Kantian Ethics, Dignity and Perfection

Paul Formosa

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Introduction: Kantian Ethics as an Ethics of Dignity

1. Introduction

This book seeks to develop an intuitively powerful approach to Kantian ethics by taking as its core normative principle Kant's Formula of Humanity (FH). This approach leads us to focus on both the dignity ("*Würde*") that our rational capacities endow us with and the inherent vulnerability of those rational capacities. According to this approach, which I shall call an *ethics of dignity*, dignity is something that we each have despite the many imperfections of our rational capacities and which we retain even as our rational capacities grow, develop, fluctuate and (often) decline. This moral focus on vulnerable rational agency requires not only that we do not wrongly harm others or wrongly interfere with the exercise of their rational capacities. It also requires that we seek to promote the perfection of rational capacities in all agents through the creation of a culture of dignity in which virtue and the moral emotions of love and respect for all persons can flourish.

An ethics of dignity focuses on treating all persons first and foremost as a source of authority over themselves which is limited only by their own dignity and the dignity of others, as well as the promotion of the vulnerable rational capacities that underwrite that dignity. Dignity is linked to rational capacities in this way since in order to have that sort of authority for others you need to have the underlying capacity to act on the basis of rational moral principles.[1] This leads to the core idea of this approach: we should interact with each other first and foremost (but not exclusively) *as* rational beings who can choose how we will act on the basis of reasoned deliberation, as opposed to undignified things which we can push and prod towards our ends through lies, force and intimidation. But we must also positively value the rational capacities in ourselves and others, and help others

[1] The links between dignity, agency, autonomy and self-control are often made. See, for example, Alan Gewirth, "Rights and Virtues," *Review of Metaphysics* 38, no. 4 (1985); Joel Feinberg and Jan Narveson, "The Nature and Value of Rights," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 4, no. 4 (1970); Michael Meyer, "Dignity, Rights, and Self-Control," *Ethics* 99, no. 3 (1989).

to achieve their ends and cultivate our own rational powers. This sets before us an aspirational goal of perfection which we should pursue in order to live up to our truly awe-inspiring rational nature.

2. Kantian Dignity in the Wider Literature on Dignity

Before we develop a Kantian conception of dignity, we first need to situate, albeit briefly, the Kantian approach to dignity within the broader literature on dignity. The concept of dignity has a long history, from the ancient Roman concept of *dignitas*, which originally signified a higher rank or status enjoyed by the privileged few, through to humanist renaissance thinkers such as Pico and Enlightenment thinkers such as Pascal, Pufendorf, Kant and Schiller.[2] More recently, the concept of dignity has gained a new importance following the horrors of World War II and the Nazi genocide. Dignity has now become a central normative term both culturally in numerous topical political debates,[3] as well as academically in many philosophical, bioethical, and legal debates. For example, the term "dignity" is now a central term in debates on everything from the treatment of workers, patients, refugees and minorities, to arguments about abortion, euthanasia and torture, to differing claims about the distribution of resources and services, and to discussions of the content and basis of rights.[4] Dignity also plays a central role in various legal covenants

[2] For a brief overview of this history see, for example, Rieke Van Der Graff and Johannes JM Van Delden, "Clarifying Appeals to Dignity in Medical Ethics from an Historical Perspective," *Bioethics* 23, no. 3 (2009).

[3] As Bayefsky notes: "The concept of dignity now plays a significant role in several areas of political life. Participants in an array of social and political movements—from civil rights to labour activism to gay rights — have invoked dignity to support their claims" - Rachel Bayefsky, "Dignity, Honour, and Human Rights: Kant's Perspective," *Political Theory* 41, no. 6 (2013): 809-10.

[4] For some of the recent literature on dignity that addresses these and other issues see, for example, Deryck Beyleveld and Roger Brownsword, *Human Dignity in Bioethics and Biolaw* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Erin Daly, *Dignity Rights: Courts, Constitutions, and the Worth of the Human Person* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Marcus Düwell et al., eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Paul Formosa and Catriona Mackenzie, "Nussbaum, Kant, and the Capabilities Approach to Dignity," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 17,

and constitutions including, most famously, the *International Covenants on Human Rights (1966)* in which rights are said to "derive from the inherent dignity of the human person".[5] This tells us that dignity has wide intuitive force and that appeals to dignity matter morally, socially and politically.

