Dignity, Autonomy and Embodiment*

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AB S T R A C T
The inalienable dignity of all human beings is independent of circumstances, capacities, or qualifications. Kantian autonomy (construed as the rational will, or the ability to exercise it) cannot ground such a notion. The roots of universal human dignity are more plausibly traced to the Judaeo-Christian worldview in which God loves all his children equally, despite their vulnerability and weakness. To mature morally is to come to realize that we gain nothing by insisting on our status, or 'standing on our dignity'; we should recognize instead the dependency we share with all our neighbours.

1. The problematic concept of dignity

In his fascinating paper, 'Religion, Morality and Being Human', Ingolf Dalferth reminds us of the Kantian conception of a person. In qualifying as persons, we are something very special. [1] We are not just animals, which would give us only a common value shared by any natural living being or 'offspring of the earth'. We are not even just animals with the distinctive feature of rationality; for this, though entailing that we can chose between options, and set goals for ourselves, sets us apart only in degree, not in kind, from the manifold animal species that manifest purposive activity. What makes us 'exalted above any price' is the fact that we are *persons*, that is to say, subjects who engage in moral reasoning (or 'morally practical reason'). This alone, says Kant, gives us *dignity*—in German *Würde*— an 'absolute inner worth'.[2] And Professor Dalferth glosses this by saying that ascribing personhood to someone is not a matter of degree, but a matter of a simple yes/no question: are we able to live a moral life or aren't we?

It follows, on Dalferth's analysis, that this Kantian notion of dignity is a 'strictly universal' notion: it can never be a matter of classifying humans into groups or classes. And he contrasts this universality with more elitist conceptions, such as that of Nietzsche, which ascribes a certain greatness or nobility to those capable of extraordinary acts of self-overcoming, and also with more recent accounts which make dignity depend on the instantiation of certain descriptive features. He suggests that dignity should better be understood as an 'orienting concept': it fosters, or encapsulates, a humane way of living with others, one in which 'we commit ourselves to viewing and treating every human being, not merely family and friends, but also strangers and enemies, as human persons with untouchable dignity'. Or expressed theologically, 'we—

[1] Ingolf Dalferth, 'Religion, Morality and Being Human: The Controversial Status of Human Dignity', *Ars Disputandi,* Supplement, series 6, pp. 143-180.

[2] Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals* [*Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1797]*,* trans. M. Gregor (Cambridge1996), 186 (Akademie edition, VI, 435). Quoted in Ingolf Dalferth, 'Religion, Morality and Being Human: The Controversial Status of Human Dignity', 9

each and every one of us— are more that we appear to be, because we are *persons* in and whom God makes his presence manifest to others.'[3]

Clearly the conception being articulated here is to some extent prescriptive. It does not merely purport to describe how the notion of dignity is in fact commonly used in ordinary moral and political discourse, but instead puts forward a kind of ideal regulative or normative principle: that we should be committed to living in a moral community— a community of self-respecting human agents who accord respect to every one of their fellows simply in virtue of their humanity.

One of the interesting things about this conception is that it leads us in a rather different direction from the one we should take if we were explicating dignity by focusing directly on the central Kantian notion of autonomy. Autonomy, for Kant, is 'the basis of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature' [*Autonomie is der Grund der Würde der menschlichen und jeder vernünftigen Natur*], as that aspect of our will whereby it must be considered as *selbstgesetzgebend* ('giving the law to itself').[4] What this suggests is that the independent power of exercising the rational will is what gives us our human dignity. To have human dignity is to be able to make decisions independently of the arbitrary will of another, acting in the full light of reason, free from internal or external interference with one's rational processes. Hence, to be autonomous I must be free from external tyranny (my status as a rational agent must be respected) and also from internal interference, such as arises from the contingencies of appetite and mere inclination.[5] I must be a fully rational, self-legislating being.

