The idea of dignity: Its modern significance

Barbara A Misztal
University of Leicester, UK

Abstract

The aim of this article is to bring to social theorists' attention the growing visibility of the notion of dignity within human rights legislation, bioethics and public discourse generally, as well as to evaluate this term's potential to enhance our capacities to respond to old and new challenges. The article starts with a short presentation of the career of the concept and discussion of the various impasses and conceptual tensions connected with the notion of human dignity. It is followed by an exploration of how the idea of human dignity has become one of the main achievements of modern times. The question of how respect for human dignity has turned out to be the fundamental feature of democratic society is addressed with help from both Waldron's perspective on human dignity as the ground of human rights and Habermas's approach that stresses the moral content of human rights. The final part of the article examines the value of the notion of dignity for social theorizing by looking at ways the employment of the concept may contribute to sociological thought and enquiry.

The notion of dignity, broadly understood as a value which is held universally and applies to all human beings' inherent and intrinsic worth, can be found in a wide range of international documents, charters and declarations. Presently, we are witnessing a wave of interest in the notion of dignity not only as a key legal notion, but also increasingly as a fundamental aspect of democratic society. References to human dignity are now frequently heard in public forums and debates, particularly in defence against violations of the condition of freedom and justice and in protests against humiliation. For

Corresponding author:
Barbara A Misztal, Department of Sociology, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH, UK
Email: bm50@le.ac.uk

example, demands for dignity were voiced during the Arab Spring of 2011, where peoples' aspiration for democratic change was expressed in calls for 'respect and dignity', seen as 'the critical concepts' which 'bring people together' (Davuvtoglu, 2010: 31).

However, it would be a mistake to associate the discovery of the idea of dignity with modern societies. The notion of dignity is a concept with a long history, which stretches from antiquity to contemporary ethical and legal debates and documents. It is enough to remember that this idea can be found in the Greek and Roman Stoics, in the Aristotelian tradition and many ancient literary works, such as Sophocles' *Antigone*. Not only the understanding that 'the humanity has profound dignity, is not a modern prerogative' (Berger, 1970: 342), it is also the notion which features in many cultures throughout the world, East and West, and in theological texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Iglesias, 2001). Moreover, since Pico della Mirandola's speech *On the Dignity of Man* (1486), there have been a number of revisions and elaborations of the notion of dignity (Kateb, 2011: 4). However, it was Kant who became the major theorist of dignity. Influenced by the Stoics' idea of the dignity of human persons as based on humanity's rational perspective, Kant viewed dignity as a sign of an 'end in oneself' and associated this foundational idea with human capacity, rooted in the faculty of reason, to act morally (McCrudden, 2008: 659). For Kant, 'justice requires itself to uphold the human rights of all persons, regardless of where they live or how well we know them, simply because they are human beings, capable of reason, and therefore of respect' (Sandel, 2009: 123). From this perspective, dignity is an absolute inner value all human beings possess. Seeing autonomy as the foundation of dignity, Kant (1991: 255) asserts that '[h]umanity itself is a dignity; for a man cannot be used merely as a means by any man ... but must be used at the same time as an end'.

In the past two centuries the concept of dignity has become prominent in many calls for social and political reform. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft used the notion of dignity to articulate her demands for the change in women's status, while the early socialists, for instance, F. Lassalle, argued that the state should ensure that workers and tradesmen live truly dignified lives (van der Graaf and van Delden, 2009: 157). The workers' calls for respect for the dignity of human work and later social movements' protests against the violation of human dignity were mainly based on theological grounds, which assume the inviolability of the dignity of the individual person due to a special rank for human beings within God's creation. The claim to special regard of human beings by virtue of being created 'in God's image' was a central element of Catholic social teaching which also emphasized 'the limits of rights in being', and was able to capture the full range of what was necessary to human well-being, and which, consequently, insisted on a 'more communitarian conception of human dignity' (McCrudden, 2008: 662).

The post-World War II incorporation of the notion of dignity into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where Article 23 (3) says that 'Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity' (Habermas, 2010: 464), can be seen as the culmination of the historical evolution of the idea of dignity. Two decades later, dignity became so central to the United Nations' conceptions of human rights that the UN General Assembly's guidelines for new human rights legislations provided 'that such instruments

should be of ''fundamental character and derive from the inherent dignity and worth of human person''' (McCrudden, 2008: 669). Since the 1990s, in addition to the prominence in human rights texts, the idea of dignity has been employed in bioethics and in public forums. In short, modern societies 'succeed in embodying and in stabilizing the discoveries of dignity that are the principal achievements of modern man' (Berger, 1970: 346).

The increased usage of this notion has been mirrored by the publication of several works on dignity's conceptual history and its numerous meanings (Iglesias, 2001; Dworkin, 2006; Waldron, 2007; McCrudden, 2008; Nussbaum, 2008; Habermas, 2010; Kateb, 2011; Sensen, 2011). Since the existing works on the notion of dignity, although unable to establish a common understanding of this idea, have managed to identify various traditions and perspectives in defining and explaining human dignity, this article, without going into details of the history of this idea, will focus on the dominant contemporary view of dignity. Today's understanding of dignity differs from the traditional usage of this term in many respects, of which the most important are differences associated with the current approach's rejection of the traditional idea of dignity as based on theological grounds and as referring to duties or holding oneself to a certain standard rather than to rights (Sensen, 2011: 83). The current universalistic identity of this concept calls for respect of autonomous wills, rejects humiliating constraints on freedom and refers to rights rather than duties. Most importantly, it reflects the legacy of Kant's categorical imperatives as 'the intrinsic, non-negotiable non-fungible worth that inheres in the very human being' (Waldron, 2007: 209).

Despite the strength of the legacy of this requirement of non-instrumentalization of persons and despite the increased employment of the idea of dignity, the concept is still not very precisely defined. Also we still do not know much about the stages in the genealogy of the concept of human dignity (Waldron, 2007; Habermas, 2010). Hence, it is not surprising that this current upsurge in dignity is accompanied by rising contestation, criticism and even opposition to this notion, with some critics seeing dignity as a 'mere decoration' which dresses up a tautological reasoning (Waldron, 2007: 203). These difficulties in our comprehension of the notion's complex, multidimensional meanings, which are rooted in many traditions, lower this idea's appeal and lead to some negative evaluations of its utility and distinctiveness. Nonetheless, despite the various impasses and conceptual tensions connected with the term of dignity, social scientists have recently been showing a growing interest in this notion.

Although some usage of the idea in social theorizing has been taking place since the notion of dignity replaced the old concept of honour (Berger, 1970), yet the increased employment of this term mirrors sociologists' more recent involvement in human rights debates, biosciences issues, and, more generally, in discussions of material and social preconditions of human flourishing. Since the notion of dignity, which always relates 'to the intrinsic humanity divested of all socially imposed roles and norms', focuses discussions of the nature of modern societies on ways to 'bridge self and society' (Berger, 1970: 342), it can be said that contemporary social science cannot avoid this idea. Since modern societies are frequently conceived as being fragmented and atomized, many thinkers searching for remedies against the dissolution of social bonds and solidarity point, implicitly or explicitly, to respect for human dignity. It is, for example, expressed

in Habermas's (2010) contention that the formation of transnational civil solidarity offers hope for a cosmopolitan rights regime which ensures respect for the dignity of all, in Honneth's (2001) idea that dignity and integrity are critical dimensions of the determination of justice today, in discussions of the conditions necessary for a decent society (Margalit, 1996), as well as in calls for a need to revisit the existing principles of moral order (Alexander, 2011) and for the re-vitalization of the idea of respect (Sennett, 2003). All these voices assume that modern processes have reshaped conditions of identity formation and that to restore a sense of justice, moral order and solidarity in a fractured society, we need to address ways in which people can achieve the self-respect, self-actualization and social recognition.

