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**SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
SPRING SEMESTER 2020**

SYLLABUS

HUMAN DIGNITY

In a World of Climate Crisis, Artificial Intelligence, and Marginalization

LECTURER: Chloe Schwenke, Ph.D.

Course Number: PLCY 688X Classroom: VMH 1207

Time: Tuesdays 7:00pm to 9:30pm

INTRODUCTION

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”

From the first sentence of Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

“We can talk about human dignity, but where is it?”

Michael Novak

“Yet what greater defeat could we suffer than to come to resemble the forces we oppose in their disrespect for human dignity?”

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

What does “human dignity” mean?

Does dignity even matter? Is the concept of human dignity significant in terms of worsening climate crisis, accelerating national and international inequalities, and governance policies and associated institutions that are often unmoored to guiding ethical principles? Should it be? Does the way in which we think about (and possibly advocate for) human dignity shape our views on globalization, social justice, human rights (legal and ethical), global poverty reduction, gender equity, community, conflict, diversity, and sustainable development?

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The rhetoric of dignity – and about secular morality in public life - was once characterized by a rich vocabulary and citizens educated in the use of that vocabulary. As columnist and writer David Brooks of the New York Times has observed, “...people in earlier times inherited a vast moral vocabulary and diet of moral tools, developed over centuries and handed down from generation to generation. This was a practical inheritance, like learning how to speak a certain language, which people could use to engage in their own moral struggles.”

In contemporary times, references to human dignity remain abundant, but the moral context and meaning are almost never well defined. For many, especially in the public arena, “dignity” is a symbolic but rather archaic, outdated term, largely empty of relevance to modern challenges. We discuss even less the opposite of dignity – indignity. What remains of the public policy notion of human dignity – and its effectiveness in public policy – is being further eroded by overusing it in our rhetoric without really knowing what it means or signifies. Without some consensus on a moral and philosophical foundation for dignity, and some more precision in the vocabulary and understanding of its meaning, is dignity quickly becoming a useless notion? Or, to the contrary, is dignity an urgently needed essential baseline for public policy?

Here in the United States, as we are now well into the Trump Era, is dignity – as a universal premise – really a cornerstone of how the United States conceives of democracy, globalization, and America’s role in the world? Such questions abound, but to begin to find answers means that we as policy experts must speak with understanding and authority about the meaning(s) and implications of human dignity, and whether geopolitical boundaries influence the distribution of human dignity.

To achieve this level of understanding, we must be specific. We should start with some personal introspection, so we can establish a vantage point for our exploration. Do we consider human nature as essentially good? Do we have moral exemplars and mentors in our own lives? Or do instead view human nature as springing from essentially flawed beings – the “crooked timber” referred to by Immanuel Kant when he asserted “Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made”. Are we moral idealists, or moral realists? Are we hopeful or cynical about the human experiment?

Once we have a sense of which moral lens we are viewing our world from (which is always open to subsequent revision), we must begin to review the leading ways in which human dignity has emerged historically as a concept, and compare this to how it is currently

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conceived in the United States, in different cultures and countries, and as an integral component of globalization. The questions we must ask will need to be incisive, as we unpack the rhetoric from the reality. To be balanced, we also need to consider critiques of human dignity, and ponder the implications for public policy were we to decide that “human dignity” no longer has efficacy, i.e. what would be lost if the concept of dignity is discredited, abandoned, ignored, or replaced?

This is a graduate level course designed to develop within students the fundamental reflective and discernment skills and sensibilities to be aware of and responsive to human dignity as a foundational concept (or set of principles) at the heart of the normative content of public policy. The course will include comparisons with other fundamental ethical principles and normative systems that shape public policy: globalization (and cosmopolitanism) versus nationalism (and communitarianism), human rights (moral and legal), gender equity and socio-economic inclusion, social justice, human capabilities and agency, democracy and deliberative participation, and human flourishing.

During this course, we will consider together such questions as:

- To what extent is the recognition and respect of human dignity considered to be universal and applicable to – and enforceable upon – all countries, and individual citizens?
- Where, if at all, does human dignity fit in as the structure, policies, institutions, and expectations of the existential climate crisis that we now face?
- Is the current deeply divided political reality in the United States a threat to the core commitment to human dignity?
- To what extent are global efforts for gender equity, social and economic inclusion, and the prevention of gender-based violence dependent on building a working consensus of universal values associated with human dignity?
- Is dignity always “embodied”?
- Does dignity only apply to human beings? Can it apply to artificial intelligence, and if so, under what conditions?
- Is human dignity an “existential” value that pertains to the identity of a person as a human being as measured through their actions, or perhaps as a “virtue” that can be discerned in their character?
- Do each of us have a direct and personal stake in how these questions about human dignity are answered, and an obligation to find such answers?

