that Kant was an existentialist. In a section entitled: ‘The context for Kant’s moral philosophy,’ Sullivan talks about how the new sciences of Kant’s day seemed to challenge traditional morality because of their implicit mechanistic determinism. He refers to the preface of the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason where Kant states explicitly: ‘I have therefore found it necessary to put aside [theoretical/scientific] knowledge in order to make room for [moral and religious] faith [Glaube].’

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38 As Sullivan mentions the motto to the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason is taken from Bacon: ‘De nobis ipsis silemus’ that is translated as ‘[a]bout ourselves we are silent.’ Sullivan 1989, 2.
In his standard book on the early philosophy of Kant, Martin Schönfeld shares this impression of the philosopher: ‘But what always distinguished Kant was his extraordinary intellectual honesty. He admitted to himself the extent of his initial failure and carefully learned the painful lesson it entailed.’\(^{40}\) He points out how Kant time and again abandoned positions once he learned that they did not hold up to his rigorous scrutiny. Thus he abandoned Cartesean mechanics and embraced Newtonian physics. His adherence to the Leibnitzian-Wolffian metaphysics in which he was schooled suffered the same fate.\(^{41}\)

Additionally, and not least, this brings to light the image of an extraordinarily focussed human being, for whom philosophizing and living at its most mundane converged to a remarkable degree. Shell writes: ‘Kant’s greatness lies, at least in part, in a singularity of purpose – a self-imposed attentiveness – by which, in aiming to found philosophy as a systematic science, he also, and not incidentally, expressed and fashioned his own character. […] Herder accused his former teacher of trying to give spiritual birth to himself. More positively and accurately assayed, Kant’s systematizing efforts go together with – and in a nontrivial sense constitute – a lifelong self-experiment. To this extent, Kant’s life can be (and was, evidently, by him) regarded as a “masterpiece.”\(^{42}\)

\(^{40}\) Schönfeld, The Philosophy of the Young Kant: The Precritical Project 2000, 19. The major project of the precritical period was for Schönfeld Kant’s attempt to reconcile natural science and metaphysics. Ibid., 10.

\(^{41}\) See also Schönfeld, Kant's Philosophical Development 2012.

Paul Schilpp remarks that Kant has often been misjudged based on the writings of the latter period as a pure rational being: cold, rigorous and emotionless. He points out, in fact, that a study of Kant’s other writings reveal a character that is ‘far from being a mere Verstandesmensch.’ He refers to a passage in the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime in which Kant describes the four temperaments. In agreement with others he takes the passage on melancholy as ‘largely autobiographical.’ Schilpp quotes the passage in full and I follow suit. Kant writes:

‘The person whose feeling leans toward melancholy is called melancholy, not because he broods in morose heaviness of heart robbed of all the joys of life, but because, if his emotional reactions were to be enhanced beyond a certain measure or were to be misdirected for any reasons, they would more easily tend towards that condition than to any other. He has a special feeling for the sublime. Even beauty, for which he also has a feeling, must not merely charm but also move him, inasmuch as it fills him at the same time with admiration. The enjoyment of pleasures is much more serious, but is on that account no less enjoyable. All emotions of the sublime contain more enchantment for him than all the deceitful enticings of the beautiful. His well-being will be closer to contentment than to gaiety. He is steadfast. For that reason he regulates his emotions by principles. The more general the principle of regulation, the broader the high feeling which comprises the lower one within itself, the less these emotions yield to unsteadiness and change. ... The person of melancholy frame of mind cares little for what others think, what they consider good or true; he trusts entirely to his own insight. Since his grounds of motivation take on the nature of principles he is not easily brought to other ideas; occasionally his steadfastness degenerates even into wilfulness. He looks upon the change of fashions with indifference and upon its glamour with contempt. Friendship is sublime and is therefore agreeable to his temperament. ... Affable conversation is beautiful, thoughtful silence is sublime. He is a good keeper of his own secrets as well as of those of others. Veracity is sublime; he hates lies and pretense. He has a high regard for the dignity of human nature. He esteems himself and regards any man as a creature deserving respect. He will endure no depraved submissiveness and breathes freedom in a noble breast. He abominates all chains, from the gilded ones worn at court to the heavy irons of the galley-slave. He is a severe judge

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43 Schilpp 1998, 3; see esp. 2-7.
44 Schilpp 1998, 4; see also 3 esp. n 4. He refers to Observations 220-221.
of himself and of others and not rarely is disgusted with himself as well as with the world.\textsuperscript{45}

If we grant Schilpp that this is indeed autobiographical, we can see the rich interior life of an author who is aware of his feelings and their power, who reveals an astounding psychological self-awareness and a similarly remarkable degree of self-mastery. This is achieved by means of a lived-through and tested, experimental approach to the self where, by means of reasonable principles, one masters passions that can lead one astray. This is something we saw in Shell’s account, namely that Kant’s life was something of ‘an experiment’ and in fact a ‘masterwork.’

Schilpp refers to the third part of \textit{The Conflict of the Faculties}. Here Kant writes in response to a letter from one Professor Hufeland who asked Kant to comment on his attempt ‘to present the whole human being, including his physical side, as a being that is ordered to morality,’ and this for the sake of establishing a regimen in order to prevent illness. Kant, inspired by Prof Hufeland, sets about to formulate just such a regimen. In this he shows how practical (moral) philosophy does not provide a complete

\footnote{Schilpp 1998, 4. What is noteworthy here in terms of our thesis on dignity is not only the reference to human dignity and respect but the use of ‘sublimity’ that clearly reflects ‘elevation.’ We see that ‘sublime’ is used in a context where two elements or activities are compared (e.g., ‘talkativeness’ vs. ‘thoughtful taciturnity’ [Guyer’s translation]) and that ‘sublime’ is used to declare which one is the better, i.e., beyond measure and calculation. The sublime awakens a feeling for whatever it regards as sublime – as in the case of friendship. It gives us an inner man’s view of lived dignity: ‘Truthfulness is sublime, and he hates lies or dissemblance. He has a lofty feeling for the dignity of human nature. He esteems himself and holds a human being to be a creature who deserves respect’ [Guyer’s translation]. See Kant, Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime (1764) 2011, 2:220-221. While some of this will be modified in Kant’s mature thought, the sentiments and the basic intellectual tools pertaining to dignity are already present here.}
answer, yet is nonetheless ‘an ingredient in every prescription.’ In attempting his formulation, Kant’s first thesis reads: ‘On the power of the human mind to master its morbid feelings merely by a firm resolution.’ It is in the opening statement of this thesis that Kant writes the following: ‘My examples confirming the possibility of this proposition cannot be drawn from other people’s experiences, but, in the first instance, only from what I have experienced in myself; for they come from introspection [Selbstbewußtsein], and only afterwards can I ask others whether they have not noticed the same things in themselves. – I am [...] dealing, not with common experience, but with an inner experiment or observation that I had to make on myself before I could submit, for others’ consideration, something that would not of itself occur to everyone unless his attention were drawn to it.’

