

The Simple Dignity of Sentient Life: Speciesism and Human Dignity

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Does the very idea of “human dignity” entail some moral disrespect for nonhuman animals? Put otherwise, does the notion of “*human* dignity” smack of speciesism (roughly, a view whereby nonhuman, sentient individuals are denied [adequate] moral standing on essentially arbitrary grounds)? Animal advocates, like James Rachels, often allege that there is a serious clash between the traditional view of human dignity and adequate moral recognition of nonhuman animals: “The traditional doctrine of human dignity is speciesist to the core, for it implies that the interests of humans have priority over those of all other creatures.”¹

There is a further reason—beyond those put forth in a critique like Rachels’s—to be concerned with the claim that the very idea of human dignity is an impediment to the proper moral recognition of animals. The ascendancy of an important modern moral notion like human dignity should not, it seems, also become an occasion for the subjugation of animals—for example, by providing an alleged rationale for harming them. It would be a cruel irony indeed for an idea that is seen as a source of moral progress—by providing a ground for our moral respect for humans regardless of social class, race, etc.—to become a source for rationalizing harm toward nonhuman animals. This paper will first evaluate the claim that the idea of human dignity is a source of speciesist thinking. Later I will discuss a related question: can the claim that nonhuman animals “have dignity” be rendered fully consistent with a broadly kantian account of (human) dignity?

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Before addressing the claim that the idea of human dignity is a speciesist notion, I will state some assumptions. I will take it to be the case without full argument here that some aspects of speciesism, or related forms of disrespect, are in fact morally problematic. “Speciesism” covers many particular forms of what might be called “species-based disrespect.” As a backdrop to help focus the argument to come, I endorse two aspects of an antispeciesist critique of human-centered moral views: (1) the pain of nonhuman sentient creatures—or animals²—has genuine moral significance, and (2) animals and some of their interests have independent moral standing.

Another way to put my point is to note that any moral obligation that would be generated in virtue of claims (1) or (2)—for example, a very

general obligation not to cause unnecessary pain to animals—is an obligation owed to animals themselves and not owed only to other human persons. This is, of course, to call into question the “indirect duty” account of such obligations, whereby all duties regarding animals are in fact owed to other human persons. As a *complete* account of obligations regarding animals the indirect duty view claims that the sole reason one should not cause unnecessary pain to animals is because doing so could harm human persons. It could harm humans, for instance, by helping to form in the persons who cause such pain habits of cruelty, or it could promote a more general insensitivity to causing unnecessary pain that might infect attitudes and actions regarding other humans.

I will further explain the distinction, to which I will turn again in section 3, between a *complete* account of an obligation and a *partial* account. Roughly, a complete account of an obligation is a statement of all the theoretical grounds for that obligation, whereas a partial account of an obligation provides at least one but not all of the theoretical grounds for the obligation. A particular obligation might be overdetermined in two general ways: either various different theories might each provide sufficient grounding for a particular obligation, or within the bounds of a single theory (for example, from within virtue theory) several different grounds might provide sufficient justification for a particular obligation. A complete account of an obligation would then provide all of the (intra- or intertheoretical) grounds for the obligation. A partial account would provide only some.

Using this distinction the main point about indirect duties from above can now be clarified: the fact that an indirect duty view is a good partial account of moral obligations regarding animals (because, for example, on virtue-based theories it would provide good reasons for those obligations) hardly qualifies it as a complete account of those obligations. An indirect duty view of obligations regarding animals may be, as in Kant, based on a substantive view of the moral status of animals: for Kant, destruction of inanimate objects is immoral in essentially the same way as cruelty toward animals, because for Kant animals and objects have the same lack of moral standing. For Kant animals and other objects are not rational agents with the capacity to subject themselves to the moral law and thereby have no independent moral worth.³ When the indirect duty view is offered in Kant as an alternative to the idea of positive obligations to animals for their own sake, it is put forward as a complete account of our moral duties regarding animals. Yet the indirect duty view seems to be a partial account masquerading as a complete account. As a complete account it simply seems implausible on its face, especially given the present state of knowledge about animal ethology and physiology. That is, it seems implausible that the duty not to cause unnecessary pain to a sentient being is not *in any respect* owed to that creature. In any event, for the purpose of evaluating the claim about the speciesism of human dignity, I will maintain without further argument that the indirect duty view should be rejected as a complete account of our moral duties to animals.