But while appeals to dignity are commonplace and powerful, the concept is not without its critics. Some critics worry that appeals to dignity can become little more than a "conversation-stopper".[6] Others have dismissed dignity as a useless and dangerous concept (often due to concerns over the use of dignity by Christian writers).[7] For example, Ruth Macklin has argued that dignity is a "useless concept" that can be replaced without loss by the supposedly less mysterious concept of respect for persons and their autonomy.[8] Stephen Pinker has argued for the "stupidity of dignity", which he sees as "a squishy, subjective notion, hardly up to the heavyweight moral demands assigned to it".[9] There

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no. 5 (2014); Graff and Delden, "Clarifying Appeals to Dignity in Medical Ethics from an Historical Perspective."; Jürgen Habermas, "The Concept of Human Dignity and the Realistic Utopia of Human Rights," *Metaphilosophy* 41, no. 4 (2010); George Kateb, *Human Dignity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011); David Luban, *Legal Ethics and Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Christopher McCrudden, ed. *Understanding Human Dignity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Michael Rosen, *Dignity: Its Meaning and History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012); Doris Schroeder, "Dignity: One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Still Counting," *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 19 (2010); Oliver Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011); Ralf Stoecker, "Three Crucial Turns on the Road to an Adequate Understanding of Human Dignity," in *Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization*, ed. Paulus Kaufmann, et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011); Jeremy Waldron, *Dignity, Rank, and Rights*, The Tanner Lectures on Human Values (2009).

[5] See, for example, Bayefsky, "Dignity, Honour, and Human Rights: Kant's Perspective," 10.

[6] Graff and Delden, "Clarifying Appeals to Dignity in Medical Ethics from an Historical Perspective," 158.

[7] The work on human dignity by the President's Council on Bioethics has sparked much of this concern – see Edmund D Pellegrino, Adam Schulman, and Thomas W Merrill, eds., *Human Dignity and Bioethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

[8] Ruth Macklin, "Dignity Is a Useless Concept: It Means No More Than Respect for Persons or Their Autonomy," *British Medical Journal* 327, no. 7249 (2003).

[9] Pinker's main target is "theocon bioethics" – see Steven Pinker, "The Stupidity of Dignity," *The New Republic* (2008).

have been many excellent and detailed replies to the worries raised by Macklin and Pinker.[10] But there is no need to rehearse these replies here. This is because the best response to these worries is to demonstrate that a particular conception of dignity can be both coherent and useful. We shall seek to do that here by developing Kant's conception of dignity, which is arguably the most influential conception of dignity that we have. If we succeed here in showing that *this* Kantian conception of dignity can be both useful and coherent, then we will have answered any worries about the cogency of the concept of dignity in the best and most conclusive way.[11] However, before we start doing that we first need to address two important issues that arise in the literature on dignity. First, what is dignity? Second, is the Kantian conception of dignity an instance of the traditional rank-view or the contemporary value-view of dignity?

What exactly is dignity? In its most general form, we can understand the *concept* of dignity to be a respect-worthy status or standing.[12] Dignity is a *status*, that is, a standing *in* some group. A status is a respect-worthy one if it is a weighty and important status that we should respond to with awe, reverence or esteem. As a status-term, dignity is relational. Those who have dignity are *elevated* over those who lack it.[13] But there are many different *conceptions* of dignity. Doris Schroeder, for example, has argued that there

[10] See, for example, Waldron, *Dignity, Rank, and Rights*; Susan M Shell, "Kant's Concept of Human Dignity as a Resource for Bioethics," in *Human Dignity and Bioethics*, ed. Edmund D Pellegrino, Adam Schulman, and Thomas W Merill (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); Rosen, *Dignity: Its Meaning and History*; Thomas E Hill Jr., "In Defense of Human Dignity: Comments on Kant and Rosen," in *Understanding Human Dignity, Proceedings of the British Academy*, ed. Christopher McCrudden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). It should also be noted that other moral concepts have faced similar challenges, such as the concept of vulnerability – see Doris Schroeder and Eugenijus Gefenas, "Vulnerability: Too Vague and Too Broad?," *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 18 (2009). For further work on vulnerability see the essays in Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds, eds., *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[11] Of course, this doesn't mean that some other conceptions of dignity aren't useless or incoherent.

