

3 Human dignity as ethical point of reference

3.1 Identification and overview

To ethically analyze and assess developments, such as the changes in human labor that occur in the context of digital transformation, guiding ethical principles and norms are required as instruments embedded in a suitable framework. While several discussions have aimed at establishing new ethical principles in the era of technology-based changes, this would not be appropriate for the present analysis. First, the claim to universality would likely be compromised, as technology-based developments are subject to constant modification with unforeseen implications. As such, this would require that new ethical values be adjusted continually in response to digital transformations, amounting to a permanent short-term revision cycle. Second, ethical frameworks based on principles that have been established over multiple decades and centuries are suitable for informing newer developments, as their usability has been confirmed independently from the contemporary state of technology by approaching humanity or human needs from an ethical standpoint. Moreover, they have robust theoretical foundations.

This chapter introduces, explains, and justifies the ethical point of reference within which the main research question will be addressed. First, the examination of various ethical approaches that led to the selection of the capabilities approach which aims to define a life with human dignity will be detailed. This will be followed by a discussion of human dignity, providing a short history of the term and highlighting the challenges associated with its specification. Subsequently, the principle of human dignity will be justified as a moral value that can claim universality from an ethical perspective by fulfilling the principle of generalizability. The capability theory and the capabilities approach will then be introduced discussing frameworks of a normative approach to human welfare. In addition, the approach's applicability to analyzing technological developments and addressing relevant ethical questions will be demonstrated. In that context, the ten central human capabilities that the capabilities approach encompasses will be specified with a discussion of the role that work plays in human dignity by

incorporating the predominant normative religious-ethical views and other relevant perspectives.

Previous studies have applied other methodological frameworks to analyze the impact of new technologies in the context of automation from an ethical perspective, depending on the specific area assessed⁸⁷. Some have been based on critical-rational ethics⁸⁸ and have included a principle-guided rational basis for ethics⁸⁹. Critical-rational ethics claims that its principles are rationally justifiable⁹⁰. Therefore, “ethical principles are rationally justified if they are generally endorsed by, that is to say acceptable to, all affected persons, given their full equality and effective self-determination”⁹¹. From an ethical perspective, technology’s treatment of human beings is particularly salient here. One potential approach from a critical-rational ethics standpoint would be to prevent technology from considering humans as a means, which would make them vulnerable⁹², but only as an end⁹³ based on Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative⁹⁴.

Additional ethical frameworks applied in the context of automation have explored predominantly utilitarian approaches, focusing on the consequences of machines’ actions⁹⁵ or virtue ethics approaches, which examine technology’s potential for moral learning through practice and self-updating⁹⁶. A purely utilitarian approach was discounted on the grounds that its purpose of achieving the “greatest happiness of the greatest number”⁹⁷ relativizes the universality of human rights⁹⁸, which are based on an “overlapping consensus”⁹⁹. This could result in advocating the majority’s “happiness” at the expense of a minority’s “unhappiness”, promoting only the satisfaction of preferences¹⁰⁰. It also risks reducing morality to a

87 Steinmann et al. 2016; Gruat 2015; McKie 2004; Burls et al. 2011; Martin et al. 2019

88 Decker 2008; Serafimova 2020; Gonzalez 2015; Mitcham 2015

89 Meyer 2017

90 Johnson/Cureton 2021

91 Koller 1992: 75

92 Harvard Business Review Staff 2003

93 Duewell 2010: 77

94 Kant/Weischedel 1982: 61

95 Anderson/Anderson 2007; Leung 2017; Karnouskos 2020

96 Howard/Muntean 2017; Consoli 2008; Coeckelbergh 2021

97 Bentham 1988

98 Gibbard 1984: 92; Heard 1997; Demenchonok 2009

99 Valadier 2014: 265

100 Nussbaum 2011: 50-51

simple cost–benefit analysis¹⁰¹, which may also relativize the equality of all humans’ rights. Furthermore, the principle of utility as such would be aligned with the pursuit of an efficiency-driven digital transformation regardless of the individual human, which leads to fundamental distress or even disregard for human dignity of all humans¹⁰² as a result of advancing automation¹⁰³. Additionally, it may focus primarily on utility, which would avoid the valuational issue by merely identifying valuation with utility in the form of happiness or desire-fulfillment¹⁰⁴.

The utilitarian approach has largely manifested in the GDP metric, and four problems arise in relation to the use of this metric to measure national quality of life, making it less democratic¹⁰⁵. First, the aggregation across lives through GDP (per capita) leads to the neglect of people at the bottom of the social ladder. Second, the terms “satisfaction” or “pleasure” in the utilitarian approach suggests singleness and commensurability, whereas real life, by contrast, is based on diversity and incommensurability. Third, preferences are not “hard-wired: they respond to social conditions”¹⁰⁶. These adaptive preferences occur when the person initially wanted something that they no longer desire. Fourth, the utilitarian approach sees satisfaction as a goal; however, satisfaction is a state or condition that ensues from activity or action taken¹⁰⁷. It is not in itself an activity.

Further ethical approaches that were discarded in the present research are resource-based approaches that urge the equal allocation of basic resources on the understanding that wealth and income are all-purpose resources¹⁰⁸. Several objections arise in relation to implementing approaches that focus predominantly on distribution. First, “income and wealth are not good proxies for what people are actually able to do and to be”¹⁰⁹. Each individual’s needs with respect to resources are likely to differ. Second, wealth and income are not suitable proxies for the ability to function in many areas¹¹⁰. For instance, stigma and discrimination may persist, even if wealth and income are completely equalized. Third, certain benefits, such

101 Serafimova 2020: 8

102 Kirchsclaeger 2021: 114-115

103 Helbing 2019: 47-50

104 Sen 2008: 30

105 Nussbaum 2011: 51-52

106 *ibid.*: 43

107 *ibid.*: 55

108 Nussbaum 2011: 56

109 *ibid.*: 57

110 *ibid.*: 58

as religious freedom or freedom of speech, are not considered by such approaches.

The capabilities approach may be characterized as a species of human rights approach¹¹¹, as the capabilities it encompasses overlap with the human rights recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and cover the same terrain of so-called first-generation rights, encompassing political and civil rights, and so-called second-generation rights, which include economic and social rights. In this sense, the capabilities approach “supplements the standard human rights approaches”¹¹². Furthermore, protection of human dignity is a key aspect of both the capabilities approach and human rights¹¹³, and both serve as “side-constraints” on the ways in which social goals must be pursued, with the idea of a “social minimum that any political society must secure”¹¹⁴. In that respect, states can pursue their conception of the social good on condition that they do not violate citizens’ opportunities to freely exercise their capabilities. The capabilities approach is also more specific than the language of human rights, which can be considered to be overly vague and unhelpful¹¹⁵. The capabilities approach also includes the relationship with non-human animals and nature¹¹⁶ in the framework.

Securing the minimal preconditions for a good society may permit the violation of certain individual rights, such as property rights, which may cause a clash between capability satisfaction and efforts to promote capabilities¹¹⁷. Counter to this, however, is the argument that rights should be more closely understood in terms of capabilities, which would be more easily accepted and realized, based on the assumption that the inherent interpersonal pluralism of the capabilities approach overcomes the potentially too rigid and stale concepts of rights-talk¹¹⁸.

The capabilities approach offers close links with deontological perspectives¹¹⁹, agreeing with the Kantian idea that “social welfare should never be pursued in a way that violates people’s fundamental entitlements”. More-

111 Nussbaum 2011: 62

112 *ibid*: 63

113 Brooks 2012: xv

114 Nussbaum 2012

115 Brooks 2012: xv

116 Nussbaum 2006b; Nussbaum 2011

117 West 2012: 194

118 Sen 2012

119 Nussbaum 2011: 94

over, the capabilities approach embraces political liberalism. Generally, the capabilities approach has been identified as suitable for analyzing the impact of changes caused by advancing automation from an ethical perspective as “for many people, these capabilities are actualized and developed in the context of daily work or based on being employed and earning sufficient wages” and “if we take employment out of the equation, there must be alternative structures in place to ensure that people (...) still have the ability to actualize and develop the capabilities that are critical to living a human life with dignity”¹²⁰.