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The course will have three main components:

- **The evolution of human dignity as a concept and a principle:** Students will explore the origins and evolving interpretations of “human dignity” with appropriate references to Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, but also several other sources from Cicero to Nussbaum. This exploration, and the remainder of the course, will be framed primarily but not exclusively from the perspectives of critical social justice, gender equality/equity, conflict, and globalization considerations. And while the concentration will center on the secular, we’ll give some attention to the realization that most Jewish, Muslim, and Christian thinking about human value places much more emphasis on the concept of the sanctity of human life rather than on human dignity – and what this implies for the secular world. We will reflect on human dignity in the sense that it refers to status, rank, nobility, or honor, and whether someone “of dignity” has a different standing under the law. Then we’ll consider the alternative and more abstract view, with appropriate reference to the thinking of Immanuel Kant, who saw human dignity more as an abstract yet very important philosophical concept – which in time became one of the strongest foundations for human and civil rights. Finally, we will consider the implications for the ideal of human dignity in the era of President Donald Trump, growing nationalism and authoritarianism, rapid technological change, and the climate crisis.
- **Harnessing “human dignity” as a practical principle:** The second part of the course will involve a hard-nosed evaluation of “human dignity”. Is dignity simply an abstraction of little efficacy to the crafting of effective public policy, or is dignity instead of deep significance? Can we measure policy results in the context of dignity indicators, processes, and outcomes? Do we need to think of human dignity possibly in a gritty way, reflecting the way we live our lives – passions, blemishes, prejudices, aspirations, virtues, vices, and all? How “human” can our dignity be? How global can our dignity ideals be? Do the currently perceived interests of human beings stand above, or in deep connection to, the dignity of other life forms on Earth and the sustainability of all life on this planet? Who really owns “dignity”, and why?
- **Human dignity in public policy:** The third and final part of the course will concentrate on the persuasive application of defensible notions of human dignity, and how to be incisive in challenging the superficial use of this concept. Through topical case studies and class debate on issues (both global and domestic), we will do our best to gain some traction in the optimal uses of human dignity in the policy context. We’ll weigh some of the arguments of leading thinkers who contend that dignity is something that is owed to a person, and we’ll discuss to what society’s

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obligations might consist of in this regard. For example, when a person is assaulted by thugs her or his dignity is compromised; we express outrage and we demand justice. But when homophobic persons humiliate a lesbian we may feel indignant on her behalf, and wish that those who are verbally abusing her were more inclusive and respectful, but we are not quite sure if society has any formal obligation to protect her dignity. How do we “measure” the damage done by humiliation and other forms of maligning the dignity of another? We do recognize that to injure or even to try to efface someone’s dignity is to treat that person as not fully human – as an object or some kind of subhuman creature – but what should public policy do to prevent or punish such attacks on an individual’s dignity?

One or more guest speakers may join in such discussions, as schedules permit. Class time will be divided among lectures, discussions, and student presentations.

Upon successful completion of the course, students with a wide variety of specific sectoral interests should be able to:

- Articulate a persuasive view of the role of human dignity in both a domestic (U.S.) and a global context, and offer arguments for and against the notion of human dignity as it ought (or ought not) to apply to public policies, artificial intelligence, climate change, and to citizens of all genders.
- Contextualize specific moral challenges to human dignity and suggest approaches to address these.
- Understand and articulate many dimensions of human dignity, human well-being, human flourishing, and gender equality.
- Articulate both the justifications for human dignity as a universal concept and guiding principle, as well the relative differences and assumptions between Western and non-Western moral thinking about human dignity.
- Frame policy analysis, outputs, and outcomes in terms of human dignity factors.

Overall Course Schedule:

Monday, January 27, 2020	Campus-wide first day of classes
Tuesday, January 28, 2020	Week One class, 7pm to 9:30pm
Tuesday, February 18, 2020	Short (8 to 10 page) term paper due by 7pm
Tuesday, March 10, 2020	Mid-term exam (60 minutes)
Tuesday, April 28, 2020	Final class presentations, round one
Tuesday, May 5, 2020	Final class presentations, round two
Tuesday, May 12, 2020	Final exam

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

There will be one short paper required early in the course, a mid-term examination, a presentation, and a final examination. Students will also be expected to lead one class discussion, as described below.