The Swiss euthanasia clinic *Dignitas,* which offers, for a fee, to terminate the lives of those with incurable and irreversible medical conditions, appears to focus above all on this aspect of autonomy. The 'dignity' that the clinic purports to promote and respect is above all the dignity of exercising the rational will; and this explains the elaborate procedures designed to make sure that the patient is rationally choosing to end his or her life, without confusion or external pressure. Clients are carefully interviewed on arrival at the clinic to ascertain that they are there of their own volition, and understand what they are doing. They are then interviewed again, after a 'cooling off' period of one day, to check that they are steadfast in their resolve to end their lives. And finally, on the day of the killing, they are again questioned about whether they know what is about to happen, what will be the effect of the drugs administered, and so on.[6] Now of course there are good legal reasons why an organisation involved in the business of killing[7]

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[3] Dalferth, 'Religion, Morality and Being Human, 175, 176.

[4] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* [*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten,* 1785], ch. 2, ed. Thomas E. Hill Jr. and Arnulf Zweig, (Oxford 2003), 236, 232 (Akademie edition, IV 436; 431).

[5] Thus, for Kant, moral imperatives cannot be construed as conditional on whatever contingent desires one happens to have, for 'in these cases the will never determines itself directly by the thought of an action, but only by the motivations which the anticipated effect of the action exercises on the will—*I ought to do something because I want something else.*' (*Groundwork,* ed. Hill and Zweig, 244; Akademie edn IV 444). Because of its dependency on the contingencies of inclination, action of this kind is always for Kant heteronomous.

[6] James Ross, 'One Last Helping Hand', *The Independent* (London), 24 April 2012, 44-5.

[7] The use of the term 'killing' may strike some readers as hostile or critical, but there is no such necessary implication. It is a matter of simple factual accuracy to describe the clinic's work as that of killing people, or, perhaps, helping them to kill themselves. The euphemistic (not to say Orwellian) term 'assisted dying', used for example by Mary Warnock, should cause disquiet precisely because it attempts to divert attention from what is actually being done in such cases. See Warnock, *Easeful Death: Is there a case for assisted dying?* (Oxford 2008).

should want to make sure that those who use its services are doing so in full knowledge and of their own volition. But the relevant point for the purposes of the present discussion is that the qualifications the patient has to display in order to pass these tests are very far from being a matter of simply belonging to the community of human beings. Something much more active is required— articulacy, moral responsibility, ability to respond to searching questions at interview, and so on. And these are not 'all or nothing' matters: they are matters of degree. One can clearly imagine many confused, distressed or disabled terminally ill patients failing the tests. So the 'dignity' that is the focus of attention in the Clinic's operations is by implication a property pertaining only to a qualified subset of human beings.

If we are to make acceptable use of the concept of human dignity, it seems clear that it needs to be a more 'universalist' notion than this (here I would wholeheartedly agree with what I take to be the conclusions of Dalferth's paper). It needs to be something that is possessed by all of us, *qua* human, and which should be recognized as an inalienable and absolute human attribute, independent of our circumstances, capacities, group-membership, qualifications or faculties. It is notorious that the principal forms of modern secular consequentialism cannot ground such a universal notion of dignity (Peter Singer's 'preference utilitarianism', in its attitude to the unborn and to infants, makes this abundantly clear);[8] and as the *Dignitas* example illustrates, it also seems that Kantian autonomy (construed as the rational will, or the ability to exercise it) cannot ground it either. Even Dalferth's heroic attempts to ground dignity in a universalist Kantian notion of membership of the moral community do not quite seem to work; for membership of the moral community presumably requires certain abilities. Dalferth bases his argument on the idea that Kantian dignity is 'ascribed not to the individual human being directly but to morality, and through morality to humanity';[9] but this 'indirect' Kantian strategy seems to me to problematic for a number of reasons. First, it is the individual who needs the protections of dignity, not humanity in general (it would hardly be comforting to be told: 'don't worry that we are sacrificing you— we are protecting the dignity of the human race in general!'). And second, ascribing dignity to the institution of morality seems to gloss over the fact that we participate in the institution to differing degrees (young children, for example, clearly participate less, since they are involved merely as recipients of moral action but not as fully fledged agents). So on the 'dignity-as-belonging-to-morality-in-general' argument, we seem to need a further reason why the protecting embrace of dignity should extend to all humans, independent of their capacities, their rational will, and their degree of participation in the moral domain.