To best serve the research interests, therefore, *human dignity*—specifically, the definition of a life lived with human dignity based on the capabilities approach—has been identified as the optimal ethical point of reference for the ethical assessment. In addition to being justifiable as a moral value (see Section 3.2), the principle of human dignity represents an integral part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹²¹, and the dignity of every human being must be respected and protected. Furthermore, the International Labor Organization (ILO)¹²² states in its Philadelphia Declaration that “labor is not a commodity” and “all human beings (...) have the right to pursue both their material well-being, and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity”. This gives an indication as to the relevance of human dignity in the context of evaluating labor, notably in terms of recent changes caused by digital transformation and automation¹²³. Owing to the representative nature of these declarations, involving the commitment of all member states of the United Nations, they exemplify a global moral compass¹²⁴. Therefore, human dignity can serve as an ethical point of reference characterized by universal consensus, practical orientation, and the ability to be enacted as positive law¹²⁵, on condition that the term and its associated framework are sufficiently defined. In addition, human dignity can serve as a key facilitator to bridge the gaps between different ideological actors to promote and “adapt” human rights¹²⁶.

120 Nokelainen et al. 2018: 19

121 UN 1948

122 ILO 1944: 1-2

123 Torresen 2018; Cruddas 2020; Arkin et al. 2012

124 Huppenbauer 2017: 53; Muerbe/Weiss 2018: 103; Frick 2017

125 Kirchsclaeger 2014: 1

126 Kirchsclaeger 2016b: 188-190

Of course, this methodological framework is not the only option; other ethical principles and approaches could also help to find ethical guidance in the context of advancing human labor automation, as discussed above. The following sections will demonstrate that, for this specific research area, the normative validity of this ethical point of reference can be ethically justified, which constitutes the main reason for its selection.

3.1.1 Short history of human dignity

The roots of the human dignity concept may be traced back to classical antiquity and Cicero's *dignitas romana*¹²⁷, which drew on a concept known to Greek philosophy with emphasis on the sociopolitical aspects of personal action within the community. There, the substance of dignity is constituted by the dignity with which a person establishes and lives out their life in society¹²⁸.

Contemplating the evolution of the recent past, beginning with the UN Declaration of Human Rights, additional documents produced throughout in recent decades have enshrined human dignity as the foundational concept of human rights law and the “ultimate value” that lends coherence to human rights¹²⁹. Examples include the Vienna Declaration of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, the 1996 International Human Rights Covenants¹³⁰, and the Bonn Basic Law of 1949¹³¹. However, these official commitments to dignity are new to human history, given that dignity has traditionally been attributed primarily to an elite group. This is still implicit in the definition offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary*¹³², which defines the term as “the state or quality of being worthy of honor or respect” or “a high rank or position”. In this context, human dignity was a rather hierarchical distinction applied to a few individuals rather than a universal principle of equality¹³³ and, in premodern times, was used to denote characteristics such as personal authority or majesty¹³⁴, which, for instance, is

127 Rosen 2012

128 Nussbaum 2009

129 Hasson 2003: 83

130 Donnelly 2013: 28

131 Huber 2015: 9

132 Oxford English Dictionary n.d.-d

133 Brennan/Lo 2007: 44

134 Englard 1999

still inherent in the word “dignitary”¹³⁵. Modern notions of dignity include the upwards equalization of rank and attempt to extend to all humans the dignity and respect that were formerly the preserve of the nobility¹³⁶. The global acknowledgment of human dignity from a cosmopolitan standpoint whereby “everybody matters”¹³⁷ is a relatively new phenomenon.

Past grave contraventions or violations of human dignity have rendered this principle particularly pertinent, forming new values by virtue of the emotional force that it carries¹³⁸. This is a development that may occur independently of any specific religious background or tradition and that promotes a universalistic fundamental feature that is highly relevant in the context of globalization, particularly in light of the global interweaving of communication opportunities¹³⁹. These new possibilities highlight how the violation of basic rights may be perceived in all other locations, a strong indicator of how values are also becoming increasingly globalized or universalized, in addition to the more conventionally known characteristics of globalization such as internationalization of trade and capital. Human rights and globalization may be said to go hand in hand, given the strong need for globally recognizable or universal norms, as actions nowadays are of global reach and thus facilitate universal awareness of human rights¹⁴⁰. Every generation must nonetheless reinvigorate the recognition of the human right to equal dignity, as demonstrated by the various crimes that are committed in the aftermath of publicly known cruelties. For instance, the violent crimes perpetrated in Hitler’s Germany did not prevent subsequent generations from pursuing ethnic cleansing in crumbling Yugoslavia, demonstrates that awareness of the universality of the right to human dignity requires continuous reinforcement¹⁴¹. However, loss of civilian life and gruesome revelations of the treatment of minorities appear to have promoted the concept of human dignity at the international level and its endorsement¹⁴², particularly from the Second World War to the present day. This development reveals how discussions regarding how the principle of human dignity might best be enacted have become more universally salient.

135 Cambridge Dictionary n.d.-b

136 Waldron 2012

137 Appiah 2006: 144

138 Joas 2000

139 Huber 2015: 7-12

140 Kant/Malter 2008: 40-46

141 Heitmeyer 2016

142 Chalmers/Ida 2007: 157-158; Eckert 2007: 41-51

3.1.2 The specification challenge of the term human dignity

Definitions of the term “human dignity” have been at times controversial¹⁴³ and ambiguous. Various aspects warrant further exploration: the concept of dignity as a position of high rank or membership of an elite group may be classified as “social dignity”, whereas the “virtue of dignity” denotes an attitude that contributes to good moral or ethical temperament¹⁴⁴. This suggests that human dignity refers to a “special moral worth and status had by a human being”. In this regard, it is essential that the term be further narrowed down and specified, particularly given the gravity of allegations that an individual’s human dignity has been violated¹⁴⁵. For instance, human dignity may be understood as *inherent* and *permanent* to every human being and impossible to take away or acquire, which stands in contrast to perceptions of human dignity as *contingent* or *limited*. In addition, in the context of human dignity violations, further clarification is warranted. Whereas “expressive dignity” describes a human behavior, “esthetic dignity” relates to an entity’s external appearance and should be distinguished from ethical understandings of human dignity. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that not all moral mistakes automatically constitute violations of human dignity, as this would diminish the term’s weight in ethical debates.

Regarding the practical orientation of human dignity, it is helpful to refer to the minimum preconditions required for a life of dignity in the contemporary world, whereby human rights and human dignity are considered as mutually co-constituting one another¹⁴⁶. In this context, human rights could be seen as justified by its creation of human beings able to live a life of dignity.

Human dignity is frequently regarded as the basis for human rights¹⁴⁷, and appeals to human dignity and human rights have saved countless lives in the past and created options for political power and de-legitimization of unjust power. Therefore, human dignity can help distinguish between right and wrong in difficult situations¹⁴⁸. In essence, this requires agreeing on a “minimum core” of human dignity, whereby an individual’s intrinsic worth as a human being must be recognized and respected by others, and

143 Kirchsclaeger 2013: 280-290; Sandkuehler 2015; Schaber 2012

144 Meyer 2002: 196-197

145 Schaber 2004

146 Donnelly 2013: 132

147 Duewell 2010

148 Naudé 2008

some forms of treatment by a state or authority prove to be inconsistent¹⁴⁹, as the state exists for providing toward individual human beings, not vice versa. Human dignity generally requires further specification to determine its optimal practical orientation, which is essential, given that it is too important to risk obscuring it with vagueness¹⁵⁰.

The use of human dignity as a reference point has also been controversial throughout time, as different arguments have been raised as to whether human dignity can claim universality as an ethical principle. One of the most common arguments against this notion stems from cultural relativism, which doubts whether the principle is interculturally valid during the current era of globalization in light of its strong affiliation with the European culture and its Judeo-Christian roots¹⁵¹. The essence of human dignity, as conceived within the biblical framework, is detailed in Genesis 1.27–1.28 with the words, “so God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them”, which marks the understanding of dignity as attributable to the placement of humans above of the rest of His creation, thereby implying that we as humans are worthy as we are loved and honored by God¹⁵².