- ❑ **Assignment One:** Due February 18th. Prepare and submit an 8-10 page (+ references) scholarly paper (1.5-line spacing) with proper citations (Chicago Manual of Style or American Psychological Association style) addressing one significant historical aspect or conception of human dignity that you assert remains relevant to contemporary public policy (in the United States, another country, or globally), but which you think has a high probability of being impacted (for better or for worse) by the climate change crisis. Describe that probable impact, and what it might signify, specifically from a moral and ethical perspective. (20% of total grade)
- ❑ **Exams:** There will be a sixty-minute mid-term examination on March 10th (20% of total grade), and a sixty-minute final examination on May 5th (20% of grade). Exams may be completed on laptops, and are “open book” but timed.
- ❑ **Assignment Two – Ignite presentation:** The Ignite presentation format is a 5 minutes long presentation consisting of just 20 digital slides, during which the projected slides advance automatically every 15 seconds. Each student will present her or his Ignite presentation in class, without using notes, and then will host 10 minutes of Q&A afterwards. Each Ignite presentation must pertain to a leading issue (and associated desired policy outcome) in human dignity in the context of one of the following three topics: the climate crisis, gender equality & social inclusion, or artificial intelligence. The Ignite presentation will be used by each student to make a persuasive verbal argument in support of a specific policy direction or outcome by relying on a moral argument(s) based upon human dignity thinking and principles, while anticipating and addressing the most likely counter-arguments that students might pose during the Q&A period. Further details will be provided later. The professor will evaluate each Ignite presentation on the basis of its moral content and moral vocabulary, on the quality of its presentation, and on its persuasiveness (20% of grade).

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- ❑ **Lead one class discussion:** Identify (and submit in advance to professor for her review and approval) an article, blog, poem, or short essay that is relevant to the topic of human dignity, and is on a topic of particular interest to the student. Once approved, and a date is selected for the student to lead a 15 to 20 minute class discussion on this article, the professor will circulate this article, blog, poem or essay to all the class in advance of the scheduled date. The professor will also provide some suggestions in advance to the student of what the discussion might emphasize. (20% of grade, which also covers overall class participation during the term).

Class attendance and participation are extremely important. Students will be expected to complete the readings and come to class prepared to discuss them. Since the class does not follow a text consistently, students can only keep up through regular attendance. Constructive and thoughtful participation in classroom discussions is highly valued.

CLASS SCHEDULE

PART ONE OF THREE: evolution of human dignity as a concept and a principle

28 January 2020 ~ **Week 1: Introduction**

Advance reading assignment and videos for Week One

- The Modern Dignity of an Uncontacted Tribe, by Kanishk Tharoor, The Atlantic, January 1, 2019 <https://portside.org/2019-01-06/modern-dignity-uncontacted-tribe>
- Emma Watson at the HeForShe Campaign 2014 - Official UN Video (13 minutes) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkjW9PZBRfk>
- Star Trek: The Next Generation - Sentient Being, video 6 minutes and 49 seconds, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjuQRCG_sUw
- Video of keynote speech by Paul Polman, Co-founder and Chair of IMAGINE, at the Annual Dinner of the Society for International Development in Washington, DC on December 12, 2019, starting at minute 21:47 and going to minute 51:10 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXnapoquRww>

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Student and faculty introductions, review of the syllabus and course requirements, and a course overview of the modern prevalence, ambiguity, persuasiveness, and the policy “problem” of human dignity.

Reading Assignments for Week Two:

- Dignity: Its History and Meaning, by Michael Rosen, Chapter 1, pages 1 – 62; see files on ELMS
- “In Search of Dignity”, by David Brooks, New York Times, July 6, 2009
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/07/opinion/07brooks.html?_r=0
- Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility, by Yechiel Michael Barilan, Chapter 1: pages 1 – 22.

4 February 2020 ~ Week 2: The roots of dignity - 1

Is human dignity “humbug”? This class will be an overview of contending and evolving historical concepts of dignity, both religious and secular. A review of Cicero’s, Kant’s, Aquinas’, and Nietzsche’s concepts of dignity, and some consideration of the relationship of dignity to equality, grace, hierarchy, and human rights.

Reading Assignments for Week Three:

- Human Dignity, by George Kateb, Preface and Chapter 1, part of Chapter 3; Pages ix – xiii, 1 – 27, 160 – 173
- Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility, by Yechiel Michael Barilan, Chapter 2 (partial): pages 23 – 28, 39 – 40, 81 - 92 .