2. How is worth conferred?
The Latin word *dignitas* has connotations which partly overlap with those of the German term *Würde.* In its Classical usage, it most frequently refers to some exalted or honoured status that attached to someone in virtue of their rank or position— the dignity of a consul, for example, or of a patrician as opposed to a plebeian. This usage spills over into English term 'dignity', so that when Prince Florizel in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* leaves the royal palace in disguise to woo the humble Perdita, a courtier describes him as one 'who has his Dignity and Duty both cast off, Fled from his Father,

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[8] Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge1979, 3rd edn. 2011).
[9] Dalferth, 'Religion, Morality and Being Human, 158.

from his hopes, and with a Shepherd's daughter.'[10] (Of course it eventually turns out that Perdita, unbeknownst to anyone, is actually herself a King's daughter, so the threat to Florizel's dignity which would have been occasioned by his marrying someone of low birth is happily avoided.)

In this conception, status is conferred by birth or high office. But as so often in Shakespeare, the idea is no sooner developed than it is subverted. When the lovers are discovered, and Florizel is subjected to the furious wrath of his royal father for having risked his dignity, Perdita refuses to be cowed:

> I was not much afeard; for once or twice
> I was about to speak and tell him plainly,
> The selfsame sun that shines upon his court
> Hides not his visage from our cottage but
> Looks on alike. [11]

Just as the sun shines on all, high and lowly alike, so, she seems to be saying, distinctions of rank and status are irrelevant to someone's true worth. This conception comes not from the Classical or pagan world, where considerations of 'dignity' as rank were all-important, but from the Judaeo-Christian worldview. In the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 'the dignity of the human person is rooted in his or her creation in the image and likeness of God.'[12] Or again, 'All human beings, in as much as they are created in the image of God, have the dignity of a person.'[13]

Nicolas Wolterstorff, in an impressive recent study, has underlined the roots of this idea in the Hebrew Bible, where he argues, with a wealth of supporting evidence, that there is a clear recognition of the equal value of all in the sight of God. Throughout the Old Testament, what Wolterstorff aptly calls the 'quartet of the vulnerable'— widows, orphans, resident aliens, and the impoverished— make repeated appearances. And in the injunctions of the law and the prophets, and the poetry of the Psalms, God is seen as calling on his people to 'loose the bonds of injustice' by rescuing these vulnerable groups who have been wronged: to 'raise the poor from the dust, and lift the needy from the ash-heap' (Psalm 113 [112]). Injustice is seen both as wronging God and as wronging the victims of injustice by failing to recognize their inherent human worth.[14]

The New Testament continues the same message, though Wolterstorff argues that it often comes to our ears in distorted or diluted form, owing to difficulties of translation. Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (5:6) says 'Blessed are those who hunger for *dikaiosune.*' The latter term is often translated 'righteousness', which today may suggest some sort of personal rectitude, whereas the Greek stem (*dik-*) has a much more interpersonal and social flavour and connects directly with justice. The 'kingdom' which Jesus was to inaugurate was to be a kingdom of 'justice and righteousness' – the very combination that so frequently occurs in the Old Testament (in the Hebrew terms *mishpat* and *tsedeqa*). And the righteous king or Messiah foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures was to be one who (in the words of Psalm 72 [71]), 'judges the poor with justice and … saves the lives of the needy.' On Wolterstorff's reading, Jesus' words and

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[10] William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* [*c.* 1610], Act V, scene 1, line 182.

[11] *Winter's Tale*, Act IV, scene 4, lines 434-7.

[12] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [1997], Part III, section 1, Ch. 1; §1700.

[13] *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* [2005], §66.

