

UNCC300 MODULE 3:

PUTTING THE HUMAN IN HUMAN DIGNITY

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MODULE 3: PUTTING THE HUMAN IN HUMAN DIGNITY

Activities and materials in this module will help you to meet:

Learning Outcome 1: demonstrate a reflective, critical awareness of personal identity and values.

Graduate Attribute 1: demonstrate respect for the dignity of each individual and for human diversity (which you will do through the *content* of the module);

Graduate Attribute 4: think critically and reflectively (which you will do through the *skills processes* involved in completing the activities);

Graduate Attribute 7: work both autonomously and collaboratively (which you will do through the *skills processes* involved in completing the activities, especially in class); and

Graduate Attribute 8. locate, organise, analyse, synthesise and evaluate information (which you will do through the *skills processes* involved in completing the activities).



In many of the activities in this module, you are being asked to exercise critical *and reflective* thinking skills. Go to the [Graduate Attribute 4 Resource](#) for assistance with these skills, prior to completing the activities.

All the various positions from which people mount their arguments about human dignity are, of course, anchored in their understandings of being human. If we are going to think about human dignity in a more cohesive way, we must begin by examining the question of what being human means.

WARNING

Topics considered in UNCC LEO materials and in class discussions may be disturbing for some students.

If you are affected, please contact your Campus Leader and or the [University Counselling Service](#).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are advised that this site may include voices or images of people who have passed away. It may also contain links to sites that may use images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now deceased.

3.1 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

3.1.1 HOW DO DIFFERENT PEOPLE THINK ABOUT BEING HUMAN?

ACTIVITY 3.1.1A

- Make a list of the qualities or attributes you have that go towards making you human.
- See if you can group the qualities/attributes in any way—can you divide them into different categories?
- Watch this video on ['what it means to be human'](#) [or read the [transcript](#)]. As you watch, note any links that can be made with your own list of qualities/attributes. Is anything mentioned that you have missed?

ACTIVITY 3.1.1B — TO DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING

When discussing what it means to be human, people from different disciplines concentrate on different dimensions of the human person. For example, medical practitioners may focus on physiology, while sociologists may discuss the ways in which humans interact in society. If you are completing this unit with face-to-face tutorials, you will have been assigned a discipline from the list below. If not, please choose a discipline from the list. **Explore the links for that discipline and be ready to discuss the following questions:**

- a. What is the dominant approach to the human person that is put forward in the resources for your allocated/chosen discipline?
 - b. Is there anything about being human that is not accounted for in this understanding?
- **Sociology:**
 - Stets, Jan. E., and Peter. J. Burke, ["A Sociological Approach to Self and Identity."](#) In *Handbook of Self and Identity*, edited by Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney, 1st ed., 128-152. New York: Guilford, 2002. (Note: You need only read pages 4 – 9 of this document as these are particularly useful).
 - **Medicine:**
 - Tsiaras, Alexander. ["Conception to birth -- visualized."](#) Filmed December 2010. *TED* video, 9:37. Posted November 2011.
 - Choi, Jack. ["On the Virtual Dissection Table."](#) Filmed February 2012. *TED* video, 6:37. Posted April 2012.
 - **Psychology:**
 - Seligman, Martin. ["The New Era of Positive Psychology."](#) Filmed February 2004. *TED* video, 23:45. Posted July 2008.
 - **Economics:**
 - Gerzema, John. ["The Post Crisis Consumer."](#) Filmed August 2009. *TED* video, 16:35. Posted October 2009.
 - **Education:**
 - Robinson, Ken. ["Bring on the Learning Revolution."](#) Filmed February 2010. *TED* video, 17:58. Posted May 2010.
 - **Physics:**
 - ["Stephen Hawking's Grand Design \(The Key To The Cosmos\)"](#) (*Dailymotion.com*, 42:32. Posted May, 2013.) [or read the [transcript](#)].
 - **Exercise science:**
 - Shepherd, Janine. ["A broken body isn't a broken person."](#) Filmed October 2012. *TED* video, 18:58. Posted November 2012.
 - **Theology:**
 - Sachs, John R. ["Introduction."](#) In *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology*, 5-10. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991.