[12] See Formosa and Mackenzie, "Nussbaum, Kant, and the Capabilities Approach to Dignity."

[13] Immanuel Kant, "The Metaphysics of Morals," in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6:315; Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity*.

are at least five different conceptions of dignity: Kantian dignity, Aristocratic dignity, Comportment dignity, Meritorious dignity and traditional Christian dignity.[14] However, Schroeder recognises that these various conceptions can be broken up into two broad categories of dignity: aspirational dignity, which requires some effort to live up to an ideal or standard (which includes Aristocratic, Comportment and Meritorious dignity), and inviolable dignity, which requires no such effort (which includes Kantian and traditional Christian dignity). Elsewhere (with Catriona Mackenzie) I have labelled these two broad categories *status* (or inviolable) dignity and *achievement* (or aspirational) dignity,[15] and a similar distinction (although usually with different labels) is often made in the literature on dignity.[16]

Status dignity refers to the respect-worthy status of a person him or herself. Status dignity is not a matter of degree as one either has status dignity or one does not, and it is often a permanent (or at least a stable long-term) property of a person. When we say

[14] Schroeder originally argues that there are four concepts of dignity, since she initially classifies Kantian dignity and Christian dignity as the same concept, but she later revises her list after recognising that the Kantian view of dignity depends on the presence of rational capacities in a way that the traditional Christian view does not. See Doris Schroeder, "Dignity: Two Riddles and Four Concepts," *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 17 (2008); "Dignity: One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Still Counting." However, Schroeder actually calls these different *concepts* of dignity. I think that this is a mistake, since these views are not outlining different concepts, but rather offering competing conceptions of the same concept of a respect-worthy status. For Rawls's distinction between a concept and a conception see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 5.

[15] Formosa and Mackenzie, "Nussbaum, Kant, and the Capabilities Approach to Dignity." There are parallels here to Stephen Darwall's distinction between recognition-respect and status-respect in Stephen L Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* 88, no. 1 (1977).

[16] Oliver Sensen makes a similar distinction, which he argues is commonly made in many traditional conceptions of dignity, between "initial" (i.e. status) and "realized" (i.e. achievement) dignity, as does Neuhäuser and Stoecker between what they call "human dignity" (i.e. status dignity) and "dignity proper" (i.e. achievement dignity). See Christian Neuhäuser and Ralf Stoecker, "Human Dignity as Universal Nobility," in *Cambridge Handbook on Human Dignity*, ed. Düwell M, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Schroeder, "Dignity: One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Still Counting."; Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity*.

things such as, "everyone has dignity," we are talking about status dignity. To have status dignity is to have, *as a person*, a dignified or respect-worthy status. In contrast, achievement dignity refers to the respect-worthy status of a person's beings and doings. Achievement dignity is a matter of degree as one can have more or less of it, and since it can come and go it is not in general a permanent or stable property. When we say things such as, "she lost her dignity" or "she acted in an undignified way", we are talking about achievement dignity. One has a degree of achievement dignity proportional to how well one does at acting in a dignified manner.