It is the aim of this article to demonstrate the relevance of this new condition of dignity in our search for recognition both in our universality and singularity. I would argue that the notion of dignity could enrich the existing sociological theories of recognition, solidarity and cosmopolitanism. Since the increased employment of the idea of dignity first occurred in the legal field, we will start our discussion with the presentation of the growing recognition of the significance of the idea of dignity in human rights discourse.

The career of the notion of dignity

Only since the end of the World War II has the term dignity been presented as the justification for human rights in international and national laws. The post-war period saw many human rights documents, which while requesting respect for persons, that is, 'the attitude appropriate to the dignity of persons' (Moellendorf, 2009: 8), assume that it is dignity which provides the rationale for the requirement for that respect. The first Article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nation, which was set up on the assumption on faith ' . . . in the dignity and worth of the human person', tells us that all human beings 'are born free and equal in dignity and rights' (Waldron, 2007: 203). Not only the founding documents of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights drew an explicit connection between human rights and dignity, but also the European Convention on Human Rights, in which Article 3 states that 'no one shall be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment' (Habermas, 2010: 464). The preambles of the two Covenants on rights adopted in 1966 (the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) clarified the 1945 and 1948 UN Charter's rather ambiguous notion of dignity by explicitly recognizing human rights as being derived from 'the inherent dignity of the human person' and proposing the understanding of dignity as 'the ground of rights' (Sensen, 2011: 74). Also Article 5 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights postulates that every 'individual shall have the right to respect of the dignity inherent in a human being and the recognition of his legal status' (Moellendorf, 2009: 6).

Furthermore, in the vast majority of national constitutions of the twentieth century, the object of respect is presumed to be the inherent dignity of persons, presented as the main foundation of rights, while states are placed in the role of the guarantor of respect for dignity, for example, the Swedish Constitution provides that public power shall be exercised with respect for equal worth of all, the liberty and dignity of

individual (Blau and Moncada, 2009). Also many international organizations promote respect for dignity. The major conventions of the United Nations on the Rights of Children (1989), the Rights of Migrant Workers (1990), and Protection against Forced Disappearance have all included references to dignity (McCrudden, 2008: 669). The idea of dignity also provides the rationale for the 2007 UN Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities, which calls on countries to 'promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity' (Cigman, 2007: 775).

The principle of human dignity is also drawn upon to protect groups' cultures and identities and to ensure their constitutional recognition. In 1978, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice, which, in Article 1, provides that all human beings are born equal in dignity. This acknowledgement of human rights, as deriving from the inherent dignity of human person, was further reinforced in the 2007 UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Wiessner, 2011). In 1986, India introduced the Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act in an attempt to protect indigenous peoples from 'indignities, humiliations and harassment' (Chamberlain, 2011: 10). More recently, the report *Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Constitution* (Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Constitution, Report of the Expert Panel, 2012), calls for changes to the Australian Constitution to prohibit racial discrimination and to encourage respect for indigenous Australians. After the Prime Minister's apologies for the past 'indignity' inflicted on the indigenous 'stolen generation' (aph.gov.au/house/Rudd_speech.pdf), after months of consultation on the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Strait Torres Islander peoples, the 19-member panel produced a 300-page report in which the word 'dignity' is mentioned six times. For instance, in its Introduction, the report says that: 'Constitutional recognition would help to improve the self-esteem and dignity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' (p. 11). Furthermore, it suggests that in the Constitution Preamble it should include that the Australian people commit themselves to upholding 'freedom, tolerance and individual dignity and the rule of law' (p. 119). Several submissions received by the Panel supported a statute of values, suggesting equality, no discrimination and human dignity as some of the main values (p. 82).

The idea of dignity has also been increasingly visible in discussions and laws about the proper use of biotechnologies. The debates surrounding new reproductive and genetic technologies, cloning and transplantation medicine and the use of genetic material in experimentation with inhuman species, have prompted international bodies and national governments to issue reports, declarations or conventions on the application of biotechnologies, in which the notion of dignity is adopted as the ultimate reason behind the new regulations in these matters. The principle of respect for dignity holds a central position in the UNESCO and UN instruments dealing with bioethics that have been adopted during the past two decades, for example, in the Universal Declarations on the Human Genome and Human Rights (1997), the International Declaration on Human Genetic Data (2003) and the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005) (Sweet and Masciulli, 2011: 6). UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights aims 'to promote respect for human dignity and protection of human rights' (van der Graaf and van Delden, 2009: 152). As the international community, in its

response to the increasing dilemmas and challenges of biotechnologies, assigns a central role to the notion of human dignity, this idea not only appears 'a dozen times in that document, it is a foundational principle of a number of declarations, statements, and practices dealing with human rights and freedom in related UN and UNESCO documents' (Sweet and Masciulli, 2011: 8). The Declaration ensures respect for the life of human beings by stating that 'the interest and welfare of the individual should have priority over the sole interest of science or society' (Article 3.2). The principle of respect for dignity, incorporated into the 1997 Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights (Article 10), also proclaims the primacy of the human being over science (Andorno, 2009: 228). In short, since the principle of respect for dignity plays a central role in the intergovernmental instruments dealing with bioethics, it is 'not [an] exaggeration to characterize it as the "overreaching principle" of international biolaw' (Andorno, 2009: 227).

The concept of human dignity is also part of dialogues and policies of health care, especially ones addressing the needs of the seriously ill and end-of-life care. For instance, the WHO declares that 'patients have the right to be treated with dignity' (van der Graaf and van Delden, 2009: 152), Article 2 of the French Medical Deontology states that 'the physician, serving the individual and public health, exercises his mission respecting human life, the person, and his dignity' (Ricoeur, 2007: 207), while the Spanish government approved plans for a Law of a Dignified Death (*Guardian,* 13 May 2011, p. 5). The idea of social dignity, understood as referring to the ways in which the worth of the person is recognized and conveyed between and among individuals and groups (Jacobson, 2007), is employed in public reviews and evaluations of health care. Despite the fact that in Britain there are national standards on patient dignity, the governmental report on *Dignity in Care* identified many problems in this respect. Also various charities, such as Help the Aged or Care, report that the health system is failing to treat older patients with care, dignity and respect (Jacobson, 2007). Debates surrounding Dignity in Dying Day, which marked World Hospice and Palliative Care Day in Britain in 2007, revealed that over a half of complaints about the NHS were about the failure of end-of-life care to ensure patients' dignity (Riley, 2007: 41).