According to this Judeo-Christian perspective, dignity may be understood as universal¹⁵³. However, Genesis 2.7 proclaims: “therefore the Lord God formed man from the slime of the earth”, leading Pope Innocent III in the twelfth century to designate man as “an element having lesser dignity than others”. In this context, and throughout the majority of Christianity’s history, this understanding has been tended to predominate over the optimistic interpretation that highlights humans’ likeness to God—the *Imago Dei*¹⁵⁴. Human dignity was thus perceived very differently within the Christian tradition prior to the 20th century. This relativizes the argument that the very concept of human dignity should be discarded in light of its Judeo-Christian origins and Western perceptions, as the concept’s understanding within this tradition has varied considerably over time. Examples of debates within the Western context include various intellectual movements, such as the humanism of the Italian renaissance, Spanish scholasticism, and

149 Neumann 2000

150 Bedford-Strohm 2010: 211

151 Hoeffe 2002: 111

152 Englund 1999: 1908

153 Donnelly 2013: 124–132

154 Puffer 2017

the German Reformation, that gave rise to a more inclusive conception of human dignity¹⁵⁵.

Human rights, therefore, were historically obliged to prevail against resistance from the Christian church, and the Judeo-Christian roots of the concept of human dignity remained largely in the background. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a breakthrough and a new commitment to human rights on the part of the church in tandem with the affirmation that human dignity is inherent to all human beings, based in part on the Second Vatican Council¹⁵⁶ between 1961-1965. The various contributors to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 included authors of secular, Christian Arab, or Chinese origin, and so the formulation highlights a broad merging of background ideas and may be presented as a “value generalization”¹⁵⁷. This argument stands in strong opposition to the culturally relativistic view; however, the universalistic claim can only be accepted if human rights address themselves self-critically and do not claim cultural superiority as such¹⁵⁸.

Christian ethics and human dignity constitute a class of “late romance”¹⁵⁹ as a result of the profound mistrust of human rights and human dignity in the context of enlightenment period. This was largely attributable to the reluctance toward secularization and the open anti-enlightenment rhetoric that was predominantly observed in European churches in the 18th and 19th century. Ecumenical thinking after the Second World War began to support theoretical paradigms that centered human rights as an embodiment of human dignity, supported by arguments drawn from the Bible¹⁶⁰.

Modern conceptions of human rights are also generally more “radical”¹⁶¹ than those of premodern Judeo-Christian traditions, as every human being is now regarded as entitled to the same fundamental rights. The notion of eurocentrism in human rights thus represents a misunderstanding, because the assertion that God created humans in His image is not based on a particular doctrine that would distinguish between Jews and Christians. Rather, this position holds that no human being’s dignity may be touched,

155 Huber 2015: 11

156 Huenermann et al. 2005

157 Joas 2012: 251-264

158 Huber 2015: 13-15

159 Bedford-Strohm 2010: 213-214

160 Smit 2007: 352

161 Huber 1994: 52-55

contradicting the clearly expressed skepticism¹⁶² that frames the universalism of human rights as a luxury for the established.

Another counter-argument raised against the notion of human dignity concerns its vagueness from a conceptual perspective. This stems, in many cases, from the high-level notions found in many legal documents that have framed the international human rights regime¹⁶³. A further argument in the same vein criticizes the use of multiple different philosophical discussions and approaches to positively justify the term¹⁶⁴ of human dignity, which generates numerous possibilities and nonetheless struggles to delineate a satisfactory inclusive definition.

The definition of human dignity must thus be firmed up, including the argument as to why all human beings are entitled to human dignity, i.e., to live a life with human dignity to claim universality. The applicability furthermore needs to be justified in the context of the advancing automation of human labor, i.e., the framework should be appropriate for analyzing technological changes from an ethical perspective.

3.2 Justification of human dignity as a moral value

In light of the different approaches toward human dignity and the challenges outlined above, it is appropriate here to justify and demonstrate the moral validity of the principle of human dignity. To this end, a negative justification path will be outlined below, as this approach has already been proven useful in the justification of moral values in other contexts, highlighting a “via negations”, which distinguishes the human from the inhuman¹⁶⁵. Specifically, the principle of vulnerability will be used to this end¹⁶⁶.

The justification of human dignity from a philosophical perspective finds its main challenge in the principle of generalizability¹⁶⁷. If not fulfilled, this can restrict the circle of addressees and run counter to the universal character of human dignity. As several approaches exclude certain groups

162 Spaeman 1988: 709

163 Beitz 2013

164 Schaber 2004; 2012

165 Rommel 2020: 56

166 Kirchsclaeger 2016a

167 Kirchsclaeger 2016a: 201

of people as a result of the principle's positive definition and justification of the principle of human dignity, any potential for discrimination must be excluded, and high sensitivity to possible discriminatory elements in the theoretical discussion of human dignity emerges as salient¹⁶⁸. A negative justification approach may operate free from discrimination, as it is not obliged to specify any characteristics or abilities that entitle an individual to human dignity. Rather, the negative approach to human dignity is based on the violations of human dignity that people suffer or may suffer, and which must be stopped and prevented.

The justification path through the principle of vulnerability¹⁶⁹ claims that vulnerability affects all humans and highlights how they differ from others and that people grant human dignity to one another on the basis of the principle of vulnerability. Therefore, people do not possess human dignity because of their vulnerability but rather because people come to terms with their vulnerability and its relevance and become aware of the “first-person perspective” and their own and all people’s “self-relationship” and recognize this as part of the human condition. Because they recognize the vulnerability of all people encompassing the “first-person perspective” and the “self-relationship”, human beings assign each other human dignity to one another as fellow human beings.

In sum, based on the principle of vulnerability¹⁷⁰, human dignity is inherently justified without any need to argue on the basis of which characteristics all human beings deserve respect—that is, which characteristics constitute human beings as human beings. Moreover, this foundation of justification may be linked to violations that have occurred in the contexts of different religions, cultures, traditions, civilizations, and worldviews, because the principle of vulnerability offers diverse and multilayered points of connection. Finally, this foundation of reasons *ex negativo* is compatible with both religious and secular conceptions of human dignity. For these reasons, the principle of human dignity is generalizable and universal based on the principle of vulnerability, which demands that the dignity of each and every human being be respected.

168 *ibid.*: 202-203

169 Kirchsclaeger 2016a: 203-206

170 Kirchsclaeger 2016a: 206

3.3 The capabilities approach

In light of the above justification of the principle of human dignity based on the principle of vulnerability, it may be concluded that humans are inherently entitled to dignity and that this excludes other species, such as animals, at least from a similar understanding of dignity. Therefore, humans may be assumed to have a special status, and consequently, their dignified life is a moral imperative. This leads onto the below discussion concerning what features or capabilities are required to realize this imperative.

The capabilities approach will be discussed below in a bid to define more specifically what a life befitting that dignity requires. The framework will be introduced in detail, and its usefulness for the subsequent ethical evaluation will be demonstrated. In the final section of this chapter, the ethical point of reference will be justified. In general, the capabilities approach may be summarized as follows: “The purpose of global development, like the purpose of good domestic national policy, is to enable people to live full and creative lives, developing their potential and fashioning a meaningful existence commensurate with their equal human dignity”¹⁷¹.