Since there are two key types of dignity, in order to develop a *complete* Kantian conception of dignity, we shall need to develop conceptions of both status and achievement dignity. To prefigure these accounts, on the Kantian view developed here everyone with a latent or developed capacity for morality has status dignity. Everyone with status dignity has an equal and absolute worth. This elevated status and worth demands respectful treatment. For this reason, if you have status dignity, then we must treat you in accordance with the FH by always treating you as an end in yourself and never as a mere means. While status dignity refers to the special respect worthy status *of* the capacity for moral agency, achievement dignity refers to the special esteem worthy standing *of* virtue or moral achievement. Achievement dignity thus functions as an aspirational ideal of perfection toward which we should strive in order to live up to our awe-inspiring status dignity. When we pursue achievement dignity we seek to live in a dignified or virtuous way. However, we can do better or worse at living up to that ideal, and so achievement dignity can come in degrees and is worthy of esteem. These two conceptions of dignity encapsulate the two key components of a Kantian ethics of dignity: the importance of deferring to the status dignity of others and the importance of promoting and pursuing the perfectionist ideal of achievement dignity.[17]

[17] This perfectionist ideal is a moral one, or a matter of *virtue*, rather than a political one, or a matter of *justice*. As Surprenant argues, Kant rejects *political* "perfectionism" in the form of the "position that one function of juridical law is to promote public morality, and claims laws passed primarily with this intent are illegitimate" - Chris Surprenant, *Kant and the Cultivation of Virtue* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

In regards to the second issue of whether the Kantian conception of dignity is a traditional or modern view of dignity, we need to be explicit about how exactly that distinction is drawn. This is important because, as we shall see, there are at least two common ways of drawing this distinction. According to the first version, the ancient or traditional concept of dignity holds that dignity "attaches to a person's position within a hierarchical social order", whereas the modern concept holds that dignity "applies equally to everyone as an intrinsic quality of personhood".[18] Given the egalitarian nature of Kant's conception of status dignity, it is clear on this way of drawing the distinction that Kant's conception of dignity is a modern one. According to the second version, on the traditional view dignity is an elevated *rank* whereas on the modern view dignity is a *value* that grounds rights.[19] Jeremy Waldron has recently defended this traditional view of dignity by arguing that in the eyes of the law dignity is a high rank and not a value that grounds rights. But on Waldron's traditional view, in contrast to other traditional views such as the ancient Roman and feudal conceptions of dignity, everyone is "levelled-up" to the rank of a nobleman or noblewoman before the law.[20] While an ancient Roman conception of dignity counts as traditional in both senses, Waldron's view counts as modern in the first sense, given that everyone has the same high rank, and traditional in the second sense, given its focus on rank rather than value.

[18] Bayefsky, "Dignity, Honour, and Human Rights: Kant's Perspective," 810.

[19] This is a fairly blunt way to draw this distinction, but it shall suffice for our purposes. Sensen lists four features that differ between the traditional and modern views in Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity*. For further discussion see Stefano Bacin, "Kant's Idea of Human Dignity: Between Tradition and Originality," *Kant-Studien* 106, no. 1 (2015); Oliver Sensen, "Kant on Human Dignity Reconsidered," ibid.; Waldron, *Dignity, Rank, and Rights*.

[20] "Every man a duke, every woman a queen, everyone entitled to the sort of deference and consideration, everyone's person and body sacrosanct, in the way that nobles were entitled to deference or in the way that an assault upon the body or the person of a king was regarded as a sacrilege" - *Dignity, Rank, and Rights*, 229-30. Waldron bases his account on an analysis of the legal (rather than the moral) conception of dignity. However, others have argued that it is the modern concept of dignity as a value that is at work in many legal contexts, such as the *International Covenants on Human Rights (1966)* – see Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity*, 1.

Is the Kantian conception of dignity a traditional or modern view in this second sense? While it is commonly assumed that the Kantian conception of dignity is a modern view in both senses, with its egalitarian claims about the absolute value of human dignity, Oliver Sensen has forcibly argued that Kant in fact defends a traditional (in the second sense) or rank conception of dignity.[21] Waldron, in contrast, argues that there seems to be *both* a modern value view of dignity at work in Kant's earlier *Groundwork* and a traditional rank view of dignity at work in Kant's later *The Metaphysics of Morals*.[22] Others, such as Allen Wood, would likely argue that Kant defends a modern value view of dignity.[23] Given these competing interpretations, it is worth asking what is at stake between a modern value and traditional rank view of dignity.