[14] Nicolas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, 2008).

actions (consorting with outcasts, touching and curing those who were ritually unclean, explaining why it was right to heal on the Sabbath) were designed to 'appeal to our worth as human beings to explain God's care for each and every one of us.'[15]

Not only does Wolterstorff trace the origins of the idea of universal human dignity back to early Jewish and Christian moral thinking, but he also makes the striking and controversial claim that without such theistic resources we will be left without any satisfactory grounding for dignity: no secular worldview can do the job. Now while it is impossible to deny the decisive influence of the Judaeo-Christian tradition on the development of Western moral thought, the majority of contemporary moral philosophers would nevertheless strongly resist the suggestion that our modern conceptions of justice, human dignity and rights require a theistic underpinning. Many would regard Kant's principle of respect for persons (referred to many times in Dalferth's paper) as providing a fully secularized basis for the modern conception of inherent human dignity— the right of each of us to be treated as an end in him or her self, never merely as a means. And this in turn is often seen as the origin of the modern idea, found in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights that 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity ...' (Article 1). Wolterstorff is adamant, however, that 'it is impossible to develop a secular account of human dignity adequate for grounding human rights'.[16] This is because Kantian respect hinges on the capacity for rational action; yet if human worth depends on this, then those who lack that capacity (infants, those born with severe mental impairment, Alzheimer's patients) risk being excluded from the domain of right-holders. The point is a familiar one in the debates over Kantian ethics, and Wolterstorff makes repeated use of it to pose a powerful challenge to a variety of secular moral theorists (including Alan Gewirth and Ronald Dworkin): if rational choice (Gewirth) or mental creativity (Dworkin) is the criterion, how can this explain why every human, *qua* human, should be regarded as having inherent worth?[17]

In the Christian worldview, by contrast, 'God loves ... each and every human being equally and permanently'; and if this is true, then 'natural human rights are grounded in that love,' since they 'inhere in the bestowed worth that supervenes on being thus loved.'[18] The idea has a certain intuitive plausibility, since our experience of human parental and conjugal love does seem to give some support to the idea that attachment or commitment to someone can endow that person with a certain moral status. Nevertheless, philosophical critics are sure here to raise the question of how exactly love can 'bestow worth'. The question is related to the vexed issue of the Euthyphro problem (which, perhaps disappointingly, is not directly addressed by Wolterstorff); the crucial worry is whether love in itself can make something valuable.

One is reminded here of the arguments of Harry Frankfurt that by loving something, or caring about it, we imbue it with worth or value.[19] Value, on Frankfurt's picture is a matter of our exercising our will, our choice, to care about something or someone. The resulting picture is one where, in a certain sense, it is we who *create* values by our own authentic choices. By deciding what we care about we bring value into the world. But there is a serious problem with this view, together with many other 'internalist' views (compare Bernard Williams's idea that value is generated by my

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[15] Wolterstorff, *Justice*, p. 131.

[16] Wolterstorff, *Justice*, p. 325

[17] See Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion* (New York1993); Alan Gewirth, *Human Rights* (Chicago1982).

[18] Wolterstorff, *Justice,* p. 360.

[19] Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton 2004), 40ff.

commitments to certain 'projects' that I make my own)[20] — namely that they seem to put the cart before the horse. I cannot, surely, create value or worth merely by caring about something (or else I could bestow worth on a pile of worthless rubbish merely by choosing to care about it); on the contrary, it seems that my caring about something is only justified if that thing is *already* worth caring about. Caring, in other words, *depends* on worth, rather than creating it.