In the public sphere, the idea of dignity is not only limited to health care. The principle of human dignity, understood as the universal value that belongs to every person by virtue of being human, is also frequently associated with the call for social justice. This association between dignity and justice is illustrated by a common justification for the welfare policy to treat all citizens as part of a more inclusive national order that distributes rights and recognition. Calls for the recognition of the basic intrinsic worth of persons as the condition of justice, for instance, were recently voiced by people in Mexico who marched for Peace with Justice and Dignity in a protest against the culture of gangs and drugs (*Guardian,* 13 May 2011, p. 5). Also concerns of groups seeking the legalization of undocumented migrants, such as Canadian Solidarity Across Borders and No One Is Illegal, focus on 'the struggle for justice and dignity of immigrants and refugees' (Monforte and Dufour, 2012: 15). Through their collective actions, mainly marches, undocumented migrants declared: 'Our fight is for life with dignity. Lift your faces in pride, for they have stolen everything but our dignity' (Monforte and Dufour, 2012: 24). While their strategy links feelings of dignity with justice, many social

movements also focus on the association between dignity and freedom. For example, the connection between dignity and freedom is expressed by people in Egypt, who, one year after the revolution, still demand 'bread, freedom and social justice' (*Guardian*, 25 January 2012, p. 17). The Polish movement, Solidarity, which was created to oppose an all-intrusive authoritarian state, insisted on the dignity of labour and stressed the association between dignity and freedom. The ethos of the early socialists, like F. Lassalle, revived by Solidarity's slogan which demanded: 'Give us back our workers' dignity' (Sroda, 1993: 5), activated moral language and expressed in moral terms workers' desire to eliminate the lack of freedom that leads to humiliation and disrespect.

All these examples of the employment of the idea of dignity illustrate that there is a growing recognition that dignity is an essential part of constitutional and international legal solutions, bioethics, health care regulations and public discourse. The career of the term human dignity in a wide range of documents, policies and debates calls for an explanation. However, the difficulties connected with this task demand that before we undertake an attempt to answer the question about the reasons behind this idea's significance in modern society, we need to comprehend the problematic nature of the concept itself.

Dignity: a problematic notion

The notion of dignity, despite the general agreement on the value of the idea, is frequently criticized for its lack of conceptual clarity and openness to misinterpretation. Often dignity is seen as serving merely as a rhetorical device in political debates, 'something of a slogan in bioethics' (Sulmasy, 2008) and as a camouflage for quite different values in legal documents. When perceived as 'mere rhetorical dressing' (Caulfield and Chapman 2005: 737) or 'a simple slogan' (Andorno, 2009: 229), the notion of dignity is disapproved for not being distinctive enough to add much to policy debates and legal reasoning. At the same time, however, the examination of the meaning of dignity in all fields demonstrates that there is a general and basic consensus on the value of the Kantian principle of dignity.

This common minimum core based on a normative commitment to Kantian ethics is especially pronounced in international law which 'lends itself to doctrines of universal human rights' (Sandel, 2009: 123). There, the general acceptance of the Kantian perspective also comes with the acknowledgement that dignity is the good which is 'prior to a principle stating what is right; and human rights as entitlements – which are justified by the good – are prior to the duties of the agent' (Sensen, 2011: 73). However, despite this general recognition of the value of the Kantian principle and despite the fact that the notion of dignity serves as a common currency of international human rights, the employment of this idea in human rights is still criticized from at least two perspectives. First, it is claimed that this notion continues to be 'left to intuitive understanding, conditioned in large measure by cultural factors' (Schachter, 1983: 849). This view, while appreciating this notion's usefulness as referring to the normative non-judgemental recognition, asserts the notion of dignity but leaves us uncertain whether it refers 'to autonomy, reciprocity or both' (Woodiwiss, 2005: 147). The second perspective more directly calls into question this idea's judicial function (McCrudden, 2008).

While both views agree that the substance of the idea of dignity is too ambiguous, too normative and open to abuse, the second view also insists that the judicial use of this idea is not 'particularly helpful' and can be even harmful as its reference to dignity in fact 'seems to camouflage' manipulability and indeterminacy with a superficially legitimizing claim of universality (Carozza, 2008: 935). The negative evaluation of the consequences of disparity in the understanding of dignity across jurisdictions prompts McCrudden (2008: 655) to warn that the idea of dignity fulfils its function only when the notion is conceptualized at a very high level of generality. The examination of the wide differences in the practical application of the idea of human dignity in various jurisdictions demonstrates that dignity appeals to judges because it allows them to communicate more than the human rights discourse offers. 'Dignity provides a convenient language for adoption of substantive interpretations of human rights guarantees which appear to be intentionally, not just coincidently, highly contingent on local circumstances' (McCrudden, 2008: 724). Pointing to the gap between the universal idea of human dignity in the abstract and its deployment in the concrete practice of judicial interpretation of human rights, McCrudden asserts that in practice the meaning of dignity is context-specific, varying significantly from nation to nation and often over time within particular jurisdictions (p. 724).

The idea of dignity as being a context-specific, culturally relative concept can also be found in Kateb's (2011) book in which human dignity is presented as an existential value which 'pertains to individual uniqueness' (p. 12) and which is the necessary component, alongside moral dignity, in the defence of rights. Kateb's main idea consists of two basic propositions and it not only serves to help defend the theory of individual rights but also gives a perspective on the dignity of the human species. The first assumption asserts that the dignity of every individual is equal to that of every other, and the second claims that no other species is equal to humanity. When we refer to the dignity of the human person, we say that every human being has a status equal to that of all others. 'When we refer to the dignity of the human species, we could speak of the stature of the human race as distinguished from the status of individuals' (p. 6). Kateb's secular affirmation of the dignity of the human species and human beings is rooted in their uniqueness as the human species 'possessed valuable, commendable uniqueness or distinctiveness that is unlike the unfitness of any other species' (p. 5). This higher dignity than all other species is 'theoretically founded on humanity's practical discontinuity with nature' (p. 5). Such an argument for species differentiation between humans and animals brings Kateb into conflict with the movement which aims to elevate the status of animals, and with scholars who – following new trends in medicine, science and technology – point to dissolving the boundaries between human and animal. For example, Rose (2007) and Fuller (2011), while debating what it means to be human in the new circumstances, suggest that there is something qualitatively new in recorded history; that now the distinctiveness of humans is changing, if not slowly disappearing, now that we increasingly identify ourselves with the rest of nature. Thus, as we increasingly embrace technological and medical advances, with developments in cyber, bio, or nanotechnology, the meaning of being human and definitions of what is 'animal' and what is 'human' could be altered. As we are learning more about our continuity with the rest of nature in terms of the ecology, genetic make-up, evolutionary history and as the boundaries of the human and the animal

are increasingly being seen as not fixed or impermeable or indistinguishable, the accepted notions of humanity are rapidly evolving (Fuller, 2011).

The criticism of the notion of dignity as excluding animals is also voiced by Singer (2006) who questions the relevance of the notion of human dignity, especially when it is used to supplement religious beliefs or is formulated in terms of a Kantian ethic. Apart from criticizing it for excluding animals, Singer rejects the idea of dignity for not offering a realistic foundation for the account of people's quality of life and for not balancing human dignity against the demands of prosperity and happiness. As there is no space here to discuss the controversy surrounding Singer's stand, let us only note that this debate is further evidence of the problematic usage of the term of dignity as it demonstrates, first, that there is no consensus who should be included in the inner circle of dignity and who should be excluded and, second, that there is no shared appreciation of the relationship between the role of reason and emotion (compassion) in our understanding of dignity. These two issues or challenges to the notion of dignity have become particularly visible with the publication of *Human Dignity and Bioethics Essays* (2008) which was commissioned by the US President's Council on Bioethics and aimed to clarify this concept of usefulness in bioethics.