We see something of the experimental nature of Kant and of his own ‘inner history’ and its importance in formulating his doctrines. We can also better understand the importance of the first duty toward oneself, namely, honesty – not to mention the role and function of consciousness. This is not meant to reduce Kant’s philosophy to his biography or to his psychology; but if we do not see that Kant lived concretely and that his life was brought to bear truthfully upon his philosophy, we miss a fuller picture of the man and his thought, not to mention the power of his thought. It is especially in his practical thought that his experience and honesty drove his philosophizing. As a monument to his integrity, Sullivan quotes this sentence that Kant wrote on April 8,

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47 Kant, The Conflict of the Faculties (1798) 1996, 7:98. The word translated here as ‘introspection’ is in the original ‘Selbstbewußtsein,’ which Schilpp translates as self-consciousness. His translation seems closer to the original. See Schilpp 1998, 5.
1766, in a letter to his friend Moses Mendelssohn: ‘Although I am absolutely convinced of many things that I shall never have the courage to say, I shall never say anything I do not believe.’ Belief can be deeply personal and its expression highly philosophical. In Kant it was both. We find here an insight into just how concrete his purposes are and what instruments he proposes to utilize in attainment of his end, which is here to prevent illness through a dynamic of regulating oneself through the instrument of the maxim. We can see in this something analogous to the dynamic of Kantian morality, which also works through maxims and principles.

The purpose of maxims is of course not to have them for their own sake. It is rather to better oneself as a human being, or as he puts it elsewhere, to gain character. Kant writes: ‘Wanting to become a better human being in a fragmentary way is a futile endeavor, since one impression dies out while one works on another; the grounding of character, however, is absolute unity of the inner principle of conduct as such.’

5.3 Absolute integrity of character: the search for the ‘absolute unity of the inner principle of conduct’ and dignity

In his fortieth year Kant suffered some profound ‘life crisis.’ This resulted in a ‘revolution and rebirth,’ which laid the ‘foundation of his own character’ [my emphasis]. Kuehn points out that Kant’s description of this rebirth reflects not only the language but also parallels the process of religious conversion according to the

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49 Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:295.
50 Kuehn 2001, 149.
Pietists. However, Kuehn also says that Kant’s conversion was not religious. Kant’s search for ‘the new man,’ according to Kuehn, lead Kant not to religion but to morality: ‘By acquiring a character one becomes a new person.’ Absolutely central in this process of recreating oneself is ‘the maxim.’ One masters oneself through maxims and in this there is also definite Stoic influence. Kuehn describes Kantian maxims as ‘really ordinary sorts of things.’ He writes: ‘They are precepts or general policies that we learned from others or from books, and that we choose to adopt as principles to live by.’ This ability to formulate a principle and to be guided by it rather than by one’s inclination reveals our rationality. For Kant we act either out of instinct in accordance with our animal nature or according to reason. Maxims then, once formulated and decided upon, should be followed and never be revoked. They are truly ‘Lebensregeln [...] rules to live by’ and as such they not only ‘express what kind of a person one is; they constitute that person, in some sense. They constitute the person as character. In other words, to have a certain set of maxims and to have character (or to be a person) is one and the same thing.’ Kuehn notes then that a good character is judged by the person’s maxims. Good maxims lead to good character and vice versa. However, in order to be good, these maxims, which limits our freedom, ‘must be constant.’ In fact, Kuehn states, ‘[w]e are worth only as much as our maxims are worth.’ Maxims are the way through which we legislate for ourselves, and how we manage to circumvent our feelings and

51 See Kuehn 2001, 150 ff.
52 Kuehn 2001, 150.
54 Kuehn 2001, 147.
55 See Kuehn 2001, 148. ‘Worth’ here refers to the second stage of dignity, i.e., realized dignity.
inclinations. It is important to understand this. As Kuehn says: ‘All this has relevance for a better understanding of Kant’s mature philosophy, but it is also extremely important for understanding Kant’s own development as a person.’\textsuperscript{56}

Kuehn shows how around the year 1764 (when Kant turned forty) his life started to change. First, he suffered a perceptible change in his ‘circle of friends.’ Kypke, one friend, moved away, but the most painful was no doubt Funk’s sudden death – a few days short of Kant’s fortieth birthday. Funk was Kant’s ‘closest friend’ and for Kuehn his death meant more to Kant than any other (before or after). It stimulated Kant to a profound personal reflection on the value and meaning of life and death. This ‘experience of human mortality’ was one of the reasons for Kant’s ‘palingenesis’ or ‘rebirth.’\textsuperscript{57} Kant’s hypochondria and despair also necessitated a life under maxims. Kuehn concludes that one might judge Kant’s ‘regimen [as] perhaps just a simple and simple-minded form of mental hygiene’ but one that Kant found ‘necessary to engage in’ nonetheless.\textsuperscript{58} It was finally also Kant’s new friendship with the English merchant Joseph Green that influenced him profoundly. Kuehn dates the friendship back to the summer of 1765. ‘This much is sure,’ he writes, ‘by 1766 they were close friends; and at least from that time on Kant was a constant and very regular visitor at Green’s house.’\textsuperscript{59}

Green, who first came to Königsberg at a young age, was also ‘a bachelor like Kant, but