SOMETHING TO PURSUE IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST

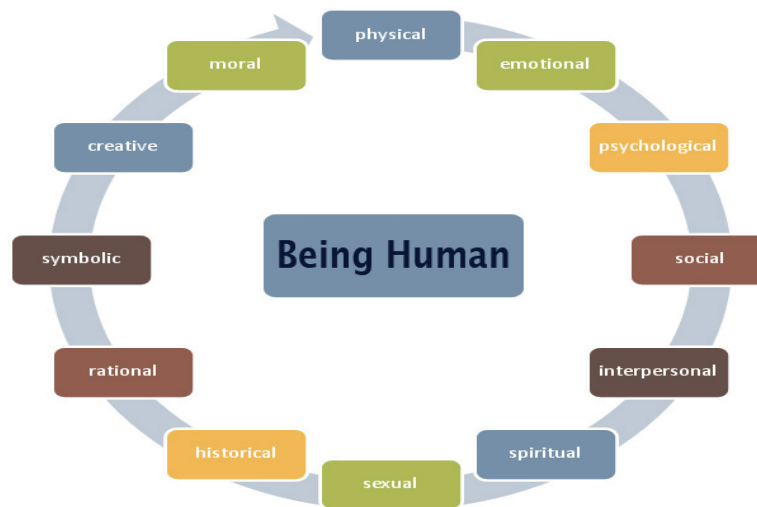
The 1999 film, *The Matrix*, follows the story of Neo, who lives in a world that is entirely constructed by electronic and chemical manipulation of the brains of its inhabitants. While we do not have to assume such a grand conspiracy theory is true, the film prompts us to think about the ways in which “reality” and “identity” can be constructed for us by others.

Watch this excerpt, [Neo Wakes Up](#) where we see Neo meeting some renegades who offer to free him from his enslavement by taking a pill. As he takes the risk, we see him “wake up” to realise that he and thousands of others are being kept in vats, their experiences controlled from elsewhere. What he had thought was real was all an illusion.

If you have an interest in this area, you may like to watch this documentary on [Philosophy and The Matrix](#) which touches on many pertinent issues and explores fascinating concepts.

3.1.2 TO BE HUMAN IS TO BE MULTIDIMENSIONAL

When you tried to identify some of the qualities or attributes that make us human, you might have come up with some general categories such as the following:



Humans have many dimensions including the physical, emotional, psychological, social, interpersonal, spiritual, sexual, historical, rational, symbolic, creative and moral. All should be considered when thinking of humans as multidimensional.

ACTIVITY 3.1.2

Compare your list from 3.1.1 with these categories. Do you have anything listed that would not fit here? How many categories there are is a matter of debate. What is important to note, however, is that humans cannot easily be reduced to any single quality or attribute. Being human is a *multidimensional* reality. Further, different individuals will develop each of these attributes to different degrees (and some, perhaps not at all). To think about being human, we need to take account of this multidimensionality.

3.1.3 TO BE HUMAN IS NOT SIMPLY TO BE A FINISHED PRODUCT BUT ALSO TO EVOLVE

In 3.1.2 we identified humans as multidimensional creatures, but we need to go a step further in describing how humans are in the world. To do this, we need to think about what some philosophers identify as tensions inherent in human existence. The first and most basic of these tensions is between “being” and “becoming.”

Scottish philosopher and theologian, John Macquarrie, describes humanity as “an unfinished, open kind of being, moving into possibilities that have still to be unfolded.”¹ We can think of human existence as somewhere between two poles: those of being and becoming.

This table visually describes the concepts of being and becoming.

BEING

What I am.....

BECOMING

What I could become

In other words, an individual human being *already exists as someone* (with a particular set of attributes), but at the same time she or he is *always on the way to becoming someone* (growing, developing, learning, changing).