The Report's exploration of the applications of the notion of dignity has initiated a dialogue on how this concept could apply in bioethical controversies, with many seeing its tentative proposals as problematic. For example, Pinker (2008) criticizes the report for using the word dignity to impose 'a Catholic agenda on a secular democracy' and for dealing 'with the ethical challenges of twenty-first century bioemedicine using Bible stories, Catholic doctrine, and woolly rabbinical allegory'. Pinker is dismissive of this notion of human dignity as 'a squishy, subjective notion' which can do more harm than good. 'Every sashed and be-medaled despot reviewing his troops from a lofty platform seeks to command respect through ostentatious display of dignity. Political and religious repressions are often rationalized as a defense of the dignity of a state, leader, or creed' (Pinker, 2008). According to him, the idea of dignity is contingent, its intrinsic meaning has been left to intuitive understanding, conditioned in large measure by cultural factors. He claims that 'ascriptions of dignity vary radically with the time, place, and beholder' (Pinker, 2008).

For Pinker, dignity is 'a phenomenon of human perception'. Some features of people 'trigger ascription of worth' and the perception of dignity 'elicits a response in the perceiver'. In short, 'the appearance of dignity triggers a desire to esteem and respect the dignified person'. Pinker, by pointing to the gap between perception and reality, warns us against being impressed by illusions or impressions of dignity. At the same time, his re-conceptualization of dignity as the psychological notion which is rooted in human perception, thus as relative and subjective, allows him to appreciate the value of the notion of respect as being morally significant. The uselessness and vagueness of the notion of dignity are also a part of Ruth Macklin's criticism of this idea which she proposes to abandon in favour of the concepts of respect and autonomy. Suggesting that respect and autonomy would be more useful than dignity as the basis to address concerns in the bioethicist's domain, Macklin (2003: 1419), the British bioethicist, says that dignity means nothing 'over and above respect for persons and their autonomy'.

However, autonomy and respect are not fundamental values in the same way as dignity which refers to the humanity of another person and prompts us to recognize the

moral claim that is made on us at the same time. Pinker's call to replace the idea of human dignity with respect overlooks the essential differences in their functions and contents and the fact that dignity remains after 'a person's contingent and accidental characteristics' have been stripped away (Fukuyama, 2002: 150). Stressing that people's sense of dignity, their ability to understand compassion and the need for justice are the collective characteristics of human beings, Sweet and Masciulli (2011: 11) say that dignity 'is not just autonomy, or respect, or the possession of human rights' and that it needs to be recognized as central to an ethical response to concerns in bioethics. Also both Habermas (2010) and Waldron (2007), while drawing our attention to dignity's link with the notion of respect, insist these two concepts are not synonymous. Furthermore, not only dignity and respect are not the same but also rights and respect are not synonymous as 'respect is neither definite right nor coincides with rights' (Galeotti, 2010: 444).

To sum up so far, in the context of the debates on the shortcomings of the notion of dignity, Kant's approach, which demands that we always treat people as an end in themselves, provides the best account of the notion of dignity not only in international law but also in bioethics and many public debates. Although in bioethics the acceptance of the usefulness of concept of dignity and the broad generality of this term are more controversial than in human rights law, nonetheless even in this new field there is a growing consensus that it requires an 'understanding that the notion of dignity is essential for the world community to be able to articulate a general framework in which to speak about the proper use, and also abuse of biotechnologies' (Sweet and Masciulli, 2011: 8). Paraphrasing Dworkin's (1997: 198) statement that 'anyone who professes to take rights seriously' ought to accept the 'vague but powerful idea of human dignity', we can say that anyone who values democracy should recognize the idea of dignity as the essential achievement of modern society. In what follows, we look for an explanation of how this concept has become the fundamental feature of a democratic society (Taylor, 1994: 76).

Dignity: the achievement of modern society

The timing of the usage of the term of dignity within international law, bioethics and public discourses generally suggests that the growing awareness of the significance of dignity is a result of several factors, of which historical conditions that made us attentive to mass crimes and the process of globalization are the most important ones. The history of the relationship between the idea of dignity and human rights has been shaped by 'the reaction against Nazi ideology and practice before and during the Second World War, culminating in the horrors of the Holocaust' (McCrudden, 2008: 662). The notion of dignity, 'that was inscribed in human rights implicitly from the outset – the normative substance of the equal dignity of every human being that human rights only spell out' (Habermas, 2010: 467), has been behind the international community's concerns to limit violence and construct a just global world and to help more people live more dignified lives, free of misery and degradation associated with war, murder and torture. With the images from the Nazi death camps, Hiroshima, Cambodia, Rwanda and other atrocities showing how people were tortured and killed and with the growing realization of the consequences of various types of discriminatory systems which used the institutional language of disrespect (sexism, apartheid, discrimination of minorities), people

increasingly recognized the importance of human rights for international justice. It is now frequently argued that in the context of the decline of social influence of the religious traditions of morality, in order to foster the culture of moral concern, we need to humanize our ethics by embedding it in human values, including the idea of dignity (Glover, 1999; Sandel, 2009). With the growing recognition that the twentieth-century atrocities demand we rethink ethics and with the literature on genocide showing that humiliation, or dehumanization is a necessary condition, although not sufficient, of genocide (Hinton, 2002), the term human dignity has established itself at the centre of human rights instruments prohibiting practices such as torture, inhuman or degrading treatments, slavery, exploitative working conditions, discrimination and arbitrary arrests (Andorno, 2009). In short, in the course of history, especially after the Holocaust, respect for human dignity became universalized and was associated with legally institutionalized rules.

The notion of dignity has come to play a central role in human rights regulations and laws also because today we are faced with challenges brought about by the process of globalization to our expectation of equality. In other words, the notion of dignity in the context of globalization provides the basis for criticism of global inequalities. According to Moellendorf (2009: 5), if we take seriously the fundamental basis of all human rights documents, 'the construction of the new institutions that reduce inequality is also a matter of global justice'. Thus, the current career of the notion of dignity is connected with the fact that the inherent dignity of persons, and the respect that is appropriate to it, are 'a useful place to start a justification of global egalitarianism' (Moellendorf, 2009: 7). The argument that a justification of global justice can start from the premise of the inherent dignity of persons is also adopted by Dennis Smith (2006) who argues that a denial of dignity needs to be seen in the context of the more general issue of global challenges. Claiming that any denial of respect is humiliating as it 'forcefully overrides or contradicts the claim that particular individuals ... are making about who they are and where and how they fit' and stressing that globalization threatens people's dignity, Smith (2006: 38) asserts that only by the implementation of human rights can we prevent humiliation. In the global context, for the human rights code to endorse equality means to ensure that 'each is accorded equal respect' (p. 47).