\textsuperscript{56} Kuehn 2001, 148. Kuehn develops the same points elsewhere. For him ‘the concepts of “moral sense”, “moral character”, “maxim” and “the good will”’ are closely related. Kuehn, Ethics and Anthropology in the Development of Kant’s Moral Philosophy 2009, 9, 7-28.
\textsuperscript{57} Kuehn 2001, 150.
\textsuperscript{58} Kuehn 2001, 153, cf 151 ff.
\textsuperscript{59} See Kuehn 2001, 155. Kuehn mentions that Kant’s regularity was, at least initially, more due to Green’s example than to Kant’s habits.
he lived a different life from the one Kant had lived until then. Rather than being driven
by the whirlpool of events, Green lived by the strictest rules or maxims.⁶⁰ Kant and
Green became close friends and eventually Kant gave up many of his earlier customs,
like the theater, music concerts, playing cards and other diversions he loved (especially
with Funk), partly under the influence of Green. ‘The days of the whirlpool of social
diversions were coming to an end – not suddenly, but slowly: maxim by maxim.’⁶¹ They
later shared the same circle of friends and shared the same interest in especially
Rousseau and Hume. Kuehn judges that in the end ‘Green [...] became the most intimate
friend Kant ever had.’⁶²

This brief biographical sketch is important because it gives us an imaginative
insight into a very human Kant, his life and some of the struggles he endured, but
especially also the lengths he had to go and the efforts he had to expend in order to
form his character and to overcome this crisis. This relates to the years of Kant’s
‘anthropological revolution’ and to the conversion experience Shell pinpoints in which
Rousseau ‘set [Kant] upright.’⁶³ It also reveals the intimate connection between Kant’s
life and thought; which reveals the integrity of the man.

All these themes are addressed by and incorporated into his philosophy – for
instance in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. In the second part Kant
addresses ‘Anthropological Characteristic.’ His subtitle is telling: ‘on the way of cognizing

⁶¹ See Kuehn 2001, 156.
⁶² Kuehn 2001, 157, see also 154-58.
the interior of the human being from the exterior."64 This reflects not only the reality of the inner life and its knowability (and hence accessibility), through one’s exterior, but also the undeniably close relationship between interiority and exteriority.

The key is character. Kant distinguishes between physical character and moral character. ‘The first is the distinguishing mark of the human being as a sensible or natural being; the second is the distinguishing mark of the human being as a rational being endowed with freedom.’65 When Kant discusses character more precisely he does it under the heading: ‘on character as the way of thinking.’66 Character has to do with the desire to become a better human being but the key to this is absolute integrity, or as he puts it the ‘absolute unity of [an] inner principle of conduct.’ Kant writes: ‘Wanting to become a better human being in a fragmentary way is a futile endeavor, since one impression dies out while one works on another; the grounding of character, however, is absolute unity of the inner principle of conduct as such.’67

Kant associates character with dignity. In fact this initial section on character is sandwiched between two references to inner worth and dignity. I take this structure as akin to a literary device that implies that the material boxed in by this repetitive theme relates directly to the theme in such a way that it functions as an interpretative lens

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64 Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:283.
65 Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:285.
66 Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:291. That character is described as one’s way of thinking reveals the interior springs and dimension of character but in knowing it via the outside shows the unity between the inner and outer that is presupposed.
67 Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:295.
through which one ought to understand the theme thus sandwiched. If this is true, we can say that *dignity* bears directly upon *character*.

Without using the word dignity, his opening description in this section already carries notions we have come to equate with dignity, namely to be special, to be worthy of respect and admiration, and, by implication, elevation.\(^{68}\) In what we would identify as relating to ‘realized dignity’ Kant writes ‘simply to have a character signifies that property of the will by which the subject binds himself to definite practical principles that he has prescribed to himself irrevocably by his own reason.’\(^{69}\) A few sentences later Kant says: ‘here it does not depend on what nature makes of the human being, but of what the human being *makes of himself*.’\(^{70}\) Character is what we *make of ourselves*. And this Kant values: ‘All other good and useful properties of the human being have a *price* that allows them to be exchanged with other things that have just as much use; talent has a *market price*, [...] temperament has a *fancy price* (*Affektionspreis*) [...] – but character has an inner *worth*, and is beyond all price.’\(^{71}\) Thus reads the beginning of this section. The end paragraph mentions the word ‘dignity’ twice (once in parenthesis as a

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\(^{68}\) See Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) 2007, 7:291 ff. Kant writes here: ‘To be able to simply say of a human being: “he has a *character*” is not only to have *said* a great deal about him, but is also to have *praised* him a great deal; for this is a rarity, which inspires profound respect and admiration toward him.’

\(^{69}\) Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) 2007, 7:292. This says nothing about the truth or correctness of the principles, it refers rather to the fact that one of character is ruled by principles. These make him distinctive.

\(^{70}\) Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) 2007, 7:292.

\(^{71}\) Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) 2007, 7:292.
clarifying description of the exact words ‘inner worth’\textsuperscript{72}). In this it is clear that character relates to morality.

What Kant discusses between these two inner worth/dignity references are, first, qualities that result from possessing a character or not. Here Kant makes three points. The first is that the \textit{imitator} (‘in moral matters’) lacks character because character is expressed by ‘originality in the way of thinking.’ For Kant this means someone who ‘derives his conduct from a source that he has opened by himself [\textit{aus seiner von ihm selbst geöffneten Quelle}].\textsuperscript{73} The second point states that if one were to compare two different ‘temperamental disposition[s],’ to wit, maliciousness \textit{versus} good-naturedness albeit without character, the former is ‘less bad’ since, at least, ‘by character’ one can overcome this maliciousness. The third point stresses that a ‘rigid, inflexible disposition’ that supports ‘a formed resolution’ is a valuable predisposition to character but not in itself a sign of ‘a determinate character.’ ‘For,’ Kant writes, ‘character requires maxims that proceed from reason and morally-practical principles.’\textsuperscript{74}

What we have here is thus: that character is related to a \textit{way} of thinking that is itself related to a source within us – a source which each can only open for himself; that ‘redemption’ – to use a theological term (that Kant does not use here) – is possible

\textsuperscript{72} See Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:295. I will quote it below since it summarises the entire discussion.
\textsuperscript{73} Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:293.
\textsuperscript{74} Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:293. He adds that one may never attribute malice to someone’s character – that would be diabolical – and moreover a ‘human being […] never \textit{sanctions} the evil in himself, and so there is actually no malice from principles; but only from forsaking them’ (Ibid., 7:293 ff.).
through character; that character requires moral maxims which follow from reason; and that evil is the result of the abandonment of principles.