Perhaps, however, the status of the person caring makes a difference. Wolterstorff uses the analogy of a great monarch bestowing her friendship on a courtier: the courtier is now 'honoured and envied in ways she was not before'.[21] Unfortunately for this argument, it still leaves open the question of whether the courtier *ought* to be so honoured. Has genuine worth been bestowed— is the courtier now genuinely fit to be honoured— or is any resulting 'honouring' that may occur merely a prudently deferential recognition of the monarch's arbitrary power? (Analogies here abound with the Euthyphro problem: the mere arbitrary commands of a God, however powerful, cannot create moral obligation). If, however, we add the premise that the aforesaid Queen is supremely good and wise and just, then her bestowing of her friendship will make not just a causal but a normative difference: there will now be genuine reason to honour the courtier, namely that in the eyes of one who is wholly good and wise and just the courtier in question is an object of affection and delight.

I conclude that there is reason to think that the impartial love of a supremely good and just God for all his creatures does indeed give us reason to honour them all alike. In the eyes of a supremely loving, good and wise heavenly father, each of us, as Wolterstorff puts it, is 'irreducibly precious'. As for whether there can be viable alternative secular groundings for the idea of universal dignity and worth, in the light of Wolterstorff's arguments that seems doubtful but still open. He has made a strong case for thinking the standard Kantian-derived attempts to provide such grounding are not promising, but this evidently leaves open the logical possibility that a better secular alternative might be round the corner.

3. Dignity and embodiment

In the final section of this paper, I should like to connect some of the ideas so far broached to the question of embodiment, bearing in mind the theme outlined in the general rubric for this conference, that 'religion is always embodied in various ways.' The contrast, discussed at various points in Ingolf Dalferth's paper, between secular and religious approaches to human dignity leaves it open how far either conception might be understood as irreducibly body-involving. Certainly, the Kantian approaches seem to lay stress on rather abstract notions— dignity as attaching to an abstract human institution (morality), rather then to individual embodied creatures; dignity as a function of purely 'noumenal' properties, such as the exercise of rational choice, rather than as depending on our situatedness in the embodied biological world. What of the religion-based approaches? The one that Dalferth adumbrates at the close of his paper again seems to abstract somewhat from the context of our embodied human existence. We are born as humans, he suggests, but we have the power to become something more — to become *persons* 'capable of living a humane life as persons among persons before

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[20] See Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley 1993), Ch. 5. For more discussion of the positions of Frankfurt and Williams, see J. Cottingham, 'Integrity and Fragmentation', *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 27, no 1 (2010), 2-14.

[21] Wolterstorff, *Justice*, p. 259.

God'. The focus of attention is not on our similarities with (or differences from) other animals, but on 'the … ethical contrast between humane or inhumane ways of living.' [22] (The latter contrast is actually described by Dalferth as 'anthropological or ethical', but the former term does not seem to play any role, at any rate if one understands 'anthropology' to involve an irreducible reference to our biological and embodied nature as a species.)

The concluding sentences of Dalferth's paper, however, point directly to the importance, in elucidating the theistic ground for dignity, of a *relationship*— the relationship of being a neighbour. 'We respect others because we respect that God respects everyone as his neighbour… God is the neighbour of everyone.' Now this relationship, it seems to me, is one that has to be primarily understood in terms of embodiment, and indeed in terms of physical location. A neighbour in the most basic sense is someone who lives next-door— in physical proximity to you.

When talking of God, we may be inclined to 'spiritualize' all this, on the grounds that God is supposed to be incorporeal, and so to have no physical relationship with anyone. But that, I think, would be too swift. In the first place, the fact that God cannot be comprehended in physical terms does not licence the inference that we can comprehend him better as a 'non-physical' kind of Cartesian ghost. It is surely better to admit, with Nicolas Malebranche, that the deity must wholly transcend any anthropomorphic conceptions: just as we should not imagine God to be corporeal, Malebranche observed, so we should not really describe him as a Mind or Spirit, since that invites comparison with a human mind. Rather, Malebranche suggested, we should think that 'just as He includes the perfections of matter without being material, so He includes the perfections of created spirits without being spirit— at least in the manner we conceive spirit.'[23] All we can really say of the 'neighbour' relation between God and his creatures— the only analogy we have for it— is that of physical proximity: God is somehow *close* to us: close to us in the closest possible way— closer within me than I am to my inner self, as St Augustine put it.[24]