The globalizing forces, together with the advances in technology, have also been enhancing the career of the idea of dignity in discussions and laws about the proper use of bioethics. Biotechnologies are 'global technologies in a globalizing world' as this type of research and its effects involve individuals, communities, nations and international bodies throughout the world and as they are increasingly regulated at the global level (Sweet and Masciulli, 2011: 8). Today, with the accelerated development of science and the increased recognition that these advances are global and globalizing, we are forced to regulate many controversial ethical issues, such as human genetic engineering or human cloning, which can be seen as a threat not only to individuals but also to 'the integrity of the human species as such' (Andorno, 2009: 228). Thus, the need for a supranational response in which the idea of dignity, viewed as 'the last barrier against the alteration of some basic features of the human species that might result from practices such as reproductive cloning or germ-line interventions' (p. 228), plays a prominent role.

In the global context, where the human rights framework has become a 'lingua franca' of international relations (Knowles, 2001: 253), the idea of dignity serves also to

demonstrate the insufficiency of the notion of national citizenship for any understanding of individuals' miseries and vulnerabilities. Monforte and Dufour's (2012) study of social movements of undocumented migrants in Canada, Germany and France demonstrates that these collective actions' calls for inclusion on the basis of the universal rights to dignity were similar in all three national contexts. This homogenization of the working out of the practical implications of human dignity in varying contexts can be explained by the causal link between the universalization of the demand for restoration of dignity and the global legitimacy of the international legal regime of rights to which the idea dignity has contributed a new sense of responsibility for vulnerable individuals and groups. As an understanding of the universal norms of dignity becomes global, broader and deeper, the use of human dignity in protests and demands for rights is not just an exercise in 'utopian optimism' (Carozza, 2008: 933). Such calls for the realization of the general principle of dignity find their support in cosmopolitanism which also insists that the notion of human dignity must be protected and enshrined in international law and that respect for the inherent dignity of the person is the essential condition of universal egalitarianism (Moellendorf, 2009: 6). It is a part of cosmopolitan human rights discourse which recognizes a stranger as a member of the human family whose inherent dignity proceeds from the Kantian idea of the 'common possession' of the earth (Ricoeur, 2007) and the essential part of democratic egalitarianism. The list of historical conditions contributing to the establishment of respect for human dignity as one of the main achievements of modern times, is further expanded by Waldron (2007) and Habermas's (2010) conceptualization of dignity as capable of enriching our understanding of the importance of universal human rights.

Waldron (2007: 205) defines the idea of dignity as referring to both 'something about the status of human beings' and 'the demand that the status should be actually respected'. Drawing on the restrictive Roman meaning of the term *dignitas*, which associates dignity with office, honour and rank (Iglesias, 2001), allows Waldron to argue, that in order to enrich our understanding of how the idea of human dignity established itself as the basis of rights, it is worth searching for a historical condition that influenced the egalitarian meaning of the modern concept of dignity. However, being also aware of Christian and Jewish theology's emphases on the universal and unconditional meaning of the notion, Waldron explores two possible ways in which the meaning of dignity could be connected with rank: one constructivist, which takes the notion of dignity from historical systems of rank and nobility, and the second, ontological, one, which draws on the theological idea.

The first approach is rooted in Waldron's claim that the use of dignity in rights discourse, which requires all human beings be granted a high and equal status, is strongly associated with the language of respect and status which belongs to the world of hierarchically ordered traditional societies. It argues that the modern egalitarian meaning of dignity is the result of a generalization of particularistic respect connected with rank and nobility. The significance of dignity in the context of human rights is associated with the fact that dignity, which in the past was connected with hierarchical differentiations of rank and status, now 'conveys the idea that all human persons belong to the same rank and that that rank is a very high one indeed, in many ways as high as those that were formerly regarded as ranks of nobility' (Waldron, 2007: 201). As the second bridge to the egalitarian meaning of the modern concept of dignity, Waldron (p. 235) suggests the

theological idea of ranks within God's creation which accords dignity to all humans because we all are made in the image of God. Thus, the growing importance of the language of human rights grounded in human dignity can be seen as replacing religion, in which humans are at the top of God's scale of creation, with the type of belief system, which proclaims the absolute worth of all human beings. Therefore, in order to illuminate dignity's association with modern egalitarian rights, we should take into account the content of the dignity embodied in the meaning of the term, connected with the demand that status should be respected and with the role of the generalization process that made all citizens now acquire the highest status possible.

Yet, the genealogy of the concept of dignity, which focuses on universalizing the connotations of status, needs to be seen in a more comprehensive way than presented by Waldron (2007). Habermas (2010: 474) argues that Waldron's account of dignity, as a modern form of the equalization of high status, is concerned mainly with the first stage of the equalization, namely, with the processes of universalization, while there is not much discussion of the second stage, that is, the process of individualization. The first stage, which witnessed the emergence of the concepts of individual liberty and autonomy, resulted in the replacement of 'the relative superiority of humanity by the absolute worth of any person' (Habermas, 2010: 74). In the second stage, in which the disintegration of Christian natural law took place, the idea of human dignity became separated from natural law, which ensured that this notion was not employed in the classical human rights declarations of the eighteenth century and in the codifications of the nineteenth century (Habermas, 2010). In modern societies, as a result of the expanded process of individualization, dignity is the essential value that one only recognizes the commonness of all human beings, or universality of all persons, but also one which 'pertains to the identity of a person as a human being' (Kateb, 2011: 10).

Habermas (2010: 471) also points out that the generalization of the concept of dignity was not originally oriented to any equal distribution of dignity but to status differences and that even today this legacy is visible. While stressing the mediating role of the concept of dignity in the shift of perspective from moral duties to legal claims, he argues that this notion, despite its abstract meaning, 'still retains from its particularistic precursor concepts the connotation of depending on the social recognition of a status – in this case, the status of democratic citizenship' (Habermas, 2010: 464). Consequently, only 'membership in a constitutional political community can protect, by granting equal rights, the equal human dignity of everybody' (p. 464). For Habermas, who identifies morality with a unified code, dignity is not 'merely a classificatory expression, an empty placeholder' (p. 466). It is rather the moral 'source' from which all of the basic rights derive their meaning. The notion of human ensures a unique characteristic of human rights as it played the catalytic role in the construction of human rights from 'the components of rational morality, on the one hand, and of the form of subjective rights' (p. 466).

Habermas rejects the idea that human rights only now are morally charged with the concept of human dignity. According to him, human rights, as the product of resistance to despotism and oppression, have always been associated with dignity and its appeal for justice to remedy suffering and humiliation. The centrality of human dignity in all historical struggles against various forms of domination and humiliation explains why, in order to prevent mass crimes and to construct just political order, there has always been

the need to fulfil 'the moral promise to respect the human dignity of every person equally' (p. 468). Habermas's call for the continuous investment of the law with a moral charge is rooted in his understanding that our common humanity entitles us to the right to protect our dignity and that any act that violates this right is a fundamental assault on us as human beings as it denies us dignity. From this perspective, dignity ensures the moral content of law and therefore performs an important mediating role as 'a conceptual hinge' in establishing the reunification of human rights' two elements: the morality and the law (p. 470).