Waldron differentiates what is at stake between the traditional rank and modern value views in terms of appropriate responses. "The thing to do with something of value is promote it or protect it, perhaps maximize things of that kind, at any rate to treasure it. The thing to do with a ranking status is to respect and defer to the person who bears it".[24] But *both* sorts of responses are central to the Kantian conception of dignity. On the one hand, we ought to defer to the conditional authority that others have over themselves and the adoption of their ends. In this sense rational agents have a higher rank or status that trumps the pursuit of lesser goods and ends that would conflict with proper respect for that higher rank. On the other hand, we should also promote, protect and treasure rational agency, its proper exercise, and its development in ourselves and others. In this sense rational agency has a special sort of objective worth or value that should be treasured and promoted.

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[21] *Kant on Human Dignity*, 229-30.

[22] Waldron, *Dignity, Rank, and Rights*, 219-20.

[23] Wood doesn't explicitly make this claim, but given his realist focus on value in his reading of Kant, it seems very likely that he would. See Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[24] Waldron, *Dignity, Rank, and Rights*, 218. See also Aurel Kolnai, "Dignity," *Philosophy* 51 (1976).

This suggests that a stark contrast between traditional rank and modern value accounts of dignity cannot be maintained in this instance. Indeed, as I shall argue in Chapter 2, dignity for the Kantian should be understood as *both* a value and a rank. This is because the status or rank that persons have for the Kantian is that of possessing absolute worth or dignity. This close link between rank and value makes conceptual sense since we can (and do) say things such as: someone's higher rank is due to their having a higher worth, or someone's higher worth is due to their higher rank.

3. Overview of the Chapters and Argument

This brief overview of the literature on dignity alerts us to the need firstly to clarify further the relationship between rank and value and, secondly to offer conceptions of both status (or inviolable) and achievement (or aspirational) dignity. A conception of dignity also needs to spell out clearly who has dignity, why they have it, and how we ought to respond appropriately to someone who has it. We shall seek to meet these objectives in the following chapters by focusing on Kantian dignity as both a direct moral standing and a perfectionist ideal. However, it is worth noting at the outset that the first four chapters focus primarily on status dignity, while achievement dignity is the focus only of the final chapter. The reason for this uneven focus is that status dignity is central to determining how the FH functions as a moral principle. This is because whether or not you have status dignity determines what sort of moral treatment you warrant. In contrast, a high degree of achievement dignity does not grant you special moral treatment under the FH, beyond the proper esteem that such excellence or virtue warrants. So while achievement dignity is important, in order to spell out a Kantian ethics of dignity in which the FH plays a central role, we shall need to focus primarily, but not exclusively, on status dignity.

In Chapter 1 I aim to perform four key tasks. First, to develop the distinction between an ethics of dignity that is found in Kant's Formula of Humanity (FH) and an ethics of consistency that is found in the Formula of Universal Law (FUL) and the Formula of the Law of Nature (FLN). Second, to argue that the FUL and FLN have significant problems when we try to use them as moral principles as they lead to strongly counter-intuitive

implications in important cases, including murder and mayhem cases. Third, to argue that the FH avoids the particular problem cases that cause problems for the FUL and FLN. This implies that the FH is not equivalent to the FUL and FLN. Fourth, to highlight the intuitive appeal of an ethics of dignity which focuses on respect for the autonomy of each and every rational being. In combination, these arguments make the case that the FH is a distinct normative principle with strong intuitive appeal which can avoid the problems that other formulations of the Categorical Imperative face. This provides us with a strong prima facie case for exploring and developing a Kantian ethics of dignity that takes the FH as its core normative principle. The task of the remaining chapters is to develop and defend that view in detail.

If the FH is to be made the core focus of this view, then we need an account of why we are morally bound by this principle. Chapter 2 takes on this task by developing a contrast between realist approaches, according to which the FH is grounded in an external moral reality which is independent of the nature (or form) of our reason or any acts of our will, and constructivist approaches, according to which the FH is grounded either in the nature (or form) of our reason itself or in acts of our will. Next, I draw a further contrast between 'all the way down' constructivist views, according to which the FH is grounded in something we actually do, and 'not all the way down' constructivist views, according to which the FH is grounded in the nature (or form) of practical reason itself. Having drawn these contrasts, I argue that 'not all the way down' constructivist views have significant advantages over the alternatives.