In the second place, in speaking of the relationship between God and human beings as 'personal', we should not be too swift to 'spiritualize' the central feature of personhood which is ascribed both to God and to humankind made in his image. On the contrary, both modern philosophy (one thinks here particularly of Wittgenstein) and traditional Christian doctrine (the conception of God as supremely revealed in the human life of Jesus of Nazareth) concur in supposing that personal attributes are to be understood primarily in term of the embodied beings who manifest them. In general, our handle on personhood, despite perennial philosophical tendencies to abstractify it, is an irreducibly corporeal one, and we need to beware of following John Locke down a long road of philosophical errors and confusions, in trying to define a 'person' in terms of something abstract called 'consciousness'. As Anthony Kenny has persuasively argued, 'the concept of a human being— an animal of a particular species with particular capacities— provides us with the only concept of a person that we can really understand.'[25] The latter claim might seem something of an exaggeration if it were taken to mean that only a human being could count as a person (we can certainly make sense of the idea of a Martian being a person); but it remains true, as Kenny implies, that

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[22] Dalferth, 'Religion, Morality and Being Human', p. 173.
[23] Nicolas Malebranche, *Recherche de la Vérité* [1674], Bk. 3, Ch. 9.
[24] *interior intimo meo*; Augustine, *Confessiones* [397-8], III, 6, 11.
[25] Anthony Kenny, *What I Believe* (London 2006), 73.

it the concept of a person is most fundamentally at home in the context of our human, biological status as a certain kind of embodied species, and that it is from here that any possible understanding of the concept must begin.

We need to keep these points in mind when reflecting further on the concept of a neighbour. The story in Luke (10: 29-37) of the Good Samaritan, told in response to the question 'But who is my neighbour?', shows that my neighbour need not be understood simply as the guy next door. But the story nonetheless depends crucially on the idea of a physical, locatable encounter, on the road going up from Jerusalem to Jericho— as the Samaritan comes upon someone who had fallen among thieves, tends to him physically, binding up his wounds, takes him to the inn, and arranges for him to be cared for. To be a neighbour to someone is to be *there* for him, not to simply wish him well in some disembodied haze of general benevolence.

The importance of physicality and location in religious thought has been brought out recently in Mark Wynn's illuminating study *Faith and Place.* Many theologians and philosophers in the past have been very wary of conceptions that seem to 'localize' God and his action— something that is connected with the so-called 'scandal of particularity'. Why should the eternal creator of the universe have a preference for a particular tribe on an insignificant planet revolving round a very average star? Why should he manifest himself as a human being in an unprepossessing town in a remote corner of the early Roman empire? In Catholic Christianity, with its traditional emphasis on relics and pilgrimage sites, the problem has seemed to many people to be particularly acute: why should an omnibenevolent creator dispense favours specifically to those who travel to Lourdes or to Santiago de Compostela?

An uncompromisingly 'metaphysical' answer offered by the hard-line traditionalist believer would be that God miraculously exercises his power precisely by intervening, or by being present in an especially immediate way, in particular locations. At the other end of the spectrum would be a psychological or pragmatic answer of the kind that might be offered by theologians of a more 'progressive' stripe: it just so happens that some places put people in a beneficial frame of mind, perhaps because of their natural beauty, or moving architecture, or historical associations. But the latter view might seem to smack of reductionism— the attempt to purge theology of reference to anything not readily explicable in natural terms; while the former position could leave one wondering at the theological coherence of the idea that the activity of an omnipresent, omnipotent God is 'localised' in this way.