Although Waldron (2007) focuses on the role of dignity as the foundation of human rights, while Habermas (2010) directs his attention to dignity as the moral substance of human rights, they both recognize Kant's approach as offering the best account of the notion of dignity. Furthermore, both Habermas and Waldron, while assigning to this notion an important role in the rational construction of morality, do not assume that it was solely reason that has brought the universalization of high status. In this perspective, dignity is a value which is 'not to be traded off against other values' (Waldron, 2007: 213), and one which stipulates that when a person's dignity is not respected, what is challenged is the reality of his or her existence for others. 'What is at stake for him, when people act as though he is not what he is, is a kind of self-preservation' (Frankfurt, 1999: 153). Thus, the idea of dignity refers both to 'the individual right to personality' (Fletcher, quoted in Cotterrell, 2011: 9) and to 'the importance of others' lives' (Sweet and Mascuilli, 2011: 9). It insists that others '*ought* to recognize' the value of the person and that we cannot ignore the significance of conveying worth and respect to others (Sweet and Mascuilli, 2011: 9, italics in original). Such a definition of dignity in terms of universality and singularity adds to the rationally constructed universalist moral order an element of concern for the plight of others, which itself is one of the 'essential and valuable reminders of our common humanity' (Nussbaum, 2004: 7).

Means of control of both conditions of dignity, namely the condition of self-worth and the respect for dignity of the other, may differ according to the status according to individuals by society and according to the nature of social institutions. This raises the question of what kind of interpersonal and institutional structures our dignity requires. Such discussion, together with our continuous search for ways in which concern for the plight of others may be expanded to reach 'the excluded among the excluded' (Balibar, 2000), opens an interesting scope for social scientists' input.

The notion of dignity and social theory

Despite playing an important role in all types of struggles against injustice and domination, the concept of human dignity has been largely hidden from sociological sight. There are few sociological works which expose the feelings of 'anger and indignation' as the natural human reaction to the conditions that are 'against the dignity of man' (Arendt, 1994: 403). Yet a closer look at sociological works which seek to discuss the conditions for the creation of a just social order reveals that such studies are, directly or indirectly, concerned with human dignity as the essential core of self-realization, solidarity or the good society. The recent 'normative' and 'cosmopolitanism' turns in social science enhance social theory's capacity to contribute to the core debates about the connections

between dignity, rights, justice and democracy. Sociologists' interest in the revival of 'social ethics' and in global problems translates into aspirations to construct a just world order which presupposes a strong commitment to the universal value of human dignity (Gorski, 2011: 9). Moreover, although the notion of dignity has remained largely ignored in classical sociological theory, nonetheless some ideas about human dignity and justice can be found in Durkheim's work.

In Durkheim's view, modern society's cult of the individual requires unconditional respect for human dignity by virtue of our common humanity. Moral individualism, by affirming what unites people, that is, their basic, irreducible human worth, provides the solidarity that modern complex societies need (Cotterrell, 2011: 6). In other words, Durkheim asserts that the dignity of individual is necessary to pluralistic societies because such societies cannot hold together without a value system that confirms the full membership status of each of its members (Durkheim, 1975: 66). Thus, in Durkheimian perspective, human dignity, seen as 'a function of social and economic complexity', is 'necessary to modern but not necessarily to pre-modern societies' (Cotterrell, 2011: 10). Durkheim's sociological explanation of the value system of moral individualism as serving the needs of a certain kind of society overlooks the universality of the idea of humanity (Cotterrell, 2011: 12). To strengthen Durkheim's sociological justification of the value of the notion of dignity there is a need to recognize dignity in terms of both our universality and our singularity. By viewing dignity as the principal value which both 'pertains to the individual in a very intimate way' and also 'extends beyond the moral person of the individual possessing [it]' (Berger, 1970: 343), we can also overcome the shortcomings of Durkheim's identification of morality with social solidarity. Such a re-conceptualization will embrace the idea of social morality that includes outsiders (Alexander, 2011) and moral sentiments that are 'rooted in existential factors unaffected by contingent social rules of cohabitation' (Bauman, 2000: 174).

The recognition of the role of both subjective and objective conditions for dignity can be found in sociological works exploring how people establish self-worth, drawing the lines between the worthy and the less worthy and resist indignity and humiliation. For example, Randy Hodson's (1996) *Dignity at Work* and Michele Lamont's (2000) *The Dignity of Working Men* study how workers establish their sense of self and how they earn dignity through their actions. The central focus of Hodson's book is the 'creative and purposive activities of employees to achieve dignity at work' (1996: xiii). His idea of dignity, interpreted as a fundamental part of achieving a life well-lived, and defined as the ability to establish a sense of self-respect and to enjoy the respect of others, refers to both the inherent worth as well as to the dignity that people achieve through their actions. 'Working with dignity thus entails both defending one's inherent human rights and taking actions that are worthy of respect by oneself and others' (p. 4). Arguing that 'life demands dignity and meaningful work is essential for dignity', he asserts that dignity is realized in the political sphere by striving toward democracy and justice, while in the economic sphere 'it is realized in the demand for a living wage and equal opportunity' (p. 3). Since dignity is necessary for a fully realized life, defending dignity and realization of self-respect through work are the keys to workers' well-being and are achieved through resistance, citizenship and the construction of autonomous meaning systems. Although Hodson's insistence that the drive to realize dignity guarantees a sense of

autonomy and a place in society can be criticized for offering too romantic a view of workers, Michele Lamont has nonetheless found his definition of dignity and typology of resistance very useful tools for her comparative studies of relationship between identity and social value.

Lamont's study of the moral boundaries by which workers establish their sense of self in the world explores how 'holding oneself to high moral standards is a way to acquire or affirm one's dignity' (2000: 44). For workers' moral boundaries provide 'a space in which to affirm their worth and preserve their dignity, a space for expressing their own identity and competence' (p. 4). Morality, which is the structuring principle of workers' world-views, is 'also important in maintaining a sense of self-worth and dignity' (p. 51). Like Hodson, Lamont valorizes workers by arguing that they 'strive to maintain a sense of self-worth and dignity, and to achieve this, they develop alternative measuring sticks that can be viewed as key elements in a culture of resistance' (2000: 147). The study's focus on 'the preservation of dignity, that is, of a space for expressing one's competence and identity' (Lamont, 2000: 248) limits its concern to the subjective worlds of workers. However, Lamont recognizes that the subjective boundaries are necessary but insufficient conditions for the construction of objective boundaries; she therefore suggests that 'the natural complement to this approach would be to look at the making of objective boundaries through the distribution of resources' (p. 248).

This meaning of dignity, as referring to distribution, can also be found in Nancy Fraser's (1995, 2010) conceptualization of dignity as the basis of equal respect and rights. She considers economic hardship and human rights to be at the core of justice, while denying that claims for cultural recognition are demands for redistribution or claims which fit under the universalist rubric of individual rights. However, while assuming that such requests for recognition are different from claims for respect or dignity and while acknowledging cultural recognition as part of 'the good life', she also accepts cultural claims as an element in the question of justice. Hence, she wants the theory of justice also to 'extend beyond the distribution of rights and goods to examine institutionalized patterns of cultural value' (Lash and Featherstone, 2001: 3). Honneth (1995, 2003), by contrast, does not see justice in terms of the language of redistribution as he is more concerned with intersubjectivity and the identity-based notion of recognition. While defining universality in terms of respect and dignity, Honneth notes that a good society is a society in which individuals have a real opportunity for full self-realization and where common values ensure that nobody is denied the opportunity to earn esteem for his or her contribution to the common good. 'To the extent to which every member of society is in a position to esteem himself or herself, one can speak of a state of societal solidarity' (Honneth, 1995: 114). He asserts that redistributive politics and universal justice based on dignity are no longer an adequate basis for solidarity which now has to be based on recognition as much as redistribution. 'Honneth argues that in today's politics of social movements and multiculturalism, a purely universalist moral order is not enough' (Lash and Featherstone, 2001: 5). Honneth's argument that the state should recognize us in both our universality and our singularity is comparable with Dworkin's (2006) observation that our dignity demands a democratic state oriented towards beneficial actions for, and equal treatment of, all with its powers limited by its citizens' rights to be treated as individual and unique subjects.