Kant presents next five principles ‘that relate to character,’ even though he states these in a negative way. The first one relates to honesty and forms to my reading the basis of the rest. It reads: ‘Not intentionally to say what is false; consequently, also to speak with caution so that one does not bring upon oneself the disgrace of retraction.’ This indicates a deliberate determination for truth and psychologically is linked to conscience. The fact that it pertains here to speaking relates it very closely to thinking – but here in relation to and in front of others. That is why one should speak with caution so as to avoid losing face in retracting one’s statement. To speak with caution requires effort of will and attentiveness, a discipline of the mind. To speak with caution is to speak in truth and this has a reference to the future, insofar as one would want to prevent a retraction of what one said. To my reading it reveals an implicit dimension of truth as being faithful (truthful) and carries the connotation of a promise. A promise is nothing other than making my word come true, or honouring my word. This is all in the service of truth. The second principle reads: ‘Not to dissemble [heucheln, pretend, disguise, conceal]; appearing well disposed in public, but being hostile behind people’s backs.’ This principle addresses one’s relation to the external world, but in a way that implies an inner source and that integrity resides in this inner

75 Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:294. ‘Not intentionally [vorsetzlich]’ can also be translated in stronger terms as ‘not premeditatively’ or even ‘purposely.’ See Beolingus Online Dictionary at the Technische Universität Chemnitz 2006-2013.
76 Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:294.
reality. It is a challenge to have constancy of character when people see me and when they don’t. To achieve this requires radical honesty toward oneself that does not cover up. Thus far we are still facing an interior dynamic, even though it has moved into the public sphere. The third principle involves the interior dynamic but now moved to the point where it affects the lives of others, i.e., personal and social relationships. Kant writes: ‘Not to break one’s (legitimate) promise [sein (erlaubtes) Versprechen], which also includes honoring even the memory of a friendship now broken off, and not abusing later on the former confidence and candor of the other person.’ We find the notion of promise explicitly mentioned here. The promise here establishes not only my word, but the word itself affects a reality – just as friendship is the promise embodied within a covenant. When such a friendship is broken it is traumatic but even (and especially) here Kant makes it radical: in one’s thinking, in one’s memory of a former friend one will still honor that friendship. It means one will not taint it internally with negative thoughts but harbour the spirit of gratitude. This implies safeguarding the former friend’s confidences and even his frankness (which is a further indication of

77 Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:294. ‘Versprechen (promise)’ can also be translated as commitment and pledge. There is an etymological association with its root word sprechen, which means to speak. A promise is to make true what I speak, or to pledge to be faithful to my word. In German the phrase sich versprechen means ‘to misspeak’ or to ‘to make a slip (of the tongue).’ See Beolingus Online Dictionary at the Technische Universität Chemnitz 2006-2013. This lends emphasis to the idea of the first principle: truth means not to speak anything false. Its roots lie with thinking, as it is expressed in words, within myself. Truth (and authentic integrity) is the pledge of unity between my words and my manner of being in the world also as it pertains to my actions and relationships. This unity is guaranteed by the promise to remain faithful to my words.

78 The very word ‘you are my friend’ establishes relationship, much like the official minister’s ‘you are now husband and wife.’
honesty). Memory (Andenken) is an activity or dynamic that relates even etymologically to thinking (Denken). It speaks, furthermore, of a mental attitude of respect, which, as we saw, is intimately associated with dignity. This highlights the ethical importance of the private, inner sphere of thought for Kant and the extent to which respect – even for a former friend – demands control and mastery of one’s inner thoughts. The fourth principle states: ‘Not to enter into an association of taste with evil-minded human beings, and, bearing in mind the noscitur ex socio etc., to limit the association only to business.’\(^79\) The translation of the full proverb Kant refers to is ‘He who cannot be characterized by his own merits can be characterized by the company he keeps.’\(^80\) It is only now that Kant fully moves to the external world, but even so our association needs to be with good-minded people, so as to protect our own goodness. The last principle supports this movement outward but also confirms that there is a reciprocity involved insofar as our outer world results from (or at least influences) our inner world of thinking, but our exposure to the outer world similarly affects our inner world. There is a reciprocity at work here. Therefore the warning to take heed to whom and what we listen to. The fifth principle warns: ‘Not to pay attention to gossip derived from the shallow and malicious judgment of others; for paying attention to it already indicates weakness. Also, to moderate our fear of offending against fashion, which is a fleeting, changeable thing; and, if it has already acquired some importance in its influence, then

\(^79\) Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:294.
at least not to extend its command into morality.\textsuperscript{81} Admitting the reality of ‘outside’ influence, Kant seems to acknowledge that fashion (‘peer-group’ values) poses an inherent danger to the individuality of character. But it is a reality and he proposes the need of our own efforts to curb it. This is especially important to prevent its intrusion into morality. The purity of morality is non-negotiable. This affirms Sensen’s point that ultimately it is \textit{morality} that grounds dignity.

In terms of the two-fold notion of dignity, character is the provenance of realized dignity. Kant writes that character is revealed in one’s ‘way of thinking’ and is something to be ‘\textit{acquired}.’ He talks of this \textit{acquisition} as an event, a ‘grounding of character,’ which is ‘like a kind of rebirth, a certain solemnity of making a vow to oneself.’ This vow and resolution initiates the moment of transformation and institutes something ‘like the beginning of a new epoch.’\textsuperscript{82} This reflects the religious language of the Pietists, and, moreover, it expresses Kant’s real ‘conversion’ or ‘rebirth’ experience in a way that parallels the conversion experience as Pietists would express it. Why does Kant take refuge in religious language? Furthermore, the central necessity (the \textit{sine qua non}) of character, morality and dignity, is truth and honesty. And truth and honesty relates for Kant intimately to religion and faith. We have already seen his words in this regard.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{81} Kant, \textit{Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View} (1798) 2007, 7:294.
\textsuperscript{82} Kant, \textit{Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View} (1798) 2007, 7:294.
\textsuperscript{83} Kuehn relates that when Kant was a pupil in Königsberg, the Pietist school (Collegium Friedericianum) he attended had as its aim the conversion of all its pupils. The way toward conversion, according to Pietist doctrine, was through the breaking of a person’s will, which would result in a supernatural experience leading one from the old man to the new. This experience is described as ‘the contrition and crushing of the heart in a \textit{repentance}.’ The way this was measured was through different exercises, among others the keeping of a soul journal that the pupils had to keep and which the teachers read, to
Kant concludes this section by writing: ‘In a word: the only proof within a human being’s consciousness that he has character is that he has made truthfulness his supreme maxim, in the heart of his confessions to himself, as well as in his behavior toward everyone else; and since to have this is the minimum that one can demand of a reasonable human being, but at the same time also the maximum of inner worth (of human dignity), then to be a man of principles (to have a determinate character) must be possible for the most common human reason and yet, according to its dignity, be superior to the greatest talent.’