3.3.1 Introduction

The various capability theories typically cohere around two normative claims: first, that the freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance and second, that well-being should be understood in terms of people’s capabilities and functionings¹⁷². Capabilities are defined as “doings” and “beings” that people may achieve if they so choose; their opportunity to do or be such things—for example, well-nourished, relieved of pain, educated, or well-traveled. Functionings are those capabilities that have been realized. Whether a human being can convert means such as resources or public goods into a functioning—that is, whether the person has a particular capability—crucially depends on certain personal, sociopolitical, or environmental conditions. These conditions are called “conversion factors”. Capabilities may also be represented by real or substantive freedoms that have been cleared of any potential obstacles, in contrast to

171 Nussbaum 2011: 185

172 Robeyns/Byskov 2021

mere formal rights and freedoms. A chosen (or realized) functioning vector entails a combination of different kinds and amounts of functionings¹⁷³, and an individual's capability is defined as a set of functioning vectors with a set of commodities (goods and services), resources (income, time or assets), and utilization abilities, given external conditions consisting of social institutions, including market prices, and the individual's other characteristics and natural or historical circumstances. These are things that "he or she has a reason to value"¹⁷⁴. This value-laden definition builds the normative criterion for determining which functions are valuable¹⁷⁵. Functioning is an "active realization of one or more capabilities"¹⁷⁶, where capability denotes the opportunity to select. For instance, a person who is starving and another who is fasting have the same type of functioning whereby their nutrition is limited, but they do not have the same capability, in that the fasting person can simply choose not to fast, while the starving person has no such choice.

Capability theories encompass a broadly inclusive range of dimensions, social relations, and personal constraints that prioritize individual value of life, freedom as a potential capability set, and "conversion abilities of individuals and of the social world itself"¹⁷⁷. They position themselves between resourcism and utilitarianism¹⁷⁸. Resources, goods, and services are important only insofar as people can use them and so they function in a certain way. However, to focus on resources is misleading, as some persons may require more resources to attain the same level of functioning as others¹⁷⁹. Mere resource compensation for differences in conversion factors is thus insufficient to promote the capability, as, for example, political rights may be instrumental in an individual's failure to achieve a certain level of functioning. Therefore, crucial to all of the various capability theories is the definition of basic or central capabilities. Amartya Sen's capability theory typically refrains from selecting lists of capabilities, preferring to remain open for different uses in public and democratic deliberation¹⁸⁰. By contrast, adopting a more evolutionary approach, Martha Nussbaum argued

173 Sen 1993, cited in Gotoh 2021: 7

174 Sen 2011: 231

175 Claassen 2014: 251

176 Nussbaum 2011: 25

177 Rawls 2003, cited in Gotoh 2021: viii

178 Claassen 2014: 3

179 Sen 1990; Pogge 2002; Anderson 2010

180 Sen 2011

that it is necessary to define these capabilities to devise a theory of justice that can justify action-guiding and, additionally, serve a critical function¹⁸¹. This capability theory of justice has become known as the “capabilities approach”¹⁸² and is associated with “greater philosophical satisfaction”¹⁸³.

This approach can serve as a comparative quality-of-life assessment in theorizing about social justice¹⁸⁴. It regards each individual as an end and considers not only the total or average well-being but also the opportunities available to each and every person, while focusing on choice and freedom and maintaining a pluralist approach to values. Nussbaum’s approach further encompasses the notion of human dignity and political entitlements. Although Sen acknowledged the importance of human dignity¹⁸⁵, he did not center it in his theoretical framework.

Different frameworks based on capability theory have been employed for the development of different concepts and normative theories within development ethics, political philosophy, or public health ethics¹⁸⁶. In this research, the term “capabilities approach” will be used in line with Nussbaum’s theory and as a pluralistic term, as this emphasizes that “most important elements of people’s quality of life are plural and qualitatively distinct” as well as that “aspects of individuals lives cannot be reduced to a single metric without distortion”¹⁸⁷. It constructs a theory of basic social justice that incorporates the notions of human dignity, threshold, and political liberalism¹⁸⁸. To a certain extent, it is aligned with Rawls’ approach to political justice, the idea of political liberalism¹⁸⁹ in which individual freedom plays a crucial role. The approach is a “political doctrine only, and on that aspires to be the object of an overlapping consensus”¹⁹⁰ and capabilities are not “just residing abilities inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment”¹⁹¹. Historically, the approach

181 Nussbaum 2003

182 Wells 2022

183 Brooks 2012: xii

184 Nussbaum 2011: 18-25

185 Claassen 2014

186 Robeyns/Byskov 2021

187 Nussbaum 2011: 18

188 *ibid.*: 19

189 *ibid.*: 89

190 *ibid.*: 93

191 *ibid.*: 20

has been influenced by philosophical views focused on human flourishing or self-realization¹⁹². Moreover, the approach holds that all human beings in a given nation should pursue the same political goal—namely, that “all should get above a certain *threshold* level of combined capability, in the sense not of coerced functioning but of substantial freedom to choose and act”¹⁹³.

The capabilities approach incorporates “moral philosophy into development economics”¹⁹⁴ into its comparative and normative versions. Ethical norms and standards of justice are incorporated and regarded as a baseline for what makes a minimally just society. It focuses on development as part of public policy¹⁹⁵ rather than GDP. In that regard, the approach takes into account that the judgment of states purely on the basis of economic growth omits crucial dimensions and considerations; for instance, economic growth itself delivers no improvements on health and education when no direct state action is taken accordingly.

Generally, the approach is not a theory on human nature, nor does it calibrate norms from innate human nature¹⁹⁶. Rather, it is “evaluative and ethical from the start”, asking “among the many things that humans might develop the capacity to do, which are the ones that a minimally just society will endeavor to nurture and support?” In that sense, the capabilities approach focuses on opportunities open to each person¹⁹⁷ and offers an alternative to GDP by incorporating important values. All nations experience struggles to ensure human dignity as well as equality and justice.

From a political standpoint, the capabilities approach focuses on the capabilities themselves as appropriate goals rather than the functionings, because this allows space for human freedom¹⁹⁸ rather than insisting that governments must *make* people do certain things, such as lead healthy lives or practice religion. A policy that promotes health, for instance, differs from one that promotes health capabilities in that only the latter honors a person’s lifestyle choice. Exceptionally, the government shall promote functionings rather than capabilities when it comes to treating people with

192 *ibid.*: 23

193 *ibid.*: 24

194 Nussbaum 2011: 77

195 *ibid.*: 12-13

196 Nussbaum 2011: 28

197 *ibid.*: 14-16

198 Nussbaum 2011: 25-26

respect and non-humiliation¹⁹⁹. In that sense, the “government must treat all people respectfully” and this “exception is made because of the centrality of notions of dignity and respect in generating the entire capabilities list”²⁰⁰ (see more below).

Basic, internal, and combined capabilities are distinct from one another, and a decent society has two overlapping yet different tasks. It might be able to provide an environment that produces more internal capabilities but that might limit the opportunities for people to function in alignment with these capabilities²⁰¹. Nussbaum refers to “substantial freedoms” as *combined capabilities*²⁰², which concern freedom of choice and action in the specific political, social, and economic situations in which the individual finds themselves. Such capabilities should be distinguished from *internal capabilities*, which represent a person’s characteristics, including their health, bodily fitness, perceptive skills, etc. *Basic capabilities* comprise the innate equipment that humans require to develop more advanced capabilities, such as the ability for practical reasoning and imagination²⁰³.

One of society’s tasks is to promote the development of internal and basic capabilities through education, the provision of resources to enhance physical and emotional health, and support for family care and love, among other provisions. One example of an issue in that regard would be a system in which people might be capable of free speech but find themselves in an environment that represses public debates on political matters.

Because combined capabilities are defined as internal capabilities along with the social, political, or economic conditions in which functioning can be chosen, it is impossible to conceptualize a society that generates combined capabilities without producing internal and pre-existing basic capabilities²⁰⁴. This distinction can be a useful heuristic in diagnosing a given society’s achievements and shortcomings. Combined capabilities typically affect the public policy discussion surrounding the promotion of internal capabilities and making available the external institutional and material conditions²⁰⁵. All types of capabilities are relevant to the present research;

199 *ibid.*: 26

200 *ibid.*: 26

201 Nussbaum 2011: 21

202 *ibid.*: 21

203 Nussbaum 1999: 44

204 Nussbaum 2011: 22-23

205 Nussbaum 1999: 44

however, the focus lies on the *central* capabilities that define a dignified life as regards the below ethical evaluation.

In applying and fostering the capabilities approach, it is crucial to enrich the definition of the ten central human capabilities²⁰⁶ in terms of the role that labor plays in human dignity with additional input, for example, from religious–ethical perspectives. Human capabilities are ethical categories that are ultimately and intrinsically valuable²⁰⁷, as shall be discussed below.