The definition of dignity in terms of universality and singularity is indirectly reinforced by studies of social movements and accounts of social and global justice. Studies of social movements document how protest and resistance activities 'assert claim to dignity' (Auyero, 2003: 10), while descriptions of social marginalization show a 'search for respect' and 'the struggle for dignity' (Bourgois, 2003: 2) as the ultimate human need. Discussions of the relationship between dignity and political entitlements can also be found in research contributing to debates on what kind of interpersonal and institutional structures may better protect people against actual and potential threats to their dignity. For example, Nussbaum (2008) offers reflections on what a capabilities-based approach, which insists on what people 'are actually able to do and to be' as a central requirement of a life with dignity, can bring to the discussion of the relationship between dignity and political rights. Such a search for how to combine the assumption of universalism with the premise that the ethical resides in the individual human being leads Smith (2010: 79) to argue that 'the good society' emerges when the moral rules governing people and society match the essence of the human person ('a center of subjective experience with purpose'), that is, when human dignity is recognized and respected. Questioning the centrality and sufficiency of the notion of citizenship for any understanding of individuals' indignities is also an essential part of our understanding that the principle of dignity, based on the assumption of our common humanity, is 'increasingly supplemented by new interpretations of other forms of respect that also tend to be universalized but based not on the principles of "sameness" but that of difference' (Markus, 2001: 1026).

Many scholars concerned with multiculturalism such as Kymlicka (2009) and Raz (2001) point out that difference can be respected, and solidarity across difference can be achieved. They see multiculturalism as developing a sense of shared community and promoting mutual respect. While acknowledging that respect for human dignity is a central moral duty, this understanding of the potential of multiculturalism, or respect for difference, acquires a high status as the basis for a new kind of civil solidarity. 'Our duty to respect people's lives does not vary in scope or strength with variations in the value of the content of the life of those people' (Raz, 2001:124). Stressing the universality of people's dignity, while at the same time recognizing that such symbolic acts of respect demand different behaviours in different cultures, Raz suggests that duties of respect for dignity 'require us to avoid causing hurt which disrespects causes' (2001: 171). Such a stand, in the context of the growing importance of human rights and their 'sufficient flexibility to be compatible with respect for cultural diversity' (Andorno, 2009: 237), puts an emphasis on universalism and cosmopolitanism's common aspect – their respect for human dignity – and overlooks their difference – that universalism but not cosmopolitanism recognizes the difference between world cultures. This new perspective signals 'a post-universalistic kind of cosmopolitanism', which refers to 'a condition of diversity but is articulated in cultural models of world openness' (Delanty, 2006: 25).

These various ways of employing the concept of human dignity contribute to sociological thought and enquiry into the nature of a globalizing world and into the conception of identity that the individual strives to achieve in relations with others through equalization of status. At the same time, such studies identify numerous obstacles to ensuring dignity for all in unequal societies and illustrate how various forms of humiliation occur

even within basically welfare- and rights-respecting institutions. With modern forces pointing towards the dissolution of social bonds and solidarity, not many believe that a decent society – a society in which 'institutional arrangements are oriented by principles, norms and rules directed at creating and maintaining conditions of dignified, humanly meaningful life for all its members and that is able to extend its civility and decency to non-members as well' (Markus, 2001: 1022) – is our immediate future. Yet the concern with the constructive power of the idea of dignity, defined in terms of universality and singularity, can enhance our understanding and capacities for the improvement of the condition of equal status, recognition and respect; it can also help us deal with urgent socio-political and scientific developments and challenges. In this sense, the role of sociology as a kind of critical type of intellectual enterprise devoted to protecting people against injustice, indignity and humiliation is to provide the justification for taking responsibility for the creation of more humane conditions.

Conclusion

Despite playing an important role in human rights, bioethics and health care discourses, the concept of human dignity has been largely hidden from sociological sight. Although there is a clear overlap in subject matter and possibility of mutual conceptual influence, the idea of dignity is not commonly accepted in sociology. Yet there are some signs that the idea of dignity is becoming a part of sociology's research interest insofar as the exploration of the value of the notion has increasingly been part of the social theorizing of issues such as self-worth, respect, intersubjective recognition and the good society. Moreover, social theory is well equipped to contribute to the core debates about the connections between dignity, justice and human rights. Sociological concern with dignity and human rights expands our understanding of the contribution of such ideas to the 'conceptual possibility of the universality and validity of cross-cultural moral judgment' (An-Na'Im, 2001: 98). Furthermore, a focus on dignity has important implications for sociology, ranging from the sociology of work and organizations and citizenship to civil society, social movements and political participation.

The recognition of the idea of dignity as the focal point for linking personal troubles and public issues can produce important knowledge that may inform public debates and enrich social policies conducive to social justice and developing ways of confronting all different kinds of injustice and humiliation. Thus, sociological contributions to the task of rethinking what kind of interpersonal and institutional structures may better protect people against actual and potential threats to their dignity can be very valuable. Explorations of experience of indignity, misrecognition and humiliation, especially when placed in cross-cultural and comparative contexts, offer social scientists a rich and ambitious research agenda. Considerations that seek to address the normative content of the universal implementation of the respect for dignity of the person can help social science engage once more in thinking about the human condition in general.

To sum up: in order to move toward general theories of human behaviour, we should embrace the notion of human dignity. The failure of the grand utopias of the past, which promised 'an equality of dignified life to all' (Bauman, 2001:10), should not discourage us from using the idea of dignity: dignity is 'not in itself utopian' (Kateb, 2011: x).

Working towards improvement of conditions of honouring human dignity is also a way of trying to ensure that people are never reduced to mere instruments for the benefit of any utopian goals, ideology or science.

References

Alexander J (2011) Morality as a cultural system: On solidarity civil and uncivil. *Perspective*, Newsletter of the ASA Theory Section 33(2):1–2, 9–10.

Andorno R (2009) Human dignity and human rights as a common ground for a global bioethics. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 34(3): 223–40.

An-Na'Im A A (2001) Human rights. In: Blau J (ed.) *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 86–99.

Arendt H (1994) *Essays in Understanding*. New York: Schocken Books.

Auyero J (2003) *Contentious Lives*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Balibar E (2000) What we owe to the Sans-Papiers. In: Guenther L and Heesters C (eds) *Social Insecurity: Alphabet City No. 7*. Toronto: Anansi, 42–3.

Bauman Z (2000) *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bauman Z (2001) *The Individualized Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Berger P (1970) On the obsolescence of the concept of honor. *European Journal of Sociology* XI: 339–47.