Why truthfulness? Shell quotes from the Remarks: ‘Truth has no value in itself, it is all the same whether an opinion about the inhabitation of many worlds is true or false. One must not confuse truth with truthfulness. Only the manner [Art] in which one arrives at truth has a determinate value, because that which leads to error can also do so in practical matters. If the pleasure of the sciences is supposed to be the motive, then search for the results of the desired effects in the pupil’s soul and in the emotional reactions of the students. Kuehn states that Kant early on came to reject this as hypocrisy, because his friends would cry and repent of their sins and yet their lives did not change at all. One can also see here the importance of truth as personal honesty (integrity), where (in the light of what we saw earlier in Shell) losing one’s freedom (the breaking of one’s will) becomes the greatest ground for fear in Kant. See Kuehn 2001, 34 ff., 45 ff., esp 52-55. See also Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 55-59, esp 56 ff. where she discusses Remarks 91-93.

84 Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:295. Kant sees the presence of truthfulness as supreme maxim, i.e., as organizing principle as the only ‘proof’ within our consciousness that we have character. This is telling because it is not the truth per se that is so significant but what it effects or demands in terms of its implication in my relation toward myself (my confessions to myself) and how I regulate my relationships to others. What is significant here is that the value of truth involves our measuring it against something else. This ‘something else’ is not explicitly mentioned here, but its presence is, as it were, like a shadow, against which we discern the movements of the dance we dance to.
it is all the same whether it is true or false. [...] The final end is to find the human being’s vocation.\(^{85}\) What comes to the fore here is that the importance of truth is not so much in its theoretical correctness but rather the *way* [Art] one arrives at it. The reference to motive points to an internal process. This seems to be confirmed in the *Metaphysics of Morals* where Kant – under the heading: ‘The human being’s duty to himself merely as a moral being’\(^{86}\) – treats three vices opposed to this duty (lying, avarice and false humility). Kant writes: ‘The greatest violation of a human being’s duty to himself regarded merely as a moral being (the humanity in his own person) is the contrary of truthfulness, *lying.*’ He then quotes the Latin proverb as illustration, which reads in translation: ‘To have one thing shut up in the heart and another ready on the tongue.’\(^{87}\) He distinguishes between an external lie (lying to others) and internal (lying to oneself). The former brings ‘contempt in the eyes of others’ but the latter is worse: ‘he makes himself contemptible in his own eyes and violates the dignity of humanity in his own person,’ and a few sentences later he repeats this ‘[by] a lie a human being throws away and, as it were, annihilates his dignity as a human being.’\(^{88}\) Kant also states that one renounces one’s personality by lying. ‘[Lying] by its mere form [is] a crime of a human being against his own person and a worthlessness that must make him contemptible in

\(^{85}\) Kant, Remarks in the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime (1764-1765) 2011, 20:175. See also Shell, Kant and the Limits of Autonomy 2009, 77 ff. in her own translation.

\(^{86}\) Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:428. The phrase ‘merely as a moral being’ seems to suggest *that* duty which grounds one’s *being* moral. Kant equates this also with ‘the humanity in his own person’ (Ibid., 6:429); and later also as ‘*homo noumenon*’ (Ibid., 6:430).

\(^{87}\) Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:429; (see also 552 note l for the translation).

his own eyes.\(^{89}\) There seems to be an inner dynamic or manner (an *Art* whereby I come to know when I lie and it affects my relationship with myself. It means there is some measure against which I measure myself or am measured, and this determines how I see myself in my own eyes. This process involves one’s conscience.\(^90\) Contemptibility is the denial of respect.

One might wonder then where this truthfulness comes from. For Kant it comes from the *homo noumenon*. It also involves a purity of motives as well as not confessing something one does not believe in. Kant gives the following example: ‘Someone tells an inner lie, for example, if he professes belief in a future judge of the world, although he really finds no such belief within himself but persuades himself that it could do no harm and might even be useful to profess in his thoughts to one who scrutinizes hearts a belief in such a judge, in order to win his favor in case he should exist.’\(^91\) Kant also writes: ‘*Truthfulness* in one’s declarations is also called *honesty* [*Ehrlichkeit*] and, if the declarations are promises, *sincerity* [*Redlichkeit*]; but, more generally, truthfulness is called *rectitude* [*Aufrichtigkeit*].’\(^92\) In a remark Kant notes that the first crime ‘through which evil entered the world,’ according to the Bible, was not Cain’s fratricide, but the first lie. The Bible calls the ‘author of all evil a liar from the beginning and the father of

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\(^{89}\) Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:430.

\(^{90}\) See MM 431.

\(^{91}\) Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals 1996, 6:430. It involves a listening attentiveness to what is found given within one’s heart, and obeying it, even if acquiescingly. In this one can discern a pattern that parallels the dynamic of both legislating the moral law and obeying it.

lies.93 Lying and truthfulness form a pivot of sorts upon which inner self and outer actions unite in integrity or disunite in hypocrisy. Central to the process of legislating the law is one’s truthfulness because in one’s inner self one measures oneself against the law and this process of conscience is a requirement of realizing the moral law within one’s person. There is a dynamic in living truthfulness and in our conscience where we come face to face against ourselves, where we are judged in our own eye.

We have seen how dignity is used in reference to concrete experiences and character formation. We have also noted Kant’s recourse to religious language to express the importance of interior integrity as well as the ‘vocation of man.’ This religious language will only intensify in the next section.

5.4 Experiencing dignity?

We have seen then that dignity is not a mere intellectual concept. Kant describes it as something to be sought and to be experienced. We are inspired by it, that is, by its expression in people who exemplify living the moral law. Its proximity to the moral law, which by nature requires expression in our lives, in accord with our duties, makes of dignity something to be lived. Evidence for this follows in a passage in The Conflict of the Faculties. Before we look at this passage in detail let us look at its context.