With these advantages in mind I then proceed to develop a positive argument which purports to show that the FH is a principle of our practical reason itself. The FH is both a principle that we are rationally compelled to follow and one that we can regard as self-imposed as it derives from our own rational nature. On this view we are obligated to obey the FH as it is a principle of our own practical reason and not because we discover that, independently of the moral law, we have an absolute worth or status dignity. This is because, on the Kantian constructivist view defended here, value and worth follow from, rather than form the basis of, the norms of rationality. The FH therefore projects or

grounds our absolute worth as the bearers of status dignity, rather than that worth preceding and grounding the FH as on realist views. On this view we have status dignity or an absolute worth because a command of our own reason endows us with that worth and status.

Having set out the foundations of the FH and our status dignity, the next task, undertaken in Chapter 3, is to demonstrate that the FH can operate as a distinct and intuitively plausible moral principle in its own right. We need to show this in order to defend the claim that the FH can operate as the core normative principle of a Kantian ethics of dignity. To demonstrate how the FH works as a moral principle, I shall break it down into two subsidiary principles, the *Mere Means Principle* (MMP), which grounds perfect duties, and the *Ends in Themselves Principle* (ETP), which grounds imperfect duties. To show how to apply the MMP, I develop a new conception of "possible consent" and of "sharing ends". We should not use others as mere means by interacting with them in ways that they could not possibly consent to. We should not use ourselves as a mere means by harming our rational capacities for the sake of any lesser end. Further, we should treat ourselves and others as ends in ourselves by promoting the development and exercise of our respective rational capacities. Together the MMP and the ETP tell us how to practically acknowledge and respond with proper respect and regard for the status dignity and absolute worth of all rational agents. But in order to properly apply these two principles to human agents we need to recognise their vulnerabilities. This makes human vulnerability a central focus of the application of the FH.

In Chapter 4 we complete the account of status dignity by focusing on the issue of *who* has status dignity. Resolving this issue is key since the FH only applies directly to beings with status dignity. In this chapter I argue that there are good interpretive grounds for ascribing to Kant the view that it is the possession of rational capacities for morality that determine whether or not we have status dignity. However, Kant's own view is incomplete as he doesn't explicitly outline what he means by a capacity, and there are numerous interpretive alternatives that merit consideration. To overcome this situation, I argue that there are good philosophical reasons, on the grounds of justificatory force and

inclusivity, to uphold as the best Kantian view the claim that it is our possession of rational capacities for morality, where a capacity is understood to be a latent, present or realised potential to will morally for its own sake, that determines whether or not we have status dignity. This view grants status dignity not just to moral saints with perfected moral capacities, and not just to normal adult agents with present moral capacities, but also to newborns and children with latent potential to develop moral capacities.

But this view implies that some humans, such as anencephalic infants, lack status dignity. If they lack status dignity, does that mean we have no moral obligations in regards to how we treat them? We are required to structure our moral relations and interactions with all those who have status dignity in terms of the perfect and imperfect duties required by the FH. We cannot, however, structure our relations and interactions with those humans who lack status dignity in terms of the FH since they lack the relevant rational capacities that could be promoted, developed and respected. Nonetheless, we are still subject to moral restrictions in our treatment of humans who lack dignity based in (at least) indirect moral duties and positively legislated legal protections. While you need status dignity to be directly covered by the FH, this does not mean that those who lack status dignity receive no moral consideration whatsoever.