3.3.1.1 Influence on policy and practice

The capabilities approach has also been conceptualized to give ethical guidance for policy: “The nation has a moral role that is securely grounded in the capabilities approach as it gives central importance to people’s freedom and self-definition”²⁰⁸.

Capability theories have hitherto been applied in different frameworks, particularly through the exploration of ethical issues in economic contexts and are “characterized by critically examining actual institutions and norms and by incorporating ethical concerns including relational norms with other people and public judgments for the social world into economic analyses”²⁰⁹. Moreover, they have been used by philosophers, social scientists, and legal scholars for descriptive, evaluative, and prescriptive purposes²¹⁰.

Applications of the capability theory have also helped shape global institutions—for example, by serving as the intellectual foundation of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), represented in an annual Human Development Report²¹¹. In that regard, the standardized usage of the different human capabilities allows comparisons across nations and regions²¹², also when assessing and evaluating technology applications²¹³.

In terms of labor market policies, capability theories have been applied in studies examining the role of work—for example, in relation to guidance for labor market policies, as an alternative to traditional indicators, such as

206 Nussbaum 1999: 41–42

207 Oosterlaken/Hoven 2012: 5–6

208 Nussbaum 2011: 114

209 Gotoh 2021: 8

210 Claassen 2014: 250

211 Oosterlaken/Hoven 2012: 6

212 Nussbaum 2011

213 Oosterlaken/Hoven 2012: 7

GDP or the unemployment rate²¹⁴, by focusing on the development of individuals' actual freedom to choose jobs or activities that they have reason to value. They have also been used to help orient labor law from a normative perspective²¹⁵. Moreover, they have been implemented in analyses of social policy dimensions in place of the economic indicators mentioned above and thus have served as a holistic tool for interdisciplinary analyses of various issues, including educational policies²¹⁶. In that respect, education represents one of the key policy issues in the research agenda within capability theories, including the capabilities approach. This is grounded in its central role in improving opportunities and developing judgment in the use of the defined capabilities²¹⁷.

Furthermore, capability theory frameworks have been used to assess certain welfare-to-work policies²¹⁸. In that regard, they can provide a critically different conceptualization of the purpose and principles of work and welfare-related public policy by providing an alternative to neo-liberal hegemony in the field of employment and work policies²¹⁹.

3.3.2 Human dignity in the capabilities approach

3.3.2.1 Defining a life with human dignity

Although the concept of dignity may initially seem vague, the mere act of focusing on the concept of a life lived with dignity makes a difference to this²²⁰ from a policy standpoint, as opposed to focusing, for example, on satisfaction. Respect is also a particularly important concept relative to dignity as part of the approach. Claims to human dignity may be denied in different ways; for evaluative purposes within the framework, however, they may be reduced to two types, corresponding to the notions of internal capability and combined capability. In that regard, "social, political, familial, and economic conditions may prevent people from choosing to function in accordance with a developed internal capability. Bad conditions

214 Bonvin 2012

215 Del Punta 2019

216 Abbatecola et al. 2012

217 Nussbaum 2004

218 Buss/Dahmen 2012; Bonvin/Farvaque 2007; Bonvin/Orton 2009

219 Orton 2011: 352

220 Nussbaum 2011: 30

can stunt the development of internal capabilities. In both cases, basic human dignity remains, the person is still worthy of equal respect”²²¹.

A life lived with human dignity, according to the capabilities approach, is closely related to the idea of active striving²²² and is a close relative of the basic human or central capability inherent in the person who pursues it. Human dignity, in this regard, is equal to all agents from the beginning, and all deserve equal respect from laws and institutions. Equability occupies an essential place in the theory. However, equal dignity does not imply that all central capabilities should be equalized, and treating all people as equal may not entail equalizing the living conditions of all.

In general, the capabilities approach focuses on the protection of areas of freedom so central that their removal makes a life not worthy of human dignity²²³. In terms of a direct policy approach, international leaders should focus on enabling lives that are worthy of human dignity rather than driving national economic growth²²⁴. Although, formally, human dignity can be a founding principle of national constitutions, for example, people’s lives can still be marked by inequality and deprivation. Therefore, a theoretical approach is required to aid their struggles or at least incite public debate by drawing attention to them. The capabilities approach respects individuals as dignified human beings with entitlements equal to those of others²²⁵ and acknowledges that “dignity is an intuitive notion that is by no means utterly clear. If it used in isolation, as if it is completely self-evident, it can be used capriciously and inconsistently”²²⁶. Therefore, it is not used as an intuitively self-evident and solid foundation for a theory that would be built upon it; rather, it is used as a tool. According to the capabilities approach, “dignity is one element of the theory, but all of its notions are seen as interconnect, deriving illumination and clarity from one another”²²⁷.

221 *ibid.*: 31

222 Nussbaum 2011: 31

223 Nussbaum 2011: 31

224 *ibid.*: 1

225 *ibid.*: 13

226 *ibid.*: 29

227 *ibid.*: 30

3.3.2.2 The ten central human capabilities

The capabilities approach defines an ample *threshold* level of ten central capabilities that are required as a bare minimum to ensure that an individual's life is characterized by human dignity. A widely shared understanding of the government's task, it follows that a decent political order must secure for all citizens at least a minimum threshold level of the ten central capabilities, whereby the government is tasked with enabling citizens to pursue a dignified and minimally flourishing life. The ten capabilities are as follows²²⁸:

1. *Life*. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. *Bodily Health*. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
3. *Bodily integrity*. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
4. *Senses, Imagination, and Thought*. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.
5. *Emotions*. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)

228 Nussbaum 2011: 32-34

6. *Practical Reason*. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)
7. *Affiliation*.
 1. Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other humans, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)
 2. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin and species.
8. *Other Species*. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
9. *Play*. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
10. *Control over one's Environment*.
 1. *Political*. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.
 2. *Material*. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

Capabilities reside first and foremost with individuals; they apply only derivatively to groups, and the capabilities approach promotes the principle of *each person as an end*²²⁹. The goal is to produce capabilities for each and every person and to prevent the use of some groups as a means to the capabilities of others or society as a whole. This impacts policy, as the unit is not considered in other terms—for example, families or groups; rather, the aim is to promote the capabilities of each member of that family or

229 Nussbaum 2011: 35

group. All capabilities must be secured and protected in distinctive ways. In that regard, “good policy in the area of each of the capabilities is policy that respects an individual’s practical reason”²³⁰. The threshold should represent an “aspirational but not utopian level, challenging the nation to be ingenious and to do better”²³¹.

3.3.2.3 Human flourishing and human dignity

The concepts of human flourishing²³² and human dignity²³³ are both central to the capabilities approach and are considered preferable in the application of the framework to utility-inspired psychological research on subjective well-being or “happiness”. The notion of a flourishing life derives from the Aristotelian tradition, whereas the concept of human dignity is mainly associated with Kant. Dignity is a critical element of human flourishing²³⁴ and can inform discussions of human rights-related issues.

In general, flourishing provides an illuminating aspirational framework with which to approach human development and obligations. The metaphorical concept of flourishing has a long history, having originated in Aristotelian ethics as “*eudaimonia*”. It can also be translated figuratively as “well-being”, “self-fulfillment”, or “happiness”²³⁵, whereby an individual prospers on account of having multiple goods and employing developed human capabilities. Flourishing is thus a desirable condition of life, whereby an individual’s life goes well in an environment that fosters their growth and health²³⁶. In the context of human flourishing, work has traditionally been regarded as an activity that is merely instrumental or of extrinsic value, or perhaps even an impediment to flourishing²³⁷. However, flourishing can be framed in a significantly different light when conceptualized in relation to the concept of meaningful work. There have been various critiques of the term’s usefulness, which consider it to be bound to unhelp-

230 *ibid.*: 39

231 *ibid.*: 42

232 Bussi/Dahmen 2012: 92

233 Nussbaum 2006a

234 Kleinig/Evans 2013

235 Kleinig/Evans 2013: 540

236 Veltman 2016: 1-2; Paul et al. 1999

237 Applebaum 1992

ful relativism²³⁸, at risk of oppositional moral hazard, or unable to give all individuals equal consideration²³⁹.