After critiquing the suggested solutions offered by the Pietist and Moravian sects within Christianity for the solution as to the best way in which one ought to ‘set about teaching [Christianity] so that it will really be present in the hearts of human beings (...  

this [being] one with the question of what to do so that religious faith will also make human beings better,’ Kant sets about identifying the one (true) principle of the Bible that offers in his mind the true solution. This solution cannot, according to Kant, come from revelation, or miracle, or anything that would remain ‘foreign to [man].’ It has to be ‘drawn from the human being’s own soul.’ And Kant claims to have found it. In the following passage Kant specifically speaks of the experience of dignity. Let us examine it in order to see what we may gain from it.

This passage from The Conflict of the Faculties consist of three sections. In the first, Kant writes: ‘For there is something in us that we cannot cease to wonder at when we have once seen it, the same thing that raises humanity in its idea to a dignity we should never have suspected in the human being as an object of experience [emphasis mine]. We do not wonder at the fact that we are beings subject to moral laws and destined by our reason to obey them, even if this means sacrificing whatever pleasures may conflict with them; for obedience to moral laws lies objectively in the natural order of things as the object of pure reason, and it never occurs to ordinary, sound understanding to ask where these laws come from, in order, perhaps to put off obeying them until we know their source, or even their validity.’

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94 Kant, The Conflict of the Faculties (1798) 1996, 7:53. I thank Prof. Ronald Tacelli for making me aware of the religious dimension related to dignity and for pushing me on it.

95 Kant, The Conflict of the Faculties (1798) 1996, 7:58. This reflects the same idea we saw above namely that one should derive one’s conduct ‘from a source that [one] has opened by himself.’ See Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) 2007, 7:293.

Kant talks about something that brings us to wonder – as opposed to the miraculous wonders propagated by religious sects. Just before this (quoted) passage he talks about rejecting ‘faith in miracles’ (‘kein Glaube an Wunder’)97 and being brought to wonder is contrasted with faith in miracles, whose source lies beyond humanity. In this case, he says, what brings us to wonderment is something in us. This wonderment, or awe, however, occurs only after ‘we have seen it’ – it does not occur automatically. It requires a sight that sees within, in other words it is an awareness of the within, which is self-awareness or self-consciousness. This links strongly with the importance Shell assigns to consciousness. This self-consciousness gives us the knowledge that causes us to wonder, and it is a different type of miracle.98 Kant defines or describes this something in us, of which we are aware, as ‘the same thing that raises humanity in its idea to a dignity.’ We might ask what the idea is that Kant refers to? I take it to be the idea or notion of humanity, that is, humanity itself, as it is understood notionally. However, Kant adds, we never expected that this very thing that leads us to wonderment is actually an object of experience. Being an object of experience means two things. In the first place, for Kant, dignity is something to be experienced. Being ‘experience-able,’ we may look for it – and indeed, demand to find it – within our life-experiences. So we are justified in seeking its corollary in Kant’s own life. The second has epistemological implications. If it is an object of experience it cannot be ‘miraculous’ – it

97 See Kant, The Conflict of the Faculties (1798) 1996, 7:58.15.
98 This passage uses derivatives of this word Wunder many times, as noun and verb, here to admire or to wonder about. The German Wunder is both a wonder (as in ‘wonderful,’ ‘awe,’ ‘wonderment’ or ‘admiration’) and also a miracle. There is thus an etymological connection operative here. See Beolingus Online Dictionary at the Technische Universität Chemnitz 2006-2013.
is from the phenomenal realm and as such it falls within all the rules and laws that govern the realm of nature and all phenomena. As he says, what is not cause for wonderment is that we are subject to moral laws in the same way as we are subject to all laws (as phenomenal beings).

Kant continues to explain what it is we wonder at: ‘But we do wonder at our **ability** so to sacrifice our sensuous nature to morality that we *can* do what we quite readily and clearly conceive we *ought* to do. This ascendancy of the *supersensible* human being in us over the *sensible*, such that (when it comes to a conflict between them) the sensible is *nothing*, though in its own eyes it is *everything*, is an object of the greatest *wonder*; and our wonder at this moral predisposition in us, inseparable from our humanity, only increases the longer we contemplate this true (not fabricated) ideal. Since the *supersensible* in us is inconceivable and yet practical, we can well excuse those who are led to consider it *supernatural* – that is, to regard it as the influence of another and higher spirit, something not within our power and not belonging to us as our own. Yet they are greatly mistaken in this, since on their view the effect of this power would not be our deed and could not be imputed to us, and so the power to produce it would not be our own.’99

We wonder at our ability and what it achieves or implies. This wonderment reminds one of the wonderment in the passage from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which Shell analysed. There Kant writes, ‘two things fill the mind with ever new and

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increasing admiration [Bewunderung] and awe.\textsuperscript{100} This wonderment similarly increases the more we contemplate it. The source of this true wonderment is that we have the ability to transcend our sensuous, animal nature in order to do ‘what we clearly conceive we ought to do’ – in other words our duty toward the moral law. This is interesting because in the first part of the passage we looked at above, he talks exactly of our ability to sacrifice our pleasures in order to obey the law, and yet he states explicitly that he does not find this fact worthy of wonder. What is worthy of wonder is the ascendency or dominance of the supersensible human being in us over the sensible. I would argue that the supersensible part is more than just the rational, as opposed to the sensual. The supersensible (übersinnlichen) refers rather to the noumenal in us which is transcendent (Überlegenheit); it has superiority and is predominant over the phenomenal and sensuous. What is marvellous or the ground for wonder is the (fact of the actual) transcendence of the supersensible over the sensible. This ability is a moral disposition and is inseparable from our humanity. It is part of the structure of our humanity and is the real ground of wonder the longer we contemplate this as a true (wahre) and not as a fabricated (erdachte)\textsuperscript{101} ideal. And although this transcendence in us is theoretically ungraspable (Unbegreiflichkeit) it is nonetheless practical and as such it enters our phenomenal human reality. So to recap: it is not just the noumenal that grounds the awe, but the fact of transcendence over the sensible. This transcendence is

\textsuperscript{100} Kant, Critique of Practical Reason (1788) 1996, 7:161.33-34. See also Shell, Kant on Human Dignity 2003, 59.