The first four chapters complete our understanding of Kantian status dignity. We now know why we have it (see Chapter 2), how we ought to treat someone who has it (see Chapter 3) and who has it (see Chapter 4). The final step in fully outlining a Kantian ethics of dignity is to move from an account of status dignity to an account of achievement dignity. We shall do that in Chapter 5 where I develop a conception of achievement dignity as an ideal of perfection towards which we ought to strive. Achievement dignity refers to the special esteem worthiness *of* virtue. As such, to give *content* to an account of achievement dignity, we shall need to spell out a Kantian account of virtue. But before doing that, we need to examine the relationship between dignity and autonomy and contrast the moral worth of actions with the virtue of a person's character or will. With these distinctions in place, I set out a conception of virtue as a complex ideal comprised of three elements. The degree to which we satisfy these various elements determines our

relative degree of achievement dignity. The three elements are the duty of apathy, the duty to adopt a good disposition, and the duty to love morality. The duty of apathy requires that we strive to rid ourselves of passions and morally significant affects that can prevent rational agency. The duty to adopt a good disposition requires that we make a revolutionary change in our deepest character-defining value commitment by becoming committed to morality at any cost. The duty to love morality requires that we strive to love morality by cultivating our pro-moral emotions and desires, including respect and love for ourselves and others, in order to preserve our moral integrity and to express a genuine commitment to putting dignity first. In successfully approaching the ideal of achievement dignity we truly live up to our awe-inspiring status dignity.

4. Kant's Ethics vs. Kantian Ethics: A Note on Method

The aim of this book is to spell out and defend an intuitively appealing Kantian conception of both status and achievement dignity. This involves approaching Kantian ethics as an ethics of dignity which takes the FH as its core normative principle. But why is this an approach to *Kantian* ethics rather than a strict interpretation of *Kant's* ethics? And why is this a *Kantian* conception of dignity and not just *Kant's* conception of dignity? To answer these questions, we need to differentiate Kant's ethics from Kantian ethics.

It might seem obvious that there is a clear and stark contrast between interpreting Kant's ethics and formulating a Kantian ethic.[25] The aim of interpreting Kant's ethics is to correctly interpret what Kant's ethical views really are. The proper method for doing this is to pay close attention to the words that Kant uses and the meaning of those words in Kant's linguistic context. Analysing the philosophical plausibility of Kant's views has no proper place in this method. In contrast, the aim of developing a Kantian ethic is to develop a distinctive moral theory that, while it has enough links to Kant's ethics to make it a Kantian view, pays little attention to what Kant actually says. The proper method for doing

[25] For further discussion see Allen Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

this is to employ independent philosophical argumentation. Analysing Kant's texts and their various interpretations has no place, or at best a marginal place, in this method.[26]

But Kant's own texts are notoriously open to multiple interpretations on even fundamental issues, such as whether Kant is a moral realist or not, or whether he endorses a two-worlds or two-standpoints understanding of transcendental idealism.[27] While some may take this as a sign of weakness, I take it to be a sign of the richness of Kant's texts that they can in some cases support multiple competing interpretations equally (or nearly equally) well. But how can we make progress in the face of such interpretive disagreement? The most common way to progress is to analyse the independent philosophical merits of the various interpretive options. Christine Korsgaard makes this way of proceeding explicit in her interpretation of Kant. She writes that it is her "view that no interpretation can be based on textual considerations alone. Language supporting all of" the main candidate interpretations "can be found in Kant's texts, and it seems possible that he was not aware of the differences among them". This leads Korsgaard to say that the defence of her interpretation "will therefore be based primarily on philosophical considerations".[28]

This way of proceeding can also be justified by an appeal to the methodological principle of charity. This methodological principle tells us to charitably interpret a view in its best and strongest form.[29] But to determine what the best and strongest form of a view

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[26] For a recent instance of this approach see, for example, Robert Audi, *Means, Ends, & Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[27] We explore the former issue in Chapter 2. On the latter issue see, for example, Henry E Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

[28] See Christine M Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 80. While Korsgaard's point is specifically about the logical, practical and teleological interpretations of the contradiction generated by the Formula of Universal Law (which we shall examine in Chapter 1), her point can easily be generalised to many other interpretive debates about Kant's ethics.

[29] This is a broad and untechnical understanding of the methodological principle of charity. This principle is loosely related to Donald Davidson's work on the interpretative "principle of charity" – see, for example, Gareth

is, we first need to consider the independent philosophical merits of the different interpretive options. Recognising this point brings the aims and methods of Kantian ethics and Kant's ethics into much closer alignment. We can also make this same point by approaching this issue from the other direction. A Kantian ethics that doesn't pay close attention to Kant's texts and the different interpretations of Kant's texts cuts itself off from its best resource. Either way, we can bring the aims and methods of Kant's ethics and Kantian ethics into much closer alignment than they might appear to be at first sight.