Wynn ingeniously steers a middle course between these two extremes. To explain how particular places can be religiously significant, we neither have to venture into the murky realms of metaphysical speculation about God's mode of intervention in the natural world, nor do we have to reduce the value of a sacred space to no more than its subjective effects in the minds of those who visit it. How might such an intermediate strategy work? In the case of pilgrimage, rather than grounding its meaning in miraculous or supernatural events on the one hand, or just in the interior life of the believer on the other, Wynn suggests that we need to take note of the *physicality* of the practice: it is the 'relations of physical continuity and proximity that explain the sense of pilgrimage practice'.[26]

These features certainly seem important in many religious contexts. A highly successful exhibition at the British Museum in Summer of 2011 explored what the curators described as 'the spiritual and artistic significance of Christian relics and

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[26] Mark Wynn, *Faith and Place* (Oxford 2009), 152.

reliquaries in medieval Europe'. The 'artistic' element was clear enough: many of the reliquaries are extraordinarily beautiful, their craftsmanship exquisite. But the religious significance, for many of those visiting the exhibition, surely had something to do with the 'physical continuity and proximity' underlined by Wynn. You are now, at this moment., standing in front of the very casket that contains the remains of the revered man or woman who so many centuries ago suffered and died for their faith. Mere superstition, or (its even more degenerate cousin) mere touristic gawping? No doubt there can be elements of both, but it would take a very cynical critic, faced with the extraordinary devotion manifested in these lovingly wrought works of art, to suppose this to be the whole story.

The point has application beyond the purely religious sphere. Wynn points out that in visiting the grave of a loved one 'it matters to us ... that we should be physically alongside the remains of the dead person.' And describing some crucial episodes in his own friendship with the poet Edmund Cusick, who died in 2007, he argues that the development of human relationships is often rooted in a shared sensibility for place— a sensibility which, in turn, is closely bound up with 'bodily movement and affectively informed perception'.[27] Part of Wynn's agenda here is to counter, or at least supplement, the highly abstract and intellectualistic framework within which much philosophy, especially the philosophy of religion, is typically carried on. When friends revisit a favourite place where they have often walked and talked together, the place itself may have a distinctive character, a *genius loci*, which allows them to interact and converse in a distinctive way, and to 'affirm ... their commitment to certain values, by means of embodied interaction with the [place], rather than by way of explicit articulation'.[28] This is an argument that needs a specific personal narrative, such as Wynn provides, to make it vivid. But the case for such an 'embodied epistemology' seems very persuasive. Wynn does not mention Thomas Hardy's poetry, but anyone who has responded to masterpieces like 'At Castle Boterel' (1913) will understand something of what is meant. Everything hinges on a physical, locatable encounter:

Myself and a girlish form benighted
In dry March weather. We climbed the road
Beside a chaise. We had just alighted
To ease the sturdy pony's load
When he sighed and slowed ...

Primaeval rocks form the road's steep border,
And much have they faced there, first and last,
Of the transitory in Earth's long order;
But what they record in colour and cast
Is - that we two passed ...

I look and see it there, shrinking, shrinking,
I look back at it amid the rain
For the very last time; for my sand is sinking,
And I shall traverse old love's domain
Never again ...

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[27] Wynn, *Faith and Place*, 42-3.
[28] Wynn, *Faith and Place*, 28-9

The poet's grasp of the significance of his relationship with his former love is intimately bound up with his knowledge of the *place* where they once alighted from the pony cart, their *physical orientation* as they climbed the steep hill together, flanked by the 'primeval rocks' that have witnessed so much of 'the transitory in Earth's long order', and which now see the poet *physically present* at the scene in old age, knowing that he will 'traverse old love's domain never again.'