Finally, consider a few preliminary remarks designed to help clarify the complex notions of dignity and human dignity. To fix ideas I will briefly note some general characteristics of a broadly “kantian”—if not fully Kantian—conception of dignity. I call this present view “kantian” (and not, say, “humean”) for two reasons: (1) it is at least consistent with most, if not all, of Kant’s central remarks about dignity, especially if we recognize the difference between the general concept of dignity and the narrower conception of human dignity; and (2) some of Kant’s views are inspiration for this kantian way to think about dignity. The view is “kantian” (not Kantian) because at the same time interpretations of Kant’s views do not determine every aspect of this account.

The uniquely moral use of the concept of dignity is typically reserved for human beings. Within the boundaries of the general concept of the moral dignity of an individual, it will help to notice an important distinction between *having* dignity and *acting with* dignity. The cognate notion of a dignified action helps characterize acting with dignity. These two general conceptions, although related, are clearly not identical; for instance, human beings may be said to have dignity even while they may not always, or often, act in a dignified manner. Furthermore, to say that one *has* dignity includes two further conceptions: having a kind of *moral worth* and having a type of *moral status*. Of course, the moral status of an individual might be directly grounded in her moral worth or even vice versa. So speaking very generally, a being that has dignity has inherent, rather than only instrumental, moral worth. And such a being has an independent moral status, higher than anything with contingent worth.

Kant, of course, says much more about what he calls “dignity” (*Würde*), for instance, (1) that it sets strict limits on what kinds of rational trade-offs might be made with beings having dignity as he conceives it, (2) that it is grounded in certain rational capacities, and (3) that all human beings are possessed of dignity and have an equal moral worth and moral status. But for present purposes I will operate with a more abstract, and thereby less Kantian, understanding of the notion of having dignity. For present purposes, having dignity is having (1) an intrinsic moral worth and (2) an independent moral status. Such a “kantian” view is not a watered-down version of Kant but instead a broader and more abstract account of some Kantian themes devoid of other Kantian commitments (for example, that morality itself is essentially rule-governed and rational in a singularly Kantian sense). The point of adopting a generally kantian point of view for this analysis of the alleged speciesism of the very idea of (human) dignity is twofold. First, to consider both a plausible and a “traditional” conception of dignity. Second, to avoid begging the questions at hand by just assuming a very permissive perspective on having dignity, that is, one already obviously compatible with one (controversial) conclusion to come: an extension of the title of dignity to sentient creatures.

In arguing that the traditional notion of human dignity “is speciesist to the core,” Rachels is taking up a now familiar theme of animal advocates.⁴ The first version of this claim can be set aside readily because it is clearly not entailed by the broadly kantian conception of (human) dignity set out here.⁵ The claim is that the traditional doctrine of human dignity suggests that moral worth, or status, is based solely on species *membership*. Putting the point in terms of moral worth, the view is that all humans (that is, members of the species *Homo sapiens sapiens*) and only humans have moral worth. But kantians, and indeed Kant himself, would instead ground the dignity of human beings on a rational capacity and *not* on species membership.⁶

In fact a kantian understanding of the dignity of human beings is explicitly not species-specific in two senses. (And here kantians are, at least in the first sense, in line with a more strictly Kantian view.) First, it is not necessarily the case that only humans can have the relevant capacity. For kantians some cognitively complex animals, like anthropoid apes or cetaceans, or even extraterrestrial beings might in fact have the relevant capacity for rational deliberation and hence the special moral worth and status of human dignity.⁷ Even Kant thought that if they existed, angels were rational; but they are surely not members of the human species. It is a contingent fact, if a fact at all, that humans *alone* possess the capacity that grounds their moral worth.