11 February 2020 ~ Week 3: The roots of dignity - 2

This class will discuss the dignity and equality of individuals, compared to perceptions (and systems) of gravitas, rank, and status, and compared to dignity in the context of the species. Is dignity owned by the elite, is it universal, or is dignity an expanding and embracing circle? How does Kateb defend human dignity? In what ways can human dignity be considered foundational to human rights?

Reading Assignments for Week Four:

- Embodied Self-Respect and the Fragility of Human Dignity: A Human Rights Approach”, by Arnd Pollmann, Chapter 17 in Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization - Human Dignity Violated, edited by Paulus Kaufmann, Hannes Kuch, Christian Neuhäuser, and Elaine Webster; Pages 243 – 261; Springer Dordrecht: Heidelberg, 2010

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<http://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r30885.pdf>

18 February 2020 ~ **Week 4: Diverse ethical views of dignity**

* First assignment due

Is human dignity an “inalienable value” that we cannot lose? Or is it instead an essential – if precarious – capability for basic human flourishing? What does it mean for human dignity to be “embodied”, and what is the relationship between human dignity and self-respect? And how does all of this relate to corresponding human rights? The class will discuss dignity as an explicit reason or “purpose” at the center of living a life in embodied self-respect, and whether human dignity is a desirable outcome of human rights or, to the contrary, whether human rights is an outcome of the failings of human dignity.

Reading Assignments for Week Five:

- Human Dignity, by George Kateb
Chapter 2, Pages 28 - 112

PART TWO OF THREE: Harnessing “human dignity” as a practical principle

25 February 2020 ~ **Week 5: Defending human dignity**

What does it mean to be defending the concept of dignity, and why is it important to do this persuasively and well? What is the relationship between individual personal status and universal human rights? Where does the notion of autonomy come into the discourse on human dignity? The class will also discuss – in the context of human dignity – morality and relativism, and personal and public morality.

Reading Assignments for Week Six:

- Human Dignity, by George Kateb
Part of Chapter 4, Pages 174 – 205
- Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility, by Yechiel Michael Barilan,
Chapter 3 (partial): pages 93 – 94, 97 – 98, 100 - 128.
- Declare Dignity: Donna Hicks at TEDxStormont (19 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPF7QspiLqM>
- “Human Dignity in Healthcare: A Virtue Ethics Approach”, by David Albert Jones, *The New Bioethics - A Multidisciplinary Journal of Biotechnology and the Body*, Volume 21, 2015 - Issue 1
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1179/2050287715Z.00000000059>

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3 March 2020 ~ **Week 6: Dignity, justice, conflict, and health**

A class discussion on social inequality, the relationship between equality of dignity and disparities in human achievement, the demands of justice, environmental stewardship and the dignity of nature (is there non-human dignity?). How, if at all, does dignity influence major challenges of conflict, migration, and health care? Can animals be deemed to have dignity?

Reading Assignment for Week Seven:

- Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility, by Yechiel Michael Barilan, Chapter 3 (partial): pages 93 – 94, 97 – 98, 100 - 128.

PART THREE OF THREE: Human dignity in public policy

10 March 2019 ~ **Week 7: Mid-Term Examination during first hour**

Second Hour: Dignity, innovation, and globalization

In terms of human action and behavior, what does it mean to “be” dignified? Can we judge other people by their dignity? To what extent can dignity serve as a useful global policy standard for addressing and resolving major suffering around the world, e.g. from conditions of conflict, migration, poverty, and inequality? Is the concept of dignity relevant to global norms based on economics? What about dignity (and sanctity) when it all gets personal – how healthcare is provided, and when it comes to the exploitation of the human body in the name of science – and of profit?

Reading and Video Assignments for Week Eight:

- “Dehumanization: Perceiving the Body as (In)Human”, by Sophie Oliver, Chapter 7 in Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization - Human Dignity Violated, Pages 85 – 97, at <http://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r30885.pdf>
- Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility, by Yechiel Michael Barilan, Chapter 5 (partial): pages 254 - 260.
- Trailer for *Ex Machina* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyKqHOgMi4g> (video, 3:05 minutes)
- Artificial You: AI and the Future of Your Mind, by Susan Schneider, Introduction and Chapters 1 – 3, and partial Chapter 4; pages 1 - 69
- The Hitchhiker’s Guide to AI Ethics, by B. Nalini, see file in ELMS

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17 March 2020 ~ No Class, Spring Break

24 March 2020 ~ No Class – emergency closure for pandemic

31 March 2020 ~ Week 8: Biologically embodied dignity...and Artificial Intelligence

In terms of dignity, what does it mean to be conscious, and why does it matter? Is consciousness limited (now, and in the foreseeable future) to humans only? If we create artificial intelligence that possesses consciousness, does this have moral status? What does dignity have to do with our biological embodiment? Does international law adequately protect the human dignity of victims of gender-based violence, or of other assaults to our embodied nature?