While this shows us that in terms of both methods and aims, interpreting Kant's ethics and developing a Kantian ethic should be closely related tasks, the two tasks can and do come apart. Two important ways in which they can and will come apart here is when we need to develop further a view beyond Kant's texts, supply missing details or missing arguments, take into account contemporary philosophical distinctions and arguments, and reject one element of Kant's theory or side with one element of Kant's theory that is in tension with other elements. When we supplement, reject, or side with one part of Kant's theory in this way, as we shall do at times throughout the following chapters, we are doing Kantian ethics and not merely interpreting Kant.

For example, in Chapter 1 we shall focus on a tension between Kant's ethics of consistency and his ethics of dignity and side with one part, the ethics of dignity, at the expense of the other part, and reject Kant's claims about the equivalency of the FH and the FLN. In Chapter 2 we shall introduce a contemporary philosophical distinction between moral realism and moral constructivism that is not present in Kant's work, and develop independent philosophical arguments to defend a certain constructivist approach. In Chapter 3 we shall need to supplement Kant's theory by developing an account of possible consent that provides details that go beyond anything that Kant explicitly says. In Chapter 4 we shall once again need to go beyond Kant's texts in order to do extra philosophical work to develop an account of what it is to have a *capacity* for morality. Finally, in Chapter

Fitzgerald, "Charity and Humanity in the Philosophy of Language," *Praxis* 1, no. 2 (2008); Nathaniel Goldberg, "The Principle of Charity," *Dialogue* 43, no. 4 (2004).

5 we need to develop a conception of achievement dignity that is not explicitly spelled out in Kant's texts by combining a number of different elements from Kant's various works and addressing some contemporary philosophical concerns. This final chapter is more interpretive in style than the first four chapters, since Kant's conceptions of achievement dignity and virtue, compared to his conception of status dignity, is more in need of sympathetic exposition than supplementing or modifying.

Ideally, the overall result of this method is the development of the best Kantian ethical view. But in developing such a view we sometimes only have to report and interpret what Kant's says, not modify, supplement or reject it. We shall therefore also pay close attention to what Kant says and what various commentators on Kant's text have said, as well as make some interpretive claims. My approach to doing Kantian ethics closely resembles Allen Wood's approach. Wood writes:

> Some philosophers seem to think that each proposition in a theory must be argued for entirely on its own, using arguments that are supposed to persuade anyone at all, even someone with no sympathy whatever for the project in which the theory is engaged. That is a standard that no significant philosophical theory could ever meet. In fact, the best defense of any philosophical conception is always a more or less systematic exposition of it… This means that "Kantian ethics" as I mean the term may sometimes look something like a sympathetic interpretation of Kant's writings, even if its aim is quite different.[30]

Wood notes here that, in terms of method, developing a sympathetic interpretation of Kant's writings and doing Kantian ethics can often look very similar. But it is important to keep in mind the different aim of Kantian ethics, which is not strict textual fidelity at all costs, but rather to develop, supplement and strategically employ elements of Kant's ethics to produce an overall Kantian philosophical view that is cogent, plausible, well-reasoned and intuitively appealing.

Many of the arguments in this book will be explicitly directed at those who already have at least some sympathy for the Kantian project, but are looking for the most intuitively appealing and well-developed version of Kantian ethics. But in order to motivate

[30] Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 1-2.

and buttress that sympathy, we shall also need to address certain sceptical worries about the Kantian approach to dignity and morality more generally. These include concerns about: the implausibility of the Formula of Universal Law (which I address in Chapter 1); the grounding of human dignity (which I address in Chapter 2); whether the FH can operate as a plausible independent moral principle (which I address in Chapter 3); the scope of status dignity and the limitations of the FH (which I address in Chapter 4); and the apparent failure of Kantians to account for the vulnerability of our rational capacities and to offer a genuine place for virtue and the emotions in a moral life (which I address in Chapter 5).