READING

The following reading forms the first chapter to a book devoted to the question of what it means to be human. It draws largely from philosophy—some of the terms and reference points may be unfamiliar to you. Work your way through the reading slowly, making a short summary in a few words of the main points from each paragraph and answer the questions which follow.

John Macquarrie, “ [Becoming](#),” In *In Search of Humanity*, 1-9. London: SCM, 1982.

After your first attempt at the reading, go to this [Reading Resource](#) that has been designed to enhance your understanding.

In light of your reading, consider the following questions:

1. What does it mean to be a human being and a human becoming?
2. What are some of the other tensions that exist in the human person?
3. What does the presence of these tensions tell us about what it means to be human?
4. In light of these tensions, what is the task of being human?
5. According to Macquarrie, what does it mean to be “inhuman”? What role do you think this notion plays in ethical debates based on human dignity?

¹John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1977), 62.

3.1.4 TO BE HUMAN IS TO HOLD A NUMBER OF TENSIONS TOGETHER

The tension between being and becoming is a basic structure of human existence, and it relates to the fact that we live (and grow, develop and change) in time. This tension between being and becoming underlies a number of other tensions to which human life is subject, and to which Macquarrie refers in the reading from 3.1.3. [2](#)

This table outlines a range of tensions and their corresponding possible outcomes.

THE FACTS	THE POSSIBILITIES
<i>I live in a concrete, historical situation that affects my options</i>	<i>I could potentially do anything</i>
RATIONALITY	NON-RATIONALITY
<i>I think, know, reason, interpret</i>	<i>I am driven by needs, desires, impulses, my subconscious</i>
RESPONSIBILITY	POWERLESSNESS
<i>I know what I must do (conscience)</i>	<i>I feel unable to act to do what I know is right</i>
EMBODIMENT	TRANSCENDENCE
<i>I feel, sense, experience emotion, suffer, die</i>	<i>I am more than my body</i>
AUTONOMY	INTERDEPENDENCE
<i>I am an individual</i>	<i>I am always in relationship; my life is bound up with others</i>
FREEDOM	DETERMINATION
<i>I am free to shape my world and myself</i>	<i>There are other forces that shape me</i>
ACCEPTANCE	COMMITMENT
<i>I must live with who I have been in the past</i>	<i>I determine a direction for myself into the future</i>

The task of being human has to do with holding all these tensions together in a meaningful way.

ACTIVITY 3.1.4

Print the Tensions in Human Existence Activity Sheet (available in [PDF](#) and [Word](#) format)

Think of examples of where these tensions have been reflected in your own life, and use them to complete the sheet.



In this activity, you are being asked to exercise *reflective* thinking skills. Go to the [Graduate Attribute 4 Resource](#) for assistance with these skills, prior to completing the activity.

As you review your completed sheet, consider the following questions:

1. What do you notice about yourself, both as a human being and as a human becoming?
2. How do these tensions help to shape you as an individual?
3. How would the removal of any of these tensions affect our understanding of what it means to be human and how humans grow/ develop/ change?
4. What do you think an understanding of these tensions in human existence highlights about the nature of human dignity?
5. What impact do you think your own understanding of the human person has on your ethical/ moral decision-making?

FURTHER READING TO DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING

The following resource provides a very clear overview of our understanding of the multidimensionality of the human person, drawing on knowledge from science, philosophy and religion.

Hewlett, Martinez. “ [What Does it Mean to be Human? Genetics and Human Identity.](#)” In *Human Identity at the Intersection of Science, Technology and Religion*, edited by N. Murphy and C. Knight, 147-163. Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2010.

This [Reading Guide](#) has been designed to assist your understanding of this text.

² Macquarrie discusses a number of these in chapter 3 of *Principles*, and his work has been adapted here. He is often drawing on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (Macquarrie, *Principles*, 59-83).

3.2 RETHINKING HUMAN DIGNITY

In 2.2 we observed some of the problems around thinking about human dignity. Having spent some time thinking about what it means to be human, we are now ready to revisit the concept of human dignity and to see if we can construct a more robust and workable understanding of what it might mean.

3.2.1 HUMAN DIGNITY IS MULTIDIMENSIONAL

One of the reasons that the appeal to human dignity sometimes leads to opposing conclusions is that it can be thought of in four different ways and these are sometimes set in opposition to one another. A novel way of approaching human dignity, however, is to think about it along the same lines that we have been thinking about what it means to be human more generally—as multidimensional, and involving a number of tensions. Human dignity is BOTH something we already have AND something we strive to acquire. It has MULTIPLE bases, all of which need to be considered in any situation where it is an issue.



The graphic consists of the words 'hUMAN', 'DIGNITY', and 'hUMAN' in a bold, sans-serif font. 'hUMAN' is at the top in dark brown. Below it, 'DIGNITY' is written in green. At the bottom left, 'hUMAN' is written in red. On the right side, 'DIGNITY' is written vertically in gold.

READING

In the following reading, David Kirchhoffer and Kris Dierickx recapitulate some of the problems with the appeal to human dignity in justifying certain types of behaviour. Then they propose a multidimensional understanding of human dignity that includes the dignity that we already have (which they call here an “ontological” type of dignity, which means the dignity we have simply because we *are*—our being), and the dignity that we strive to acquire (which they call here an “existential” type of dignity, because it refers to our actual life situation and choices—our becoming).

This article is set in the context of medical ethics. Once again, some of the terms and reference points may be unfamiliar to you. Work your way through the reading slowly, making a short summary in a few words of the main points from each paragraph.

Kirchhoffer, David and Kris Dierickx, “[Human Dignity and Human Tissue: A Meaningful Ethical Relationship?](#)” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 37 (2011): 552-556.

After your first attempt at the reading, go to this [Reading Resource](#) that has been designed to enhance your understanding.

3.2.2 RETHINKING HUMAN DIGNITY IN RELATION TO THE FOUR QUADRANTS

Given that the human person is multidimensional, and thus, human dignity is multidimensional, it would be useful to rethink each of the four quadrants. Let's look again at our diagram. This time, when you click on each quadrant you will be prompted to reconsider the approach based on what you have learned so far in this unit.

As you work through each of the quadrants here, and the related activities, write a paragraph summarising, critiquing and synthesising each of the categories in light of an understanding of human dignity as multidimensional.

Select each quadrant below for more information and videos.

1A RETHINKING THE DIGNITY THAT HUMANS ALWAYS ALREADY HAVE BY BEING A MEMBER OF THE HUMAN SPECIES

Some people support this argument because they affirm that human life has a significance in a larger framework—that human beings are created by God to be part of a universe that has an ultimate meaning. Not all people agree with this position, although we cannot dismiss it simply because it has a basis in a religious belief. To do so would be simply to replace one belief (that every person has inherent value) with another belief (that no person has inherent value).

Other people who support this argument do so not on the basis of religion, but on the basis that it is natural to favour one's own species. One of the problems that critics of the inherent dignity position raise is that it can lead to "speciesism"—the privileging of one species over another, with a concomitant lack of value being accorded to other species, or to the whole natural system on which humans depend. Watch [Dr Richard Ryder explain his position on speciesism](#) (or read the [transcript](#)).

In either case, however, *not* to invest human beings with inherent value leads to the need to decide on what basis one would accord value to some people but not to others. This is a very difficult problem, not easily resolved, especially when we think about it not in the abstract ("what should the Government do about asylum seekers?"), but in concrete and very personal terms ("what would I want done to me or to members of my family in those circumstances?").

To determine that there are different degrees of human value goes against one of the most basic principles of modern thought—human equality, which is underscored in many contemporary documents and movements. To argue for human equality means that individual differences do not lead to differences in value or worth.

A way of affirming the value of the position that human dignity is inherent in being human, while avoiding some of its pitfalls, is to:

- acknowledge that it allows for the full complexity of being human—this position potentially takes seriously that human beings are multidimensional and are not to be reduced to one level or type of functioning or significance;
- acknowledge that to deviate from it is to raise the very serious issue of what should constitute exceptions, and that this has to do with violating an understanding that fundamentally all humans are equal;
- recognise the problem of speciesism and to uphold the worth of other-than-human species and the environment as a whole, and so affirming human dignity does not mean minimising the value of animals or nature.

ACTIVITY 3.2.2 (1A)

Return to [1.2.1](#) and [1.2.3](#) and revisit the resources listed there as part of the exploration of human dignity, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Martin Luther King Jnr's famous "I Have a Dream" speech. How often is human dignity linked with human equality?

SOMETHING TO PURSUE IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST

Attempts to enshrine animal and environmental dignity in law, such as in the Swiss constitution, raise further questions about what that might mean in practice and how the treatment of animals might be distinguished from the treatment of fellow humans.

Read Kirchoffer, David. " [Human Dignity and the Moral Status of Animals](#)." *Southern African Public Law* 27 (2012):116–132.

After your first attempt at the reading, go to this [Reading Resource](#) that has been designed to enhance your understanding.

2A RETHINKING THE DIGNITY THAT HUMANS CAN ACQUIRE (OR LOSE) THROUGH A SENSE OF SELF-WORTH

Being able to affirm one's own dignity is not always easy. Some people seem to be blessed with the capacity to do this naturally and continuously. But others feel that their own sense of worth is subject to their perception of how others view them at any given time and so is very vulnerable. They have to work hard at maintaining a sense of their own dignity.

If I cannot affirm my own dignity, does that mean I have none?

While being able to know that one is valued is important, this is only taking into account one part of the multidimensionality puzzle that is human existence. For example, a person who cannot at a particular moment affirm his or her own dignity might still exist in a network of relationships where that worth or value is significant. Even in the extreme instance where no such relational network exists, one could argue that the individual still has dignity in the context of society.

Think about the example of Jacintha Saldanha, the nurse at the centre of the [phone-prank scandal in the UK](#) in 2012. While we cannot know for certain what motivated her to take her own life, we can guess that her experience of a loss of personal dignity may have been at issue. *One question to consider is whether we can equate her lost sense of dignity with her actual possession of dignity.*

It is obviously appropriate to respect the feelings of a person who believes in particular circumstances that she or he has no remaining dignity. Such respect may actually be a sign of the attribution of dignity. Yet it is also possible that, in these circumstances, the person in fact retains the kinds of dignity that could either be described as inherent (in the type 1 sense) or as bestowed (in the sense of 2B). Further, the actions of others may assist in the restoration of that person's sense of dignity.

One of the difficulties with thinking about human dignity in terms of an individual's sense of self-worth is that responses to various circumstances can take many forms. For some people, being in a situation where they feel shamed and degraded may lead to a complete loss of their sense of their own dignity (as in the case above). For others, however, when almost every aspect of life has become intolerable, their sense of personal dignity is strengthened and becomes almost inviolable. Return to consider the example of Brian Keenan in 2.1.4.

Consider, also, the story of [Alice Herz-Sommer](#), the 109 year old holocaust survivor, who kept her dignity in the face of great horror. She is known for her amazing spirit: "Everything is a present," she says, and "I look where it's good."

A question to be raised in any consideration of human dignity where a felt sense of worth is at issue is how it relates to the multidimensionality of the person. Is it, for example, a sense that all dignity is lost when what is lost is autonomy, or reason, or freedom, or another characteristic?

ACTIVITY 3.2.2 (2A)

Make a summary of this article from Archbishop Vincent Nichols, "[Human Dignity: What is it?](#)", and answer the following questions:

1. In 3.1.3 and 3.1.4, we discussed the notion of human being and human becoming, and outlined a number of tensions in human existence underpinned by this notion. What parallels can you see between this understanding of the human person and the understanding of human dignity put forward by Archbishop Nichols?
2. How would you describe Nichols' definition of human dignity? Return to your definition from the week 2 tutorial. You may wish to develop this definition further.
3. What are the three objections to the use of the term human dignity that Nichols addresses in his article? How does he address these objections?
4. In his discussion on the 'Dignity of Care', Nichols notes that "human dignity emerges from social relationships". To what extent do you think this is true? Why/ Why not? What impact do you think an understanding of the "social dimension of human dignity" has/ can have on the health care profession and other professions of service?

1B RETHINKING THE DIGNITY THAT HUMANS ALWAYS ALREADY HAVE BASED ON POSSESSION OF ONE OR MORE HUMAN CAPACITIES

This position is basically a development of the 1A position, except that here we have an attempt to identify what it is in particular about human beings that determines that they are of special worth.

One of the problems with this position is that some of the qualities that are used to mark humans as distinctive are actually shared with other animals. So, for example, if rationality is used as the criterion of human worth, it must be recognised that other primates sometimes have more highly developed rationality than some humans—for example, adult orangutans compared to human infants.

However, the real difficulty with this position is that, by trying to identify a single point of distinctiveness, it fails to take adequate account of human multidimensionality. This is true not only to the extent that we can speak about different categories that characterise human being (rationality, sociality, sexuality, and so on), but also in the sense that we have to allow for the complexity of the way that humans live in time (being and becoming). In other words, it is vital to attend both to the multiple aspects of human being and to the ways in which any these aspects might be actual or only potential.

ACTIVITY 3.2.2 (1B)

Watch this short discussion by [Martha Nussbaum](#) as she challenges the notion that a person has dignity because he/ she is self-sufficient. She says that “this imagination of persons being self-sufficient plays an important role in the discrimination toward those so-called ‘disabled’ persons.” She calls, instead, for a ‘capabilities approach’ for understanding the human person. Such an approach calls for consideration of the potentiality of the human person.

Note: This piece of film has full captioning. Choose ‘English’ not ‘English: automatic captions’.

After viewing the video, consider the following questions:

1. The argument that dignity is attributed to human beings because of particular qualities is often put forward by utilitarian philosophers. What critique does Nussbaum offer towards the utilitarian, or “social contract approach” to justice?
2. Which understanding of human dignity does Nussbaum allude to in her “Capabilities Approach”? To what extent does this equate with an understanding of the person as multidimensional?

SOMETHING TO PURSUE IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST

In a chapter commissioned by the President’s Council on Bioethics, Nussbaum notes that “full and equal human dignity is possessed by any child of human parents who has any of an open-ended disjunction of basic capabilities for major human life-activities.” These capabilities are set out in the *appendix* of “[Human Dignity and Political Entitlements](#)”. You may also like to read the section on ‘Dignity and its Basis,’

Watch the following presentation by Nussbaum, which explains in detail her theory and its application: [Martha Nussbaum, “Creating Capabilities: the Human Development Approach”](#).

1. After viewing the resources provided here, what do you think is the premise of Nussbaum’s theory?
2. How does this differ from our previous understanding of 1B, as presented in Module 2?

2B RETHINKING THE DIGNITY THAT HUMANS CAN ACQUIRE (OR LOSE) THROUGH MORAL/IMMORAL BEHAVIOUR (2B)

The flipside of affirming one's own dignity is having it affirmed by others, and position 2B has to do with situations in which a person is judged by others no longer to have dignity on the basis of their actions that are deemed to be immoral (and/or illegal).

It seems obvious here to say that, if human life is more complex than a single dimension, it is harsh to judge that a person has lost all value on the basis of one dimension alone. While we recognise that moral action gives an orientation to a person's life, and can be determinative in more than one dimension, we must also recognise the capacity for change, growth, forgiveness, compassion, reconciliation.

ACTIVITY 3.2.2 (2B)

Watch/listen to/read this [interview with Sister Helen Prejean](#) by Andrew Denton on *Enough Rope*. Note especially her description of her love for Patrick Sonnier, the person whom she first accompanied to the death chamber:



Photo taken by Marc Featherly, Illinois Wesleyan University. Permission granted by IWU.
Source: [Illinois Wesleyan University](#)

"Yes, I loved him. I loved him as a Christian you know. The media took a hold of that great story right? Nun falls in love with death row inmate and ah, but it wasn't a romantic love. It was a love of friendship and believing in his dignity. I was horrified at his crime, and I well I am still horrified at his crime. But I wanted him to be able to see his own dignity in my face and for him to look at me when they killed him."

SOMETHING TO PURSUE IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST

Do a web search on Helen Prejean's work. See if you can identify different perspectives on what the death penalty implies for human dignity.

3.2.3 A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN DIGNITY

Throughout this unit, we have explored four understandings (or bases) for thinking about human dignity. As we discussed examples for each understanding, we saw that problems arose when people took into account only *one* understanding. In our exploration of what it means to be human, we saw that the human person is multidimensional and that we are highly complex creatures. To consider only one aspect of the human person when trying to define what it means to be human would diminish the human person in his or her fullness. In the same way, to understand human dignity on the basis of one dimension alone would be to diminish the fullness of the human person and his or her dignity. A properly considered understanding of human dignity must take into account its multidimensionality - it is not either/or, but both/and.

READING

In this scene from the 1978 film, [‘Les Miserables’](#) (or read the [transcript](#)), we can see the multidimensionality of human dignity at work.

After Jean Valjean’s release from prison, he seeks help at the Bishop’s house, yet is considered by the housekeeper to be “a beggar, a monster.” In the housekeeper’s eyes, Valjean has lost all worth (dignity) as a person, and she regards him with contempt. This can be seen as an example of a 2b approach to human dignity: a convicted criminal is frequently judged in the eyes of society no longer to have personal value.

Bishop Myriel, on the other hand, sees Valjean differently. The Bishop sees Valjean’s inherent dignity and welcomes him, saying: “No man who is created good by God can be made entirely bad by man. There is always a spark which evil can never extinguish.” This can be seen as an example of a 1a approach to human dignity: a human person always has value because he or she has been created by God. Moreover, we can see something of a 1b approach here, too: it is not simply creation by God that bestows dignity, but moral value—dignity comes about because of the essential goodness of the person, which always remains no matter what wrongs have been committed.

The shame that we see in Valjean when he is caught by the police the next morning (after stealing the Bishop’s silver) and is again treated with kindness by Bishop Myriel, shows that Valjean is struggling with his own sense of self-worth. Here we are dealing with the 2a approach to human dignity: Valjean feels his own loss of worth because he has stolen from the Bishop even after the Bishop has shown him great kindness.

After Bishop Myriel restores Valjean’s freedom (by telling the police that it was he who had deliberately given Valjean the silver), he commissions Valjean to make a good life for himself and others. By treating Valjean as if he has dignity (1a, b), Myriel effectively restores that dignity for Valjean himself (2a), in the sight of those who might want to condemn him (2b). The Bishop does this not only on the basis of a belief in Valjean’s inherent worth (1a, b), but also in light of the possibilities of Valjean’s future. Valjean can go forward to act in accord with his own dignity (2a) and be of value to society (2b).

Can you see the way in which each of the four quadrants are reflected in the paragraphs above? How do these come together in the text to reflect a multidimensional approach to human dignity?

Now watch [Valjean’s Soliloquy](#) (or read the [transcript](#)) from the 2012 film, which highlights his transformation as a result of the Bishop’s kindness.

A multidimensional approach to human dignity recognises that human dignity is *both* inherent *and* acquired. It is something we hold innately as human beings, and it is something that has the potential to grow. A multidimensional approach recognises that if we subscribe to an understanding of human dignity as inherent, we also have a responsibility to uphold this dignity in ourselves and in others. Our actions can and do have a transforming effect on those around us, and it is in this sense that we can understand the potentiality of human dignity.

In the case studies for your assessment, you will be asked to explore the various appeals to human dignity and analyse how the case may be understood in light of a holistic, multidimensional understanding.