Reading Assignments for Week Nine:

- Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility, by Yechiel Michael Barilan, Chapter 3 (partial): pages 129 – 147.
- Artificial You: AI and the Future of Your Mind, by Susan Schneider, Partial Chapter 4 and Chapters 5 through Conclusion and Appendix; pages 69 - 152

7 April 2020 ~ Week 9: Artificial Intelligence, Merging with AI, Transhumanism – and Dignity

The boundary between human and machine may become far less distinct, as possible AI applications may allow humans to augment and expand their intelligence, mental capabilities, and access to data. As we consider the implications of AI and dignity, what happens when we push – or eliminate – the boundaries between humans and machines?

Reading/Video Assignment for Week Ten:

- Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility, by Yechiel Michael Barilan, Chapter 4 (partial): pages 149 – 166, 170 – 183.
- Philippines: Surviving Climate Change & Demanding Dignity
<https://www.facebook.com/AmnestyNZ/videos/503416420241556/?v=503416420241556>
- Kiribati confronts climate upheaval by preparing for 'migration with dignity'
<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/07/kiribati-confronts-climate-upheaval-by-preparing-for-migration-with-dignity/>

14 April 2020 ~ Week 10: Climate Change and Human Dignity,

Does human dignity place a moral demand on those in power to do all that they can to stop

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the climate change crisis, so that the environment does not harm humanity because of these serious climatic changes? Or is treating humanity apart from the larger environment the core problem?

Reading and Video Assignments for Week Eleven:

- Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility, by Yechiel Michael Barilan, Chapter 5 (partial): pages 207 – 218, 254 – 260; Chapter 7: pages 296 – 302
- “Introduction” to Mary Wollstonecraft’s book, *The Rights of Women*” (see file posted on ELMS)

21 April 2020 ~ Week 11: gender equality and human dignity; review class covering entire term

28 April 2020 ~ Week 12: Student Ignite presentations and discussions

5 May 2020 ~ Week 13: Student Ignite presentations and discussions, and final exam review

12 May 2020 ~ Week 14: Final Examination

READINGS

Primary readings will include the following complete books or e-books (purchase recommended for the four books):

- 1) *Human Dignity*, by George Kateb, Belknap Press; 1st edition, 2011
- 2) *Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility: The New Language of Global Bioethics and Biolaw*, by Yechiel Michael Barilan, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA., 2012
- 3) *Artificial You: AI and the Future of Your Mind*, by Susan Schneider, Princeton University Press, 2019

We will also be accessing readings from the following online report

- Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization - Human Dignity Violated, Springer Dordrecht: Heidelberg, 2010
<http://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r30885.pdf>

Additional readings and videos will include a few selections from the following links and other articles posted as PDFs on ELMS:

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- *Dignity: Its History and Meaning*, by Michael Rosen, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA., 2012
- “Human Dignity in Healthcare: A Virtue Ethics Approach”, by David Albert Jones, *The New Bioethics - A Multidisciplinary Journal of Biotechnology and the Body*, Volume 21, 2015 - Issue 1
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1179/2050287715Z.00000000059>
- “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to AI Ethics”, A 3-part series exploring ethics issues in Artificial Intelligence, by [B Nalini](#)
<https://towardsdatascience.com/ethics-of-ai-a-comprehensive-primer-1bfd039124b0>

OFFICE HOURS AND FACULTY BIO

Students may schedule time by calling or emailing the lecturer, so as to understand issues more fully or to discuss their work. Dr. Schwenke's cell phone 301-448-2953. Dr. Schwenke’s email is chloemaryland@gmail.com.

Dr. Chloe Schwenke is an experienced leader and manager of non-profit organizations, having served in the Washington DC region as vice president of Freedom House, director at the International Center for Research on Women, and executive director of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs. She also has technical expertise in applied ethics & human rights, gender equality & social inclusion, and public policy. She has both U.S. and international work experience, having lived and worked in Asia, the Middle East and Africa for 15 years, and she is an accomplished writer, public speaker, and trainer. Chloe earned her doctorate in public policy from the University of Maryland. Further details can be found on her website at www.chloemaryland.net