I would submit that there are important lessons to be learned here about the general structure of human relationships. Love for friends is not an abstractified flowing of benevolence or even of individuated commitment, but a dynamic process that unfolds in corporeally and physically mediated ways, through what we do together, how we walk and talk together, where we go, and the trajectory of embodied memories of shared dwellings and journeys. To be a friend or neighbour with someone is to go with them along these paths, and to be prepared to have one's own space encroached on by them, as they will reciprocally be prepared to receive us. If we were purely rational disembodied agents or mere 'persons', in some quasi-Cartesian sense of mere 'thinking things' or 'conscious beings', true relationships as we understand them would be inconceivable: they would be reduced to detached interchanges of information, interactive exercises of intellection and volition, but without all the vulnerabilities of embodied particularity that make love and friendship truly precious. For in true relations of neighbourliness, friendship and love, we abandon our austere self-sufficient autonomy, and accept our 'passivity' (to use a term aptly deployed by Dalferth at the close of his paper): we know our need, our dependency, and need it to be recognized by others. And once we know this, we can see at once that our dignity and worth cannot depend on our rational powers and capacities, nor our ability to determine our choices as moral lawgivers, nor any other intellectual endowment, even that of consciousness (which may of course be dormant, or de-activated, as in a coma), but simply and solely on our need for others to reach out to us, as we need to reach out to them. This is a need that applies to every single human being on the planet. To mature morally is to come to realize that we gain nothing by insisting on our status, or 'standing on our dignity' (as the English idiom has it), but that we gain everything by recognizing the dependency we share with all our neighbours.

Finally to the issue which has been involved, explicitly or implicitly, throughout this paper, and which I take to be central to Ingolf Dalferth's concerns also, namely the relative merits of religious versus secular accounts of dignity. The focus on passivity and vulnerability that has just emerged seems to me to be a clear point in favour of the religious account; for it is not clear that our human weakness and dependency provides any purely secular reason why dignity or worth should attach to us all qua human. If anything, the reverse seems true. For on a standard Darwinian view of human nature, our nature is simply a set of contingent features that have emerged out of a blind nexus of forces, shaped by random mutation and the struggle for survival. So selecting any one of these features, such as our frailty and dependency, as the basis for according inherent worth to us, seems pretty arbitrary, or at any rate no more or less warranted than ascribing true dignity on the basis of strength, following Nietzsche, or 'great-souledness', following Aristotle.[29]

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[29] Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [*Also Sprach Zarathustra* 1883]; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* [325 BC], Bk. IV.

On the Judaeo-Christian view, by contrast, human beings, despite their frailty (formed of the 'dust of the earth') are, as the Hebrew Bible has it, made in the image and likeness of God.[30] So simply in virtue of our human status we participate in some way in that infinite worth that is God. (Again, we should beware of 'spiritualizing' this— the creation language of Genesis is robustly corporeal.) And building on this foundation, the Christian vision takes the extraordinary further step of declaring that our corporeal human nature is actually 'divinised' — raised up to the fullest dignity by Christ's humbling himself to take our bodily nature upon him. As the poet and priest Gerard Manley Hopkins so vividly puts it:

> In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
> I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
> This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
>   Is immortal diamond.[31]

Nothing, on the face of it, could be more undignified than this 'Jack' — a common, ordinary fellow, of undistinguished worth; this 'patch', a mere fool or ninny; this potsherd, a broken fragment, like that with which the wretched Job, reduced to the utmost indignity, scraped his sores (Job 2:8); weak and feeble, as perishable as matchwood. Yet all at once, by Christ's sharing in our bodily nature, this paltry individual becomes 'immortal diamond' — of infinite worth and dignity.

None of this, of course, counts as a philosophically watertight theistic grounding of the concept of human dignity, since it depends on the revealed truth of the Incarnation. But for those who accept that truth, it does indeed, as Hopkins beautifully expresses it, raise every human being, 'all at once', to infinite, Christlike, worth. The secularist can, to be sure, resolve to treat every human being *as if* they were of such infinite worth; but it is entirely unclear what might ground that resolve, since there is nothing in the way things are, on the naturalist worldview, that underwrites it; there is only a plurality of diverse specimens of a certain species of featherless biped, some stronger, some weaker, some outstanding and splendid, some defective and wretched, all subject to infirmity and eventual decrepitude. The universal dignity of humankind is the pearl of great price in our ethical culture. But torn out of the religious seabed that nurtured it, it may not take very long to be swept away on the advancing tide of secularism.

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[30] Genesis, 2:7 (dust) and 1:26 (image).
[31] G. M. Hopkins, 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire'; *Poems (1876-1889)*, no 49, final stanza.