Blau J and Moncada A (2009) Sociological theory and human rights. In: Turner B (ed.) *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 496–513.

Bourgois P (2003) *In Search of Respect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carozza P (2008) Human dignity and judicial interpretation of human rights: A reply. *The European Journal of International Law* 19(5): 931–44.

Caulfield T and Chapman A (2005) Human dignity as a criterion for science policy. *PloS Medicine* 28(8): 736–8. Available at: http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.0020244 (accessed 17 January 2011).

Chamberlain G (2011) Tourists told to avoid 'human safaris', *The Observer*, 12 January, pp. 10–11.

Cigman R (2007) A question of universality: Inclusive education and the principle of respect. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 41(4): 775–93.

Cotterrell R (2011) Justice, dignity, torture, headscarves. *Social & Legal Studies* 20(3): 3–19.

Davutoglu A (2010) We in Turkey and the Middle East have replaced humiliation with dignity. *The Guardian*, 15 March, p. 33.

Delanty G (2006) The cosmopolitan imagination. *British Journal of Sociology* 57(11): 25–47.

Durkheim E (1975) Individualism and intellectuals. In: Pickering WSF (ed.) *Durkheim on Religion*. London: Routledge, 59–73.

Dworkin R (1997) *Taking Rights Seriously*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dworkin R (2006) *Is Democracy Possible Here?: Principles for a New Political Debate*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Frankfurt H (1999) *Necessity, Violation and Love*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fraser N (1995) From redistribution to recognition? *New Left Review* 212: 68–93.

Fraser N (2010) Injustice at intersecting of scales. *European Journal of Social Theory* 13(3): 363–71.

Fukuyama F (2002) *Our Post Human Future*. New York: Basic Books.

Fuller S (2011) *Humanity 2.0*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Galeotti A E (2010) Multicultural claims and equal respect. *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36(3–4): 441–50.

Glover J (1999) *Humanity: A Moral History of Twentieth Century*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Gorski P (2011) After Kant: Protestant ethics and social theory. *Perspective*, Newsletter of the ASA Theory Section 33(2):1, 9.

Habermas J (2010) The concept of human dignity and the realistic utopia of human rights. *Metaphilosophy* 41(4): 464–80.

Hinton A (2002) *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Honneth A (1995) *The Struggle for Recognition*, trans. J Anderson. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Honneth A (2001) Recognition or redistribution? Changing perspectives on the moral order. *Theory, Culture & Society* 18(2–3): 43–55.

Honneth A (2003) Redistribution as recognition. In: Fraser N and Honneth A (eds) *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political- Philosophical Exchange*. London: Verso, 110–97.

Hodson R (1996) *Dignity at Work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics (2008). Available at: http://bioethics.georgetwon.edu.pcb/reports/human_dignity/. (accessed 12 January 2012).

Iglesias T (2001) Bedrock truths and the dignity of the individual. *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 4: 111–34.

Jacobson N (2007) Dignity and health. *Social Science and Medicine* 64: 292–302.

Kant I (1991) *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M Gregory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kateb G (2011) *Human Dignity*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press.

Knowles L (2001) The lingua franca of human rights and the rise of a global bioethics. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 10: 253–63.

Kymlicka W (2009) The multicultural welfare state. In: Hall P A and Lamont M (eds) *Successful Societies: How Institutions and Culture Affect Health*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 226–55.

Lamont M (2000) *The Dignity of Working Men*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Lash S and Featherstone M (2001) Recognition and difference. *Theory, Culture, & Society* 18(2–3):1–19.

Macklin R (2003) Dignity is a useless concept. *British Medical Journal* 327: 1419–20.

Margalit A (1996) *Decent Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Markus M (2001) Decent society and/or civil society. *European Journal of Sociology* 68(4): 1011–30.

McCrudden C (2008) Human dignity and judicial interpretation of human rights. *The European Journal of International Law* 19(4): 655–724.

Moellendorf D (2009) *Global Inequality Matters*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Monforte P and Dufour P (2012) Comparing the protests of undocumented migrants beyond contexts: Collective actions as acts of emancipation. *European Political Science Review* 4(2):1–29.

Nussbaum M (2004) *Hiding from Humanity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Nussbaum M (2008) Human dignity and political entitlement. In: Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics Available at: http://bioethics.georgetwon.edu.pcb/reports/human_dignity/ (accessed 12 January 2012).

Pinker S (2008) The stupidity of dignity. *The New Republic*, 28 May. Available at: http://www.tnr. com/story_print.html?id=d8731cf4-e87b-4d88-b7e7-f5059cd0bfbd (accessed 18 January 2012).

Raz J (2001) *Value, Respect and Attachment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Constitution, Report of the Expert Panel (2012). Available at: http://www.youmeunity.org.au/uploads/assets/3446% 20FaHCSIA%20ICR%20report_text_ (accessed 21 January 2012).

Ricoeur P (2007) *Reflections on the Just*, trans. D Pelleauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Riley A (2007) Day for dying. *The Guardian*, 6 October, p. 41.

Rose N (2007) *The Politics of Life Itself*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Sandel M J (2009) *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* London: Penguin.

Schachter O (1983) Human dignity as a normative concept. *The American Journal of International Law* 77: 848–54.

Sennett R (2003) *Respect*. New York: Norton.

Sensen O (2011) Human dignity in historical perspective: The contemporary and traditional paradigms. *European Journal of Political Theory* 10(1): 71–90.

Singer P (2006) All animals are equal. In: Kushe H and Singer P (eds) *Bioethics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 562–78.

Smith C (2010) *What Is a Person?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Smith D (2006) *Globalization: The Hidden Agenda*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Sroda M (1993) *Idea Godnosci w Kulturze I Etyce*. Warsaw: Warszawa Uniwersytet Warszawski.

Sulmasy D (2008) Dignity and bioethics. In: Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics. Available at: http://bioethics.georgetwon.edu.pcb/ reports/human_dignity/ (accessed 12 January 2012).

Sweet W and Masciulli J (2011) Biotechnologies and human dignity. *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society* 3(1): 6–16.

Taylor C (1994) The politics of recognition. In: Goldberg DT (ed.) *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 76–106.

van der Graaf R and van Delden J (2009) Clarifying appeals to dignity. *Bioethics* 23(3): 151–60.

Waldron J (2007) Dignity and rank. *Archive Européenne de Sociologie* XLVIII: 201–37.

Wiessner S (2011) The cultural rights of indigenous peoples. *The European Journal of International Law* 22(1): 121–40.

Woodiwiss A (2005) *Human Rights*. London: Routledge.

About the author

Barbara A Misztal, Professor at the Department of Sociology, University of Leicester, is the author of *The Challenges of Vulnerability* (Palgrave, 2011), *Intellectuals and the Public Good* (CUP, 2007), *Social Theories of Remembering* (Open University, 2003), *Informality, Social Theory and Contemporary Practice* (Routledge, 2000), *Trust in Modern Society* (Polity, 1996), and *Action on AIDS* (ed. with D. Moss, Greenwood Press, 1990). Her research interests include sociological theory, cultural and political sociology. Her new book project aims to enhance sociological understanding of the spectrum of normality by illustrating it with the help of literature.