\textsuperscript{101} Erdachte in this context is translated as fabricated and implies the opposite of truth, although here it literally means conceived, which is a way of thinking or looking at something. See Beolingus Online Dictionary at the Technische Universität Chemnitz 2006-2013.
mixed, that is, it is experiential and therefore phenomenal, but it also points to something more or beyond itself, to the incomprehensible. Its presence within is a witness to something beyond us.

Our humanity, then, is like a being with two arms, one roots us in the practical and phenomenal and therefore within empirical experience and is as such not foreign to humanity at all and the other reaches to the noumenal. But the fact of our transcendence makes the noumenal then somehow real, because it occurs within us, within our humanity. The human becomes the meeting point of these two realms. This moral transcendence points to it. This is a deeply religious concept pointing to something of the divine with and within us. Speaking phenomenologically, it bears resemblance to experiences described by the sects as miraculous. Kant even admits that those who see this as supernatural and miraculous could be forgiven. But of course for him this is a power within us and not attributable to a divinity. This power of transcendence is the real ground for wonder. And more so that it belongs to us: we produce it – it is not from outside of ourselves, and yet it points to something more – to my mind, the Good.

Kant concludes with the third section: ‘Now the real solution to the problem (of the new man) consists in putting to use the idea of this power, which dwells in us in a way we cannot understand, and impressing it on human beings, beginning in their earliest youth and continuing on by public instruction. Even the Bible seems to have nothing else in view: it seems to refer, not to supernatural experiences and fantastic feelings which should take reason’s place in bringing about this revolution, but to the
spirit of Christ, which he manifested in teachings and examples so that we might make it our own – or rather, since it is already present in us by our moral predisposition, so that we might simply make room for it. And so, between orthodoxy which has no soul and mysticism which kills reason, there is the teaching of the Bible, a faith which our reason can develop out of itself. This teaching is the true religious doctrine, based on the criticism of practical reason, that works with divine power on the hearts of all human beings toward their fundamental improvement and unites them in one universal (though invisible) church.'¹⁰²

This is the last section we shall look at. Note the religious concept of ‘the new man,’ meaning the converted man. Kant here explicitly refers to religion and to the Bible. Here he returns to the initial problematic he discussed, namely, how best to teach Christian faith so that it is really present in the hearts of people. Note again the desire of Kant to be practical and concrete. This is intended for living and not for theoretical knowledge. And it is to counter the unhelpful notions of revelation or supernatural miracles as sources for acquiring the new man, all which imply that the power of change and transcendence does not come from within. The reason for the awe and wonderment is really that this power of transcendence or toward transcendence is present within each one. This power or ability abides with (in) us in a truly incomprehensible manner.¹⁰³ Teaching people that they have this ability within is the solution. And it is a democratic solution, awakening the responsibility to use it from

within instead of seeking it from that which is without and foreign to humanity. This is for Kant the real intended (‘demythologized’) message of the Bible and is in full accord with his understanding of his practical philosophy. He invokes the doctrine of the incarnation here but in a way that implies that we become carriers of the ‘spirit of Christ’ through this dynamic process of transcendence when ‘we make it our own,’ although it is already present within us.\(^{104}\) This reflects the two-fold notion of dignity. In terms of initial dignity, we may say that the transcendence toward the moral law is already present as *ability* within us; but only ‘when we make it our own’ do we *realize* our dignity, which is concretely to express the ‘spirit of Christ.’ Kant adds that we have to make room for it. We have to cultivate this transcendence through obedience to the law. We have seen above that Kant admits his description mirrors religious faith. Kant does not mention faith here as such.

But moral faith is practical; it is meant to be lived and creating space for it means we have to accept this dimension of the noumenal, within us, operative in dignity and morality. One cannot wish it away or ignore it. Its presence in a discussion of themes so closely associated with dignity means that dignity has this metaphysical dimension too.

In Shell’s presentation we saw that both dimensions, the epistemological and metaphysical, find a home within humanity itself. Sensen and Sullivan refer to the

\(^{104}\) I am indebted to Prof. Ronald Tacelli for this point. He made me aware that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation lies behind Kant’s conception here and that Kant used it (analogically) to express a personal incarnation of the ‘spirit of Christ’ within each person, and which he related to dignity. Tacelli holds, furthermore, that there are insights to be gained by investigating late-scholasticism (especially in Germany) as another source utilized by Kant both in his terminology and arguments. One example being Kant’s conception of ‘humanity in one’s person.’ I have not explored this latter possibility in this dissertation.
metaphysical dimension, though in a less explicit way, seeing it more in terms of methodology. We have not gone into the interpretative differences among Kantians regarding metaphysics in Kant; but certainly one area these three authors might fruitfully engage in dialogue with each other regarding dignity would be the relationship of dignity to metaphysics and even to religion. For Kant they certainly seem to be linked.

This dynamic of transcendence we have been discussing is paralleled in the *Groundwork* passage we discussed above where Kant discusses respect.105 It is because of the moral law’s presence and where it comes from – *homo noumenon* – that we respect ourselves. I see the fact of our legislating the very law we obey as revealing a similar structure. Even though transcendence and the origin of legislation cannot be notionally determined, we can – indeed must – see them as pointing to openness within our humanity. That it is a *moral* openness points I believe to the *Good*. This seems to me congruent with Shell’s account of man in which such openness resides. I have already described Sensen’s vision of the purity of the law for the law alone, and this dynamic speaks to me of the reality and primordiality of the moral law that demands absolute adherence. It stands in itself and speaks for itself and demands adherence only in its own terms and for its own sake. This is language that reflects a deep religious sentiment. That we can grasp and desire that is the result of this dynamic of transcendence.

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105 G 402 note.
6. The Experience of Dignity: Quo Vadis?