There are various reasons that may explain the connection between human flourishing and human dignity. Flourishing refers to the ways in which humans can develop and live well during their lifetimes; such flourishing is socially construed for the most part, and achieved only if certain social norms and conditions are fulfilled²⁴⁰. One essential aspect that enables flourishing is being treated with dignity—for instance, avoiding constant humiliation—although dignity, as such, is insufficient for flourishing. In this sense, the recognition of human dignity, configured not only as the expressed capacity to accept the moral status of other humans but also as a social environment in which moral norms and attitudes exist, is an essential element in human flourishing. Although recognition of human dignity is not an absolute requirement for human flourishing, without such recognition, humans' ability to flourish is likely to be severely restricted. This includes a judgment that has both subjective and objective components²⁴¹. Consequently, the concept of flourishing is directly connected to dignity, and both concepts play significant roles in the capabilities approach, which defines a life lived with human dignity as one that is, at the very least, “minimally flourishing”.

3.3.2.4 Applicability to technology

It has been argued that any new technologies must have properties that support “morally desirable features”²⁴² such as supporting human development and that motivate political choices from a moral perspective so that people have the valuable human capabilities required to live a dignified life. Capability theories have become a framework by which to analyze the impact of new technologies, particularly in light of their relevance to “capability expansion”²⁴³. As such, various specific technology applications, such as

238 Harman 1983

239 Pogge 2002

240 Kleinig/Evans 2013: 556-559

241 Nussbaum 2011

242 Hoven 2012: 30

243 Oosterlaken 2009: 94

robot-facilitated health care²⁴⁴, sustainable end-use energy planning²⁴⁵, or the use of technology in education²⁴⁶ have been considered.

The development of new normative frameworks has also made use of aspects of capability theory, for instance in terms of “responsible innovation”²⁴⁷. Such frameworks are concerned with future-of-work aspects, including technological unemployment and universal basic income. The aim here is to develop AI technologies that are “governed by an inclusive and deliberate societal judgment”²⁴⁸. This specific framework was initially developed to analyze technology applications such as health-care robotics or social media and the platform economy. Achievements in the capabilities approach in areas such as health, education, participation, and empowerment are key to ensuring that technology can improve individuals’ lives: “information and communication technologies (ICTs) alone cannot improve people’s lives; ICTs need to occur within broader strategies that are tailored to make the most use of these tools and techniques in order to reap their potential benefits for human development”²⁴⁹.

Other perspectives based on capability frameworks include considerations of technical objects’ abilities to “enable capabilities directly and affect other inputs in the attainment of valued capabilities”²⁵⁰, where these objects are “a new class of conversion factors”. The approach can also challenge us to “co-design technologies with users in a way, that expands the freedom of the user to live the life they themselves value”²⁵¹. In a given application, producers and consumers must be supported in their decision-making in a fair-trade value chain. The availability of this capability framework to guide technology is essential, as not all technology investment has a positive impact on development²⁵². The capabilities approach can also help to alter local scenarios and individuals’ circumstances through the appropriate deployment of technology with the aim of making social, economic, or cultural improvements, for instance, by strengthening political rights of individuals.

244 Coeckelbergh 2012

245 Mathai 2012

246 Chigona/Chigona 2010

247 Santoni de Sio et al. 2021: 1

248 *ibid.*

249 Hamel 2010: 32

250 Haenssger/Ariana 2018: 99

251 Kleine et al. 2012: 42

252 Coelho et al. 2015

Different approaches have adopted Sen's version of capability theory as a basis for further analysis, benefiting from its greater flexibility and versatility²⁵³ compared to Nussbaum's version. However, as Sen's approach does not define specific capabilities, its use runs the risk of undermining the relevant ethical relevance and focus, as outlined by Nussbaum's version, which emphasizes social justice and human dignity. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned example of how the capability framework has been used demonstrates how focusing on capabilities rather than other metrics, such as those purely relating to quantitative indicators, is a proven method in the analysis of technology, which includes the assertion that technology can serve as a conversion factor for the attainment of capabilities.

3.3.3 Social justice in the capabilities approach

Social justice can be defined as “the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities”²⁵⁴; it can be used to explore the enablement of a just societal order by discussing factors such as differences in the distribution of wealth, freedom, or fair privilege chances²⁵⁵. The definition offered by the UN²⁵⁶ frames social justice “as the principle that all persons are entitled to ‘basic human needs,’ regardless of differences such as economic disparity, social class, gender, race, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability, or health”. This view incorporates “the eradication of poverty and illiteracy, the establishment of sound environmental policy, and equality of opportunity for healthy personnel and social development”²⁵⁷.

The principle of social justice makes demands of the executives and authorities of a state but also of civil society, fellow citizens, or the private sector²⁵⁸. In the context of advancing automation, one example of a social justice issue might be the growing economic inequality that arises as a result of increases in productivity alongside a diminished availability of paid jobs²⁵⁹. Such a situation has consequences for equal opportunities

253 Haenssngen/Ariana 2018

254 National Association of Social Workers 2005

255 Glatzel 2000: 148

256 UN 2020

257 Anyoun 2016

258 Nothelle-Wildfeuer 1999: 86-343; Jost/Kay 2010: 1122-1125

259 Manzeschke 2019; Kirchsclaeger 2021; Autor 2015; Hessler 2016

when the transferal of income from workers to capital that is triggered by the capitalization effect of automation expands the privileges of capital holders²⁶⁰. Another consequence might be reduced bargaining power among employees as automation facilitates their replacement and strikes are no longer an effective pressuring tool²⁶¹; this relates to the dimension of political rights.

3.3.3.1 Social justice and human dignity

The very keystone of social justice is the recognition of the dignity of all human lives²⁶². All political governments must thus assume equality to be a prioritized principle that is crucial to their proper functioning. Equality does not eliminate diversity, because the most common phenomenon affecting all humanity is difference, whether genetic, physical, or mental, and every human possesses the privilege of being unique.

The preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights²⁶³ also situates human dignity as the basis of justice: “whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”. In that regard, social justice can be regarded as being derived from human dignity and human rights²⁶⁴. Therefore, human dignity is fundamental to concepts of justice, as it is from dignity that rights can be derived, and rights and dignity together can be considered the basis of justice.

The interconnectedness of the principles of dignity and justice can of course be controversial, as it is notoriously difficult to link substantial moral principles; however, their interrelatedness may be found in various dimensions²⁶⁵. In light of this, one fruitful approach might be to focus on the sense of justice or sense of dignity that includes a certain degree of that which one might consider to be just²⁶⁶. In that regard, human dignity

260 Sachs 2019; Schwab 2016

261 Stefano 2018; Anderson/Macedo 2017; Cimagamore et al. 2016

262 Masferrer/García-Sánchez 2018: 4

263 UN 1948

264 Zuckert 2007

265 Pritchard 1972: 299-300

266 Rawls 1963: 281

should be afforded a prominent place in any formulation of the principle of justice.

Moreover, combating poverty and global inequality is closely related to the idea of living a life with human dignity; the former cannot happen without the latter. One's economic position is largely connected to their ability to exercise certain rights, and juridical and economic development are intertwined²⁶⁷; these issues have also been covered by the Human Development Index (HDI), which is, as mentioned, based on the capability theory. Issues relating to social justice also arise when people desire that they be treated as equal, irrespective of their socioeconomic background or the family they were born into, for instance²⁶⁸.

A lack of financial resources has a clear correlation with the right to equality and human dignity²⁶⁹. If equality is denied to humans who lack food, shelter, or access to health services, it necessarily follows that equality cannot be achieved. Humans who are denied access to basic social and economic rights are denied the opportunity to live their lives with human dignity.