Second, it is not in fact the case that *all* humans have this capacity. In spite of the fact that Kant himself may have thought otherwise, some members of the species *Homo sapiens sapiens* lack completely the relevant rational capacities (as well as the potential to develop or regain them) that ground what Kant called human dignity. With a variety of quite common contemporary medical interventions, such individuals can and do remain alive—for example, a vast number of individuals with serious and irreversible brain disorders ranging from anencephaly to persistent vegetative states.⁸ That Kant himself may have thought all humans do have dignity, or in so saying did not have such cases in mind, is of no real significance to a reasonable kantian understanding of who has “human dignity.” Such a kantian account may ground a human being’s possession of *human* dignity on facts about the possession of a capacity for practical rationality. This second point—that on a kantian view not all humans have human dignity—will no doubt be worrisome to some, including some who take themselves to be kantians. This worry will be discussed directly. However, Rachels’s first form of speciesism simply does not apply to the traditional doctrine of human dignity understood in this kantian, or even in the first sense in a more strictly Kantian, fashion.⁹

Animal advocates do, however, have a further and a deeper argument that suggests another sense in which the notion of the dignity of humanity is speciesist. In short, the view is that “species-membership is correlated with *other* differences that are [morally] significant.”¹⁰ Rachels distinguishes four versions of this view; I will not discuss each of them, however, for it is not my purpose here to evaluate (Rachels’s) arguments against *speciesism*, some

of which seem to me to be on the whole correct. It is rather my point here to determine if a kantian view of dignity does in fact entail species-based disrespect. To that point, one central and recurring theme does, however, need discussion. Rachels's main challenge to the traditional view of human dignity is that some humans might not be deserving of the status of human dignity.¹¹ This point requires comment for two reasons. First, I have already suggested what is surely a controversial point: that at least a kantian view of dignity need not hold that all humans in fact have "human dignity." Second, Rachels advances here what has become a very familiar, and often regarded as powerful, argument of animal advocates generally: that supporters of the idea of human dignity simply cannot accept the conclusion that some humans do not have human dignity.¹² I think they can.

Rachels's version of this central argument goes roughly like this: the traditional view of human dignity dictates that we should not use (e.g., "as laboratory subjects or as food") any human beings, no matter how cognitively compromised, *because they have human dignity*.¹³ Yet I have already suggested that on a kantian view, and perhaps even on a good contemporary understanding of Kant's view, not all humans should be taken to have *human* dignity. Put another way, not all humans have equal dignity.

The problem Rachels poses here can be solved once we recognize that he supposes without any supporting argument that the notion of human dignity itself provides a complete, or at least a necessary partial, account of an obligation like the duty to avoid using a severely retarded human being as a laboratory subject. Yet it is far from obvious that this is the case. The point I wish to make here is simply that the notion of human dignity might for a kantian provide neither a complete nor a necessary partial account of such obligations. This is not to say that for the kantian there is not an obligation to respect the irreversibly and severely compromised human being but rather that the idea of human dignity is not, even for the kantian, the proper way to understand how it is grounded.

From a broadly kantian perspective, neither the general concept of dignity nor the more specific conception of human dignity is best understood as a *complete* account of obligations to severely mentally compromised humans because it is not in fact the only possible ground for such obligations. Furthermore, the more specific conception of human dignity at issue in Rachels's argument may not even be a necessary *partial* account of such obligations for the kantian, because an alternative ground—say, kantian moral virtue(s)—can provide an account of our obligations regarding severely and irreversibly brain-damaged human beings. Consider the related, if somewhat extreme, example of a kantian faced with the question: should one respect a corpse (say, by not using it for third base in one's softball game)? Though the corpse unequivocally lacks human dignity, a kantian might have a variety of alternative reasons to avoid such desecration. These might include: (1) considerations of the virtue of the agent himself, (2) indirect duties to others who have reason to care about the corpse, and (3) some minimal but universalizable respect for the human form itself,

symbolically represented by a corpse, devoid though it is of any potential for rational capacity.

It is not my point here to provide a full and finalized argument for how to ground such obligations. I simply wish to note that even for a *kantian* the idea of the human dignity of severely and irreversibly brain-damaged humans need not provide necessary grounding for the obligations at issue, in spite of animal advocates' tendency to insist that it does. A *kantian* of the sort I envision here would recognize grounds other than those rules linked to an account of the human dignity of moral patients as support for obligations regarding them. The claim here can be further generalized, since it is not my point to show that it is virtues, rather than rules, that can cover these kinds of obligations, but instead to show that the possession of human dignity by such moral patients need not be at the ground floor in either case. Rather the obligation can be grounded indirectly, for example, in those traits of character that ought to be reinforced in the agent or duties owed to friends and family of severely and irreversibly brain-damaged human beings.¹⁴ In short, the notion of human dignity, and any principles based upon it, need not do all of the moral work for a *kantian* account of morality. Although human dignity may be a particularly useful way to discuss the moral irrelevance of traits like race, gender, or social class, it is surely over-worked if it is put forward to explain every possible obligation regarding all members of our species.

It may be useful to sort out some further features of the emerging view of the general concept of dignity that I am presently outlining. I have already alluded to one additional distinction between two more conceptions of dignity. That distinction is between "human dignity" and what I will call "simple dignity." (I discuss having "simple dignity" in further detail in section 3.) Having "human dignity" is, roughly, having the moral status and moral worth possessed by a typical human being. This notion of a typical human being might well be understood in terms of certain salient rational capacities. Given that understanding, the moral status of "human dignity" is surely not held by all humans; and it is only a contingent fact, if a fact at all, that it is held by only humans.

In light of the argument above, the *kantian* idea of human dignity cannot be said to be speciesist in either of the ways that Rachels suggests. Of course, the way that Kant himself uses the idea of human dignity (which I try to steer a careful course through) is, for one, to suggest that "human dignity" is the way to designate the domain of individuals deserving of moral consideration. Kant surely does not recognize (but a reform-minded [*kantian*] theorist can) the existence of what I call simple dignity. In part because some critiques of *speciesism* seem telling, it is reasonable to find room within the general concept of dignity for the idea of the simple dignity of sentient beings. It is one of my main points here that a reasonable (*kantian*) moral theorist can reject the strict *Kantian* idea that human dignity is the only kind of dignity. Put otherwise, she might reject the idea that human dignity is the only genuine kind of moral worth and status. I side here with Rachels, roughly about some of the failings of speciesist thinking,

in order to demonstrate how he is overstating the case that the idea of human dignity is “speciesist to the core.”

Finally, on the kantian view of having dignity outlined here, it is simply not true that there is no moral respect at all due to individuals, human or not, who lack whatever capacity, or the potential for it, that is deemed central to having human dignity. For instance, for reasons enumerated above they might be treated *as if* they had human dignity. My main point is that some allegiance to the ideas of dignity or human dignity need not entail, Rachels’s insistence notwithstanding, any allegiance to speciesism. Of course it might be said Rachels’s use of “human dignity” is shorthand for a cluster of traditional ideas that is *in fact* speciesist. Yet, such a move so clearly begs the question at issue that I will move forward to other issues. I have simply tried to show above that a broadly kantian notion of human dignity is not, as Rachels suggests, a speciesist notion. If animal advocates simply stipulate that human dignity is a speciesist notion, they both trivialize the debate and fail to even begin to probe the complex idea of human dignity.

Of course, the kantian may insist that *human* dignity, grounded on certain rational capacities, marks the highest moral status and worth. For those who suppose this claim is a (covert) reaffirmation of speciesist thinking, it is worth noting that it is not even *Rachels’s* view that the avoidance of speciesism requires a radical egalitarian fix (that is, the conclusion that all animal species including humans be treated with exactly the same level of moral respect).¹⁵ Since (following Rachels himself) such radical egalitarianism is arguably not the sine qua non of the attack on speciesism, species-based disrespect is perhaps best identified with the denial of (adequate) moral standing on morally arbitrary grounds. Starting with this point the simple dignity of sentient beings can be grounded (even for some kantians)¹⁶ on morally relevant capacities like sentience or the capacity to flourish.

3

Can we talk coherently within a broadly kantian tradition promoting human dignity about the dignity of animals? I shall discuss this question from the point of view, if you will, of the general concept of dignity as a normative idea. The key question then is this: do we stretch the concept of dignity to the breaking point (or to a point where it is taken to cover too much ground and is thereby weakened), if we talk, as I recommend, about the “simple dignity” of sentient creatures? The main problem, as I am concerned with it here, for any discussion of “simple dignity” is the following objection: the very conception of simple dignity tends to undermine, or is in tension with, the moral or ethical force of the more general concept of dignity. Put otherwise, the objection is that the notion of a hierarchy of dignities is itself at odds with the best (modern/kantian) understanding of the moral or ethical idea of dignity. I take this objection seriously for the following reasons: (1) contemporary talk about (human) dignity has had a conspicuous (and laudable) egalitarian quality, and (2) historically the modern idea of

human dignity was introduced, by Kant and others, to fend off proponents of moral and political hierarchies.¹⁷ If the essence of the modern idea of dignity embodies an argument against hierarchies, then can the very concept of dignity now be used in a way that itself admits of a hierarchy of dignity?

A brief restatement of my sense of the notion of “simple dignity” may be helpful. When I suggest that nonhuman animals should be understood to have “simple dignity,” I claim that any being that has “simple dignity” has an intrinsic moral worth and an independent moral status. The idea of dignity itself links considerations of moral status with those of moral worth.¹⁸ Although some very simple beings may in this sense be said to *have* simple dignity, it would generally not make sense to talk about such a being *acting with* simple dignity, because acting, as distinct from merely behaving, is surely just the kind of thing a being that (only) has simple dignity may not be able to do.

So, does this idea of a hierarchy of dignity undermine the moral or ethical force of the general concept of dignity? First of all, for those who already employ some normative conception of having dignity, there already exists a normative hierarchy that includes those entities that have dignity and those that do not. So the question here is: can a normative hierarchy including simple dignity and then at least one other level or rank of (human) dignity be posited without undermining the moral force of the general concept of dignity? Put differently: if there is a hierarchy within the realm of those entities that are morally considerable, can the notion of *dignity* capture this, or is it better reserved to mark moral considerations that are essentially nonhierarchical?

This is the point where there is some payoff to be collected from having noted the distinction between the general concept of dignity and the more specific conception of human dignity. The general concept of dignity clearly seems adequate to the task of embodying a hierarchy of moral status and worth without the result being that the moral force of that concept is in any way undermined. And the fact that the more specific conception of human dignity may not by itself easily accommodate hierarchies including human beings does not show that the more general concept of dignity will suffer a loss of moral force if it does.

Consider a further objection. The concepts of dignity and human dignity are members of a family of concepts clustered around the practice of *moral evaluation*, including related concepts like honor, (self-)esteem, (self-)respect, pride, and responsibility. And the present extension of this notion of a “simple dignity” to animals, most (and perhaps all) of whom are arguably *not* moral agents but moral patients, takes the concept of dignity so far out of context as to strip it of that meaning that results from its membership in this original family of ideas. We tend to speak exclusively of the normative evaluation of moral agents and not of moral patients like (most) animals. In addition, animals are not typically taken to have the capacity for self-evaluative—or “reactive”—attitudes like pride or self-respect. So, the argument goes, the idea of the “simple *dignity*” of sentient life is too far from its conceptual home to make sense. And since it is too far out of context to

make sense, the usage of “simple dignity” recommended here should be abandoned.

But once again, the distinction between the general concept of dignity and the specific conception of human dignity provides for a telling reply. Perhaps it is true that when applied to moral patients—for example, humans in a permanent “persistent vegetative state”—the conception of human dignity may have traveled too far from its conceptual family of origin to make (good) sense. The more general concept of dignity, however, is, so to speak, a much better traveler. In short, it is wrong to suggest that the general concept of dignity has the same restrictions on its coherent use as the more specific conception of human dignity. A use that pushes the conception of human dignity past the point of coherence, or simply into philosophically controversial territory, may not do so for the more general concept of dignity.

Yet a different kind of question might now present itself. If, as I have suggested, it is possible to embrace an account of the simple dignity of sentient life, then why not proceed to the next step, that is, recognize also the dignity of nonsentient life? Some environmental ethicists may insist that such a move is recommended by points already conceded in the present discussion. Now it may be true that it is advised to make the move from the consideration of the dignity of sentient life to the dignity of very simple life. At least additional good reasons to do so might be provided. One argument to the contrary here suggests that moral worth and status are coextensive with sentience because something has moral worth and status if and only if what one does to it *matters to it*. Yet it is surely equally plausible that moral worth and status are coextensive with having a well-being *of one's own*; and awareness of one's well-being is hardly an obvious condition of having a well-being of one's own. The scope of the present paper is, however, simply not adequate to investigate this point fully and canvass the many other arguments about the moral worth and status of nonsentient life, because such arguments may also concern not only individual life forms (micro-fauna and plants) but also complex collections of living things (from species to ecosystems, up to and including the biosphere itself).

The present analysis has, at least, shown that there is no *internal* barrier—that is, none raised by consideration of the concept of dignity itself—to a move from the discussion of the simple dignity of sentient life to talk of the simple dignity of very simple life. Should the best arguments in fact lead us to conclude that some forms of simple, nonsentient life (say, giant sequoia trees) have inherent value and basic moral status, then the general concept of dignity can accommodate that conclusion even if the narrower conception of human dignity cannot.

Some kantians or other friends of the moral idea of dignity may be alarmed by my suggestion that sentient beings have simple dignity or by the more radical possibility of the recognition of the simple dignity of nonsentient living things. For this reason I will briefly outline two important qualifications on any conclusion about the scope of the idea of simple dignity. First, a notion of basic moral status, for example, Kenneth Goodpaster's notion of “moral considerability,” is not to be identified with

relative moral weight or with moral rights.¹⁹ To suggest that a person and a cat (and perhaps a giant sequoia) each have simple dignity is *not* to suggest that their relative moral weight is the same.²⁰ Nor is it suggested by the claim that a cat has simple dignity that it also has moral rights or, if it does, that those rights are identical in scope or weight with human rights. It is important to avoid the all too common conflation of “equally having moral status” with “having equal moral status.” Questions about both relative moral weight and the possession of moral rights are independent of any account of the simple dignity of sentient beings.

The second qualification regarding the scope of the idea of simple dignity is related to a difference noted by Ronald Dworkin between “two categories of intrinsically valuable things: those that are incrementally valuable—the more of them we have the better—and those that are not.”²¹ An example from the first category would be knowledge. With appropriate qualifications we can claim the more knowledge that exists the better.²² An example from the second category would be (human) life: living entities are generally valued only once they exist, in part because they do exist. In short, in the case of (human) life, more is not necessarily better. My present point is not to defend or discuss this distinction. I only wish to note that it too may provide some relief to those worried about the radical possibility of extending the notion of *dignity* to apply to nonsentient life. One is not thereby committed to the idea that the more life that exists the better. If such qualifications are not sufficient to calm the worries of some (kantians) about possibly extending the title of simple dignity to (some forms of) nonsentient life, then it becomes necessary to confront the arguments, which are not given here, for the claim, which for reasons of space is not really advanced here, that simple life has simple dignity.

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Two points seem worthy of emphasis in conclusion. First, Rachels and like-minded animal rights advocates are wrong to suggest that the idea of human dignity is perforce a speciesist notion. Indeed an attack on species-based forms of disrespect can even be rendered fully consistent with a general *kantian* account of the scope and the meaning of the ideas of dignity and human dignity. Second, the more generic concept of dignity can be used to help mark the moral worth and the moral status of sentient life. Perhaps kantians who hew close to a strict Kantian account may not have much to say about how this second point is to be made out because of the centrality of the capacity for practical rationality in the Kantian view of morality. Yet, a Kantian account of the centrality of the capacity for rational deliberation for *human dignity* does not strictly confine the sensible (kantian) application of the generic concept of dignity. Once adequate notice is taken of the difference between the generic concept of dignity and the specific conception of human dignity, there is ample conceptual space for the discussion of the simple dignity of sentient life—and perhaps of nonsentient life as well.

It has been one point of this paper to begin to outline this often overlooked idea of “simple dignity” as a moral, or ethical, concept. The

combination of the ascendancy of the ideas of dignity and human dignity in modern discourse and the widespread moral concern about animals and the environment seem to justify the effort. However, this paper has surely not sorted out all of the complex questions that would arise from the broad and systematic application of this idea of simple dignity.²³ Such questions would include: How is the aspect of the moral *worth* of simple dignity linked to the moral *status* aspect of simple dignity? How should one construct any hierarchy of dignity, that is, where should one draw (how many?) levels within this hierarchy? A more systematic analysis of the conception of simple dignity must wait for another time. Furthermore, if fully understood, the moral idea of dignity is potentially quite valuable as one part of a nonspeciesist moral theory.²⁴ The claims of some animal advocates notwithstanding, the idea of dignity—or even *human* dignity—is not a moral encumbrance or an objectionable remnant of speciesist thought. Indeed, when properly understood the general concept of dignity is a moral idea that can serve well whatever future expansions of our moral concern seem called for by a more generous and ever increasing understanding of the nonhuman world.

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Notes

¹James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (New York: Oxford, 1990), 181, see also 4–5; see in addition Peter Singer's "All Animals Are Equal," in *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, ed. Tom Regan and Peter Singer (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989), 82–84; Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York Review, 1990), 238–40.

²Throughout this paper I will use "animals" to refer to nonhuman sentient creatures generally.

³Kant employs the indirect duty view in *Lectures on Ethics* [1775–80], trans. L. Infield (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1963), 239–41. In later discussions Kant tends to discuss animals only when discussing the animal nature of human beings; see *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue* [1797], trans. J. W. Ellington (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1983), 96–97.

⁴See Singer, "All Animals Are Equal," 82–84.

⁵Rachels calls this view "unqualified speciesism": *Created from Animals*, 182f.

⁶See his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [1785], trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper, 1964), 102–3.

⁷On apes in particular see *The Great Ape Project: Beyond Human Equality*, eds. P. Cavalieri and P. Singer (New York: St. Martins, 1993).

⁸Of course, in Kant's day most individuals in such cases would not have survived as they do at present. For discussion of such cases, see Michael J. Meyer, "Dignity, Death and (Modern) Virtue," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1995):45–55.

⁹Indeed, given present facts, which differ in important respects from Kant's own, the best understanding of Kant's account of human dignity might support the claim that humans who have completely and irreversibly lost their rational capacities have no claim to the title of human dignity. This, of course, does not leave one free to treat them however one wishes. On the latter point, see *ibid.*, 49–50.

¹⁰Rachels calls this view "qualified speciesism": *Created from Animals*, 184.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 186, 189, 191–92.

¹² See Tom Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights” in Regan and Singer, *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, 112; and also Singer, “All Animals Are Equal,” 80ff.

¹³ Rachels, *Created from Animals*, 186.

¹⁴ On the theoretical standing of virtue-based obligations, see Michael Slote, *From Morality to Virtue* (New York: Oxford, 1992), chap. 10, esp. 159–64.

¹⁵ Rachels, *Created from Animals*, 208–12.

¹⁶ Can “kantians” establish the boundaries of the moral realm (e.g., the boundaries of moral status) without essential reference to practical rationality? This is too large a question for the present paper, so it must suffice to say here that if practical reason provides the mark of the highest status for kantians it need not also mark the lowest status as well. If it pushes one too far out of Kant’s camp to notice a minimal, intrinsic moral value in forms of life that lack practical rationality or lack rationality altogether, the moral theorist wishing to do so may not be a “kantian.” This question is primarily about the boundaries of “kantian,” which is surely neither a simple nor a precise category.

¹⁷ See Michael J. Meyer, “Kant’s Concept of Dignity and Modern Political Thought,” *History of European Ideas* 8, no. 3 (1987):319–332.

¹⁸ A point that does not go without saying. See Mary Anne Warren, *Moral Status* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3–23.

¹⁹ Kenneth Goodpaster, “On Being Morally Considerable,” *Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1978):311–12.

²⁰ Mary Ann Warren offers a most interesting multicriterion account of a hierarchy of status in *Moral Status*, 148–77.

²¹ Roger Dworkin, *Life’s Dominion* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 70.

²² Of course, we may not wish all things be known by all people at all times—a point Dworkin seems to overlook—since, for example, we would presumably like the terrorist to forget how to set off his bomb. But this does not detract from the fact that *ceteris paribus* knowledge is generally thought intrinsically valuable and incrementally so.

²³ For other attempts to note that Kantians may have more to offer in the general area of environmental ethics, see Thomas E. Hill Jr., “Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments,” in *Autonomy and Self-Respect*, ed. Thomas E. Hill Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 104–17; and Tim Hayward, “Kant and the Moral Considerability of Non-Rational Beings,” in *Philosophy and the Natural Environment*, ed. Robin Attfield and Andrew Belsey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 129–42.

²⁴ This seems salient given that popular accounts of political justice (see John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1993], 21, 244–47) often do not apply to animals or nonsentient nature.