We have looked at this passage on the experience of dignity and how might we describe this experience then. We have seen how Kant’s desire for change in his life brought him to an insight concerning the importance of *character*. We have also seen that this process of change could not have taken place without the use of maxims; and we know how important, how central maxims came to be in Kant’s later life as he worked out his moral philosophy. Throughout this process Kant remained committed to humanity’s rationality – the field on which he experienced the majesty of the stars above and the moral law within. It was also in the experience of self-consciousness where he discovered a dynamic within that allowed him time and again to overcome in himself many obstacles in fulfilment of the moral law. This experience of transcendence became for him the object of the experience of dignity. As I mentioned, this would be an instance of *realized* dignity, because occurring in the context of fulfilling the moral law. In this experience of transcendence he discovers a ‘dualism’ where, on the one hand, we are rooted in the phenomenal world of experience and causal laws, and yet, on the other, must be more than our sensing, animal nature, able to discern another dimension, which is not accessible to empirical experience or theoretical knowledge, but which needs to be ‘there’ and ‘active.’ And this places man in two ‘worlds.’ This process, I suggest, is paralleled in Kant’s insight that we both obey the moral law (in the practical world of experience) and legislate the moral law, becoming the authors of the law. And
yet we saw that respect is the natural result of the effect of the presence of this law, which suggests that even as it comes from us (as noumenal) it also in some sense does not come from us (as phenomenal). This is the pivotal ‘handle’ where what we called ‘transcendence’ comes into play unleashing a dynamic whereby we stand both in this world and yet at the same time are open and receptive to another world. This receptivity impresses itself upon us in terms of ‘duty,’ of ‘obedience,’ ‘respect’ and ‘humility.’ It is also the ‘other’ world that grants us ‘personhood’ and ultimately ‘freedom’ and its ‘responsibility.’ We see the same dynamic when we legislate the moral law: when Kant says we have to universalize our maxims it is we who universalize and legislate, but at the same time the universalizing is simultaneously not our invention; it is only universal if it is given as universal. We thus do not create thus universality – we discover it. We test to see if our maxims fit with universality. And in this we are also receptive; we receive the law we both legislate and obey. The source is, for want of a better word, the Good, and we participate in it because we incarnate its spirit in following the moral law. Might this be the transcendence to which our dignity points?

We are receptive and yet the question remains: Where does what we receive come from? Sullivan, Shell and Sensen all acknowledge this receptivity in their own way. I have focussed in this dissertation more on Shell and Sensen. Shell describes this process in terms of consciousness and its dynamic acknowledging that in the moral we find something akin to a ‘revelation’ even of the ‘infinite’ albeit in a non-religious sense. Shell does not reduce Kant only to the epistemological. She is open to metaphysical as
well as epistemological concerns. This makes her treatment especially rich and suggestive.

Sensen spends less time on metaphysical issues but he describes a dynamic, which, if we were to imagine ourselves concretely, would yield results similar to Shell’s. His description of the ultimate elevation of the moral law, conveys with unique power how that law alone suffices for motivation and fulfilment. In other words when we want to truly honor the moral law as the law deserves we are to allow no other motives, no other influences but the law for its own sake, on its own behalf. This pure vision is a moral vision and, as such, points to the dynamic of transcendence that has occupied us in these pages.

In the end we may say that dignity is a gift and with this gift comes a great responsibility. This gift is the gift of our being that is geared towards the moral law. And we need to develop it by means of following the law. Kuehn quotes Rink, who quotes Kant on the religiosity of his parents. We see a phenomenological description here of dignity: ‘Even if the religious views of that time ... and the concepts of what we called virtue and piety were anything but clear and sufficient, the people actually were virtuous and pious. One may say as many bad things about Pietism as one will. Enough already. The people who took it seriously were characterized by a certain kind of dignity. They possessed the highest qualities that a human being can possess, namely that calmness and pleasantness, that inner peace that can be disturbed by no passion. No
need, no persecution, no dispute could make them angry or cause them to be enemies of anyone.'

If what I have said is true, I would suggest that dignity is also, in terms of its use, an ‘inspirational’ category. It does not motivate one to follow the law, but rather in following the law and experiencing the self-transcendence implied in living the law, the law becomes its own inspiration and this we may also call ‘dignity.’ I end with this footnote Kant wrote in the *Groundwork*:

‘I have a letter […] which asks me why it is that moral instruction accomplishes so little, even though it contains so much that is convincing to reason. My answer was delayed so that I might make it complete. But it is just that the teachers themselves have not purified their concepts: since they try to do too well by looking everywhere for motives for being morally good, they spoil the medicine by trying to make it really strong. For the most ordinary observations shows that when a righteous act is represented as being done with a steadfast soul and sundered from all view to any advantage in this or another world, and even under the greatest temptations of need or allurement, it far surpasses and eclipses any similar action that was in the least affected by any extraneous incentive; it elevates the soul and inspires the wish to be able to act in this way. Even moderately young children feel this impression, and duties should never be represented to them in any other way.’

I propose this elevation and inspiration to be an experience of dignity in another.

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7. Final Conclusion

Scholars may disagree on some points of interpretation, partly because they start from different questions, follow different methodologies and come with various interpretative frameworks to the texts. But no one denies that in his philosophy of human dignity (if we might call his thoughts on dignity a philosophy) Kant presents a world and vision that is profoundly and pre-eminently moral. It is in the moral world and its possibilities, which fall to human beings to realize or incarnate, that our only true value and worth lies. This realization comes through obedience to the moral law, which becomes ‘an entity in itself’ to such a degree that it is to be sought and realized for its own sake. And this realization involves the transcending of our own animal natures in obedience to our duty to the moral law. And yet, if we dare ask further, could this movement of transcendence in our reaching out for the moral law not be a witness to or pointer to something truly Transcendent, which is the Good itself?
### Key to Abbreviations

The following abbreviations were used in referring to the relevant texts of Kant. When quoting from a particular translation the full bibliographical data was noted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthr</td>
<td>Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF</td>
<td>The Conflict of the Faculties / The Contest of Faculties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJ</td>
<td>Critique of Judgment / Critique of the Power(s) of Judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins</td>
<td>Lectures on Ethics (Collins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPR</td>
<td>Critique of Pure Reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPrR</td>
<td>Critique of Practical Reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed</td>
<td>Lectures on Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals / Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH</td>
<td>Conjectural Beginning of Human History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic</td>
<td>Lectures on Logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td>The Metaphysics of Morals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrong</td>
<td>Lectures on Ethics (Mrongovius)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH</td>
<td>Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens or Essay on the Constitution and the Mechanical Origin of the Whole Universe according to Newtonian Principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refl</td>
<td>Reflection (number) from Notes and Fragments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rel</td>
<td>Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remarks</td>
<td>Remarks in the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigil</td>
<td>Lectures on Ethics (Vigilantius)</td>
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