The principle of social justice may be recognized as an aspect of human flourishing when equal treatment has to be enforced as part of a specific working culture²⁷⁰ or in terms of leadership at work; it is closely related to an inclusive environment²⁷¹. In the context of poverty, improving living conditions as an element of social justice may be considered closely associated with granting humans the dignity that is their right. Correspondingly, providing people living in poverty with the opportunity to live dignified lives may be essential to the pursuit of global justice by extending greater inclusivity to the poor²⁷². In addition, "humanity's technological-economic capacities now easily suffice for the avoidance of all severe poverty"²⁷³. These reasons would support the notion that human dignity should serve as a guiding principle for promoting global justice in relation to technology and its development.

Human dignity and social justice are likewise linked in the practical dimension of human labor. This is the case, for example, with regard to

267 Februar 2004: 53-54

268 Hicks 2011: 114-126

269 Swartz 2011: 9

270 Kleinig/Nicolas 2013: 547

271 Pless/Appel 2012

272 Pogge 2008

273 Pogge 2014: 482

vulnerable low-waged workers who are particularly at risk of becoming the victims of unequal power at the hands of corporate enterprises²⁷⁴. In this regard, lives and livelihoods could be unjustly regulated when corporates find ways to shift the risks of undocumented employment onto immigrant workers themselves, for instance. This highlights how the dignity of human beings can be violated by illustrating how workers could be exposed to poor working conditions, low wages, and a lack of access to medical services.

Another illustrative example of how these two principles are interconnected is wage equity²⁷⁵. The receipt of a stable, sufficient salary and other benefits covers the necessities of life and good health, including housing, food, or prospects for career advancement. Therefore, economic inequality in terms of wages relates to human dignity of workers. From a practical perspective, crowd work may illustrate how technology affects the recognition of human dignity as well as social justice, when microtasks are distributed among different so-called low-waged “crowd micro workers”²⁷⁶. These platforms can fail to provide appropriate financial recognition for work performed and have been criticized and connected to a call for obligatory minimum remuneration. This would be a key requirement for encompassing dignity as a condition for decent work²⁷⁷.

3.3.3.1 The capabilities approach: An approach to social justice

The capabilities approach to social justice involves questioning the requirement for a life worthy of human dignity²⁷⁸. Respect for human dignity requires that “citizens be placed above an ample specified threshold of capability”, which serves as the basic claim of social justice²⁷⁹.

The capabilities approach is thus “concerned with entrenched social injustice and inequality, especially failures that are the result of discrimination or marginalization”²⁸⁰. Key duties in terms of global justice are assigned to institutions²⁸¹, which, however, must be thin and decentral-

274 Stuesse 2010: 112-113

275 Ung et al. 2021

276 Berg et al. 2018

277 Rosenfield/Mossi 2020

278 Nussbaum 2011: 32

279 *ibid.*: 36

280 Nussbaum 2011: 19

281 *ibid.*: 120-122

ized. International treaties and other agreements are helpful in imposing norms on the community of nations. Simultaneously, corporations and non-governmental organizations can be instrumental in promoting human capabilities in regions in which they are active. Nevertheless, this diverse feature of the approach can capture more because it is more attentive to the particulars of a given situation while acknowledging that the individual—rather than the state—requires that an ethical perspective be adopted²⁸². In that regard, the approach can be applied depending on the political environment. Moreover, the approach covers wider issues than resource-based evaluations, including personal agency, which provides an improved perspective on issues relevant to global justice²⁸³.

Capability theories envision a pluralistic and public conception of justice that is tied to democracy and public reasoning²⁸⁴, with the aim of “design[ing] society’s economic and political institutions in such a way that adequate material and social resources are available to everyone in order to possess and exercise a set of basic capabilities that go to make up a decent life”. In this respect, depending on the capability, distribution principles may become increasingly relevant to obtaining social justice in society, as may be illustrated when people are adequately nourished (i.e., nutrition) or afforded the ability to avoid common or preventable illness (i.e., health care). Moreover, social responsibility should be emphasized over individual merit and achievement. In that context, a social safety net for citizens would be required to realize these capabilities—for example, unemployment benefits, minimum-wage legislation, or health insurance.

Such a view would also be fundamentally opposed to certain forms of liberalism wherein freedom is understood as non-interference and individuals are free from interference on the part of the state, the law, or their fellow citizens²⁸⁵. Capability theories, however, take the stance that freedom entails possessing different capabilities to achieve valuable functionings, whereby the state can act for redistributive purposes and provision of public goods so that the maximum conditions for basic capabilities can be realized for all citizens. In this regard, a society may be said to have failed if it permits its citizens to grow up in poverty and suffer from capability shortfalls and deprivation, which is additionally counted as a failure to treat

282 Feldman 2012: 477

283 Robeyns 2012

284 Alexander 2010: 2

285 Alexander 2010: 4

all members of a society as equal. Capabilities-promoting interventions are thus aligned with the approach under the purview of a fair rule of law and in compliance with human rights. Consequently, the fight against poverty, famine, and societal failure can be more effectively won when people's entitlements are supported and economic and political forces are recognized as causes of malfunction, based on the normative benchmark of the capabilities approach.

The capabilities-oriented understanding of social justice²⁸⁶ represents the evolution of the non-utilitarian understanding of the theory of justice²⁸⁷, whereby “the requirements of justice are better understood on the basis of an inquiry into the plural components of the human good and making certain basic capabilities part of the public conception of justice”²⁸⁸. Furthermore, it would “overcome” the issue of the existence of different needs and preferences and acknowledge that equality in resources alone can undermine equality in other respects—for instance, for an individual with disabilities who requires additional support²⁸⁹. To resolve this issue, it is thus crucial to recognize that we must ensure the capabilities of others and that capability satisfaction for one individual may require different resources from those required by another person. Such issues that arise from equality of resources can thereby be countered. Welfare inequality can also be overcome, as the capabilities approach focuses on essential capabilities that are independent, for example, of specific expensive tastes. In this sense, although the thresholds for capability satisfaction will probably differ from one group to the next, capabilities are sufficiently resilient and robust.

In sum, the concept of a life lived with human dignity has a strong social justice component and this is reflected in the capabilities approach. The facilitation of conditions that serve to convert the capabilities entailed in living with human dignity into functioning supports the aim of pursuing social justice, as the provision of and access to work could serve as a facilitator. Other aspects of social justice could include discussions about unpaid work such as child rearing. Regarding the relationship between capabilities and social justice, the theories synthesize multiple relevant criteria, such as resources, opportunities, or individuals' subjective states²⁹⁰. It may further

286 Alexander 2010

287 Rawls 1999

288 Anderson 2010: 52

289 Brooks 2012: xiv

290 Austin 2018

be justified given that “a capability metric is superior to any subjective metric because only an objective metric, such as capability, can satisfy the demand for a public criterion of justice for the basic structure of society”²⁹¹. Therefore, the present research’s methodological approach, which is grounded in Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, encompasses aspects of social justice.

3.3.4 Discussions on the justification of the capabilities approach

The most common critique of the justifiability of the capabilities approach originates from a “resourcist perspective” and argues that, in terms of social justice, the framework cannot “conceivably deliver at least one candidate public criterion of social justice that would be as clear and as workable and as plausible as the leading resourcists criterion” based on Rawls’ two principles²⁹². Counterarguments to this critique mainly highlight the fact that this view “insists that questions of justice only concern the institutional structure of society”, whereas “capability theorists support the inclusion and social practices as possible sources of injustice”²⁹³. In addition, the objections are not useful as “the resourcist approach, by refusing to commit itself to a theory of the human good, deprives itself of the ability to put forward good, enduring reasons for the proposed list of resources to share (primary goods), and lays itself open to the objection that the consensus on what the primary goods are, is only the consensus of an intellectual, well off minority”²⁹⁴.

The approach’s ten central capabilities have also been criticized with respect to the security of their grounding in human dignity²⁹⁵ and whether this conception of dignity is sufficiently theorized²⁹⁶. For this reason, this ethical point of reference has grounded human dignity from a moral perspective (see above) as “moral obligations cannot form part of Nussbaum’s political conception of dignity and thus would need to be independently defended”²⁹⁷.

291 Anderson 2010: 81

292 Pogge 2002: 216

293 Oosterlaken 2013: 205

294 Berges 2007: 23

295 Claassen 2014

296 Formosa/Mackenzie 2014

297 *ibid.*: 882

Furthermore, the “list debate” has frequently been raised in terms of the values attached to human agency²⁹⁸—for instance, in terms of the capabilities that should be used. However, it has also been argued that “the capability approach, with its stress on dignity and its list-approach, is ‘universalist’ enough, yet at the same time it also leaves plenty of room for interpretation in particular contexts”²⁹⁹.

Likewise, the emphasis on individuals’ capabilities has been criticized as being overly individualistic at the expense of groups and social structures³⁰⁰. In terms of measurement³⁰¹, critics have highlighted that capabilities are generally not measured based on quantitative metrics³⁰². This is also relevant to the different policy environments across nations³⁰³. Regarding measurement-related critiques, policy decisions have frequently been taken, as, for example, in court decisions, in a “discursive form of analysis that has evolved which seems appropriate for (...) questions involving a threshold level of fundamental entitlement”³⁰⁴. In that sense, “the notion of a life in accordance with human dignity is one of the most fertile ideas used in worldwide constitutional jurisprudence”³⁰⁵. The capabilities approach moves through areas of life that are influenced by public policy, whereby the protection of the defined basic entitlements is an essential requirement of life with human dignity. In addition, multiple frameworks based on the capability theory have been applied in evaluative and prospective analyses³⁰⁶, aiming to go further than merely measuring economic situations in terms of traditional indicators, such as GDP, and have proven effective in measuring well-being³⁰⁷. With the 10 central human capabilities, the approach represents itself as a “political-ethical theory”, extending the original welfare economic theory’s applicability³⁰⁸.

To conclude, different perspectives have been leveraged to justify the capabilities approach³⁰⁹. Moreover, the capabilities approach as it pertains

298 Oosterlaken/Hoven 2012: 5-6; Crocker 2008

299 Coeckelbergh 2012: 80

300 Robeyns 2005; Stewart 2005

301 Comim et al. 2008: 7

302 Comim 2008: 157

303 Alkire 2005

304 Nussbaum 2011: 62

305 *ibid.*: 78

306 Alkire 2008

307 Drèze/Sen 2013

308 Claassen 2014: 240-241

309 e.g., Berges 2007; Anderson 2010; Nussbaum 1999

to the present research offers a more specific definition of what is required to live a life that aligns with the justified principle of human dignity, which has been grounded above from a moral perspective. In that sense, the facilitation of a life lived with human dignity is regarded as a universal moral obligation, supported by the capabilities approach for evaluative purposes and complemented by the role of work in dignity, as discussed below. Nevertheless, the ethical evaluation will highlight certain policy implications.

3.4 The significance of work in human dignity

Work plays an essential role in the discussion on living a life with human dignity with respect to how capabilities are “actualized and developed in the context of daily work”³¹⁰. Therefore, the significance of work in relation to human dignity warrants further discussion and specification to enrich and complement the ten central capabilities: “The list of central human capabilities is a very general one and can be further specified in many different ways”³¹¹. Furthermore, it is open-ended and subject to ongoing revision and rethinking³¹². For instance, employment options must be made available, including the consideration of adequate workplace relationships as part of respecting human dignity³¹³. Moreover, critics have claimed that the ten capabilities include an “insufficient discussion of labor”³¹⁴.

Normative religious-ethics views on work and how it facilitates a life with human dignity will be discussed below, along with other perspectives, to determine how the ten central human capabilities might be improved and refined. Moreover, the role of identity and meaningfulness will be examined in relation to the role that work plays in a dignified life. Finally, the implications of these views will be outlined and potential critiques of the crucial role of work will be discussed.

310 Nokelainen et al. 2018: 19

311 Nussbaum 2011: 101

312 *ibid.*: 108

313 *ibid.*: 39

314 Weidel 2018: 74-79

3.4.1 Religious-ethics views on work for a life with human dignity

3.4.1.1 Catholic social teaching (CST)

At the end of 2019, over 1.34 billion people worldwide identified as being of the Catholic faith, representing about 17.7 percent of the world's population³¹⁵ and exhibiting a global growth rate of around 1.12 percent compared with the previous year. Although not all Catholics will inevitably share exactly the same moral principles, the figure nonetheless provides an idea of the breadth and depth of the influence that Catholic social teaching (CST)³¹⁶ wields over a substantial portion of the world's population. Moreover, as detailed below, CST has also influenced the work of the ILO and the United Nations (UN).

CST has championed human dignity since at least the Second Vatican Council between 1962 and 1965³¹⁷. Pope Paul VI recognized the dignity of the person in society with a focus on common goods and socialization and characterized the nature of human dignity within the CST, as not an abstract or ethereal reality but rather as understood within the concrete conditions of personal, social, economic, and political life³¹⁸. The conditions of human dignity are further demonstrated by human rights, and human rights and duties are clarified by the comprehension of the human person³¹⁹. This demonstrates that the central concerns of CST cohere around the dignity of the human person and the welfare of the community.

CST defines several conditions of human dignity in the charter of rights included in *Pacem in Terris*³²⁰. It states, for instance, that true freedom must safeguard the dignity of the human person. Furthermore, humans have the right to engage in economic activities appropriate to their degree of responsibility. In addition, the worker is entitled to a wage that aligns with the precepts of justice. This entails an amount that is sufficient in proportion to the available funds to allow them and their families a standard of living that is consistent with human dignity.

Overall, as stated in *Pacem in Terris* 35, a society may be considered “well-ordered, creative, and consonant with human dignity” when it is

315 Glatz 2021

316 Sison et al. 2016: 503-506

317 Loretan 2015; Huntington 1991

318 Hollenbach 1979: 65-59

319 Clark 2014: 12-25

320 Catholic Church 1963

founded on truth. This truth, among others, advocates the elimination of all traces of racial discrimination and recognition that all humans are equal in dignity and a sense of superiority toward others is not rooted in nature. The government, moreover, must not rule by means of threats, intimidation, or promise of reward but rather must provide sufficient incentive to work for the common good, as to do otherwise would violate the dignity of free and rational human beings. Therefore, safeguarding citizens' dignity should be a primary concern for government.

There are other implications mentioned in *Pacem in Terris* 122, highlighting the economic evolution of under-developed countries, whereby richer states are obliged to support poorer countries to also provide their citizens with conditions conducive to human dignity, an obligation that is directly linked to global justice.

Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum progressio*³²¹ further emphasizes the importance of ongoing education for a life with human dignity. This encompasses education for justice and solidarity to affirm the unity of mankind and to work on behalf of that affirmation. Human development (i.e., education) is an essential aspect of becoming fully human and constitutes considerably more than mere survival. In this regard, work can never be reduced to a mere means of subsistence. These efforts must be planned and coordinated and should promote both economic and social progress by enhancing human capabilities, including the ability to acknowledge the dignity of others. Regarding education, there is also a "functional" interpretation of the image of God that relates to the distinction between "basic dignity" and "full dignity", whereby basic dignity cannot be lost and is inalienable while full dignity may be developed through education, including the capability to exercise reason and freedom of choice³²².

Certain business principles have been developed based on CST to provide further guidance as to the role of work in human dignity. These specify that business should honor the dignity of the person in God³²³ through work and aim to extend the shareholder-centered ethic of much of current business-thinking with a person-centered ethical approach to business administration. The principles relevant to work shall be discussed below.

The principle of *making a living* specifies that business should not be understood in the cold abstractions of shareholder-value but rather in the

321 Catholic Church 1967

322 Ferrero/Sison 2014

323 Sandelands 2015; Novak 1996

“warm flesh and blood of our personal lives and in the revelatory light of faith”³²⁴. Business should be a matter of heart and emotional nearness, characterized by personal human work, not in distance of reason by being abstract and detached from itself. Aligned with the image of God, we come into our humanity at work, and making a living is equivalent to making a life in God. This stands in opposition to the understanding that humans are for work, that they are a mere instrument of shareholder interests and that they are answerable to these interests. In this regard, the opposite is the case from a CