

whether what was inside a pregnant woman was a small human being was the same sort of question as whether what was inside a pregnant mare was a little horse, or what was inside a pregnant cat was a little kitten. Only at the very earliest stage would there (normally) be any dispute about these two cases; there should not be more about the human one. My interlocutor had nothing to say to this; he was obviously taken aback.

There is a sense of non-indifferent truth, which anyone will concede; truth is non-indifferent if it helps or frustrates your purpose to acknowledge it. Here virtue should promote an acknowledgement of the truth, if there is practical wisdom; for a convenient-looking falsehood is likely to do much disservice in the long run and a wise person will know that. Even if the convenient-looking falsehood does not rebound on you in the particular case, the habit of relying on falsehoods certainly will. As habits are created by practices, the wise one will therefore not want to engage in this practice at all. This is a calculation not dependent on his love of truth in itself, or on his unwillingness to offend God by lies.

No truth, then, is indifferent if it affects what is to be done. People who are hell-bent on evil purposes have therefore the strongest inclination of hostility or indifference to the truths, acknowledgement of which would threaten their proceedings. But there is *still* nevertheless the distinction that I started out with, the distinction between knowledge that is got by consulting the well-informed, making observations, checking information, learning history or natural science or mathematics or logic; and the knowledge, which is what I called connatural to a virtuous person: the knowledge, for example, of the dignity of human nature which comes out in the behaviour of one who has it even if he has never formulated it. That knowledge is not unavailable to us who are not virtuous but may be restrained by shame from misusing people we have the power to misuse. But it is strong only in good people.

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## The Dignity of the Human Being

We live in a society — or in societies — where there is an obligatory passion for equality. The prestige of democracy is connected with this.

Marxists, and many other people, regard 'inequality' as a word of reproach against any system. With Marxists, indeed, I have noticed that the various natural inequalities among human beings are not called 'inequalities' but 'differences'. For Marxists, then, an inequality is a 'difference' which is objectionable. To call it an inequality is to imply that it ought to be eliminated.

There is a truth of which all this is a distorted reflection. There is just one impregnable equality of all human beings. It lies in the value and dignity of being a human being.

When I call this equality impregnable, I do not mean that it is inviolable. That is, I do not mean that it cannot be violated. It can. Alas, it often *has* been violated, often now *is* violated. It was violated in chattel slavery where the slave had no rights — not even the right to a marriage where husband and wife cannot be sold apart or their small children sold away from them. It is violated every time people are killed for others' convenience as the Nazis killed mental defectives; or as in warfare civilian populations are bombed, or when anyone murders his fellow human, not in anger as deserving death, but for advantage to himself. So too it is

\* From undated manuscript. English original of lecture given in German.

violated when an obviously human foetus is deliberately killed in abortion. It is violated by someone who puts his dead or dying mother out into a rubbish bin. I might add to the list but need not.

What do I mean, then, by saying that the value and dignity of a human being is impregnable? I mean that it cannot be taken away.

If there are equal voting rights in a set of people, they may be taken away from part of the set. Then that is an equality you no longer have if you are one of the deprived part. It is not as if you still had that equality, those voting rights, but are prevented from exercising them. No, I am imagining a change in which those rights are taken away from you.

The equality of human beings in the worth and dignity of being human is one that can't be taken away, no matter how much it is violated. Violations remain *violations*.

When I call this an impregnable equality, someone may be tempted to deride me. For are not all cats equal in being cats? Have I said more than that humans are equal in being humans? I have said more, or implied more. There is a special worth and dignity in being a human. The following will bring this out. I implied that angry vengeful killing may not be *eo ipso* a violation of human dignity. This is not meant to suggest that it is an OK sort of thing to do. But here the killer may have an answer to the question: '*For what* did that person have to die?' — an answer which says 'He deserved it'.

To regard someone as deserving death is very definitely regarding him, not just as a human being but as endowed with a dignity belonging to human beings, as having free will and as answerable for his actions. I am not defending the murderer I am imagining; he has not the right to kill his victim. But I am *contrasting* him with the murderer who is willing to kill someone for gain or other advantage, to kill as getting rid of this human being suits his plans. *He* is not respecting in his victim the dignity of a human being at all. Similarly with 'active euthanasia' which is non-

voluntary on the part of the victim. He is to be killed because of the 'disvalue' of his life; his living is of negative value and so things are better with him dead.

Capital punishment, though you may have reason against it, does not, just as such, sin against the human dignity of one who suffers it. He is at least supposed to be answering for crime of which he has been found guilty by due process.

When capital punishment takes grisly forms, as it often has in various places — like the English hanging, drawing and quartering for high treason, like the French *peine forte et dure*, like the American electric chair or gas chamber, like the Chinese 'death of a thousand cuts', like impalement or burning over a slow fire — then it takes on a character which means that the victim's human dignity is being violated. The ancient Hebrew Law, the Torah, shows us why in an expression restricting punishments: a man was not to be given more than forty stripes 'lest thy brother become vile in thy sight'.

This warning is connected with other punishments than execution, but it applies to execution too. Sometimes, we learn, an executioner in the past would ask the victim for forgiveness and sometimes the executed would give the executioner something for his pains and freely forgive him. A method of execution which would rule out the possibility of such a request as grotesque because it makes a vile spectacle of the executed, is surely a sin against human dignity. The Athenian cup of henlock seems the furthest from 'making your brother vile in your sight'. A man might deserve much worse, but inflicting much worse upon him means making him a vile spectacle, as the Romans did those they crucified. It is doing that, even if you cover the spectacle up, as in America they cover the face of the victim in the electric chair with a mask because it becomes horrible to see. The

\* Deuteronomy 25: 3

spectacle may be hidden from the physical eye, but so it is emphasised for the eye of the mind.

All my considerations have by implication emphasised the bodily life of man. This is not because disregard of human dignity is always directly connected with attacks on that bodily life. If a state makes it illegal to teach some class of men to read, that is also an assault on human dignity. One can think of others which are similarly directed against mental and spiritual enlargement. Nevertheless in our day — and perhaps in any day — the primary target of assaults on the value and dignity of human nature is man's bodily life. This we see in abortion, in euthanasia, in operations to turn a male or female human being into a pre-tended member of the opposite sex, in experiments with human embryos. With the latter we approach a sort of attack on the kind of being a human is by playing with developmental possibilities and unnatural modes of reproduction: artificial insemination, in vitro fertilisation, combination of human with non-human gametes; in short, interfering with the human generative powers and elements in such a way as to damage, abuse them *and* the character of human generation itself. This last occurs in *two* ways: one is contraception, whereby what is the generative kind of act is prevented from being so by deliberately rendering it infertile in case it would otherwise have been fertile; the other is by some technical generating or trying to generate human beings otherwise than by procreation. Procreation by the male in the female is intrinsic to the mode of a new human life's coming about by human operation. Why? It is because what the operation is bringing about *is* human life. Fatherhood — which means procreation — and motherhood — which means conception — are a very important part of the human relationships constituting the life of man. Making human zygotes in a dish or test-tube is an enormity because the operator is a manufacturer — even if he uses his own semen — not a father. Remember that we are intellectual animals, whose vegetative and animal life is part of a life framed by our

intellectuality: we are nourished, for example, not like plants but like other animals, but our eating is conducted in a specially human way, reason entering into the getting and preparation of food and into the conduct of meals. Similarly our sexual activity and reproduction is all tied up with our intellect, our not merely animal emotions and our aesthetic feelings. Reason and love enter into most, and certainly into all characteristically human exercise of this vital function. Hence marriage and the celebration of and awe before procreation and pregnancy. The child who is conceived by a mother, and who has a father, is not unequal to them. I think people have hardly considered what will be the status of babies who have not even grown inside a woman and been born. Suppose the experimenters succeed with artificial placentas which they are trying to make; suppose they produce children who reach the stage of separation from the placenta. It will take legislation for those children not to be mere scientific property. How far further will our consciences be calloused by that time if it comes in ten or twenty five years?

This helps a bit to make one see that as we respect human dignity by respecting human life, so we violate human dignity by not respecting human sexuality. This means respecting human sexual intercourse as being the means by which human life is propagated into new individuals, not because no other means are imaginable; as we know, they are not merely imaginable but actual; but because procreation is the means belonging to our life as life of the kind we are. That is a very basic aspect of human life, remaining when reproductive sexuality is indulged, without its proper surrounding in marriage. 'Human life' means the human course of life, not just a human's being alive.

We have free will; it is therefore open to us to use our powers wrongly, and it has become open to us to succeed in abusing them essentially. And it is a great temptation to us, the more we can, to arrange to have our pleasures, and have or not have off-

spring, according to our desires — with recourse to the ingenious technology of our race and time.

If we do this, if we don't stick to human procreation of human beings, we generate further contempt for beginning human life and further alienation from belief in the dignity and value of human-ness. This is clear if we contemplate the experimenter who begged for human ova from gynaecological clinics and fertilised them with his own semen. It will also be clear if you consider how developments make the following possible: human foetuses have a certain commercial value. So a woman of today may find a possibility of becoming pregnant, letting the baby grow to twenty eight weeks (because bigger ones are worth more) and then going somewhere where they will pay her for a late abortion, which yields the foetus for resale, say, as valuable material. If you act so, are you not shewing that you do not regard that human being with any reverence? Few will fail to see that. But the same is true of one who has an abortion so that she can play in a tennis championship; or for any reason for which someone might choose to destroy the life of a new human being.

This lack of reverence, of respect for that dignity of human nature so wonderfully created by God, is lack of regard for the one impregnable equality of all human beings. Lacking it, you cannot revere the dignity of your own human-ness, that is the dignity of that same human nature in yourself. You may value yourself highly as a tennis player or a natural scientist, but without a change of heart you cannot value yourself as being a human, a *Mensch*. For you have shewn the value you set on a human life as such. You are willing to extinguish it as suits you or as suits the people who want you to do so.

Like very many people I have observed something of the celebrations of VE Day, celebrations of the victory of the allies over Nazi Germany. I have been bitterly amused at the solemn pratings about how the human spirit shewed that it *could not* be suppressed; the love of freedom *must* win in the end — but, it was

added, we must never forget, because we must be resolved never to let such things happen again. We must remain in the sun of morality triumphant over evil; we must preserve our happy state and be determined to fight against monstrous evils when they threaten. 'Fools!' I thought. 'You talk of being armed in spirit against possible future threats of evil. You seem all unconscious of living in an actually murderous world.' Each nation that has 'liberal' abortion laws has rapidly become, if it was not already, a nation of murderers. There are nearly a million abortions in the United States every year (perhaps more now) and in my own country it is proportionate. I assume that it is about the same in any advanced nation that has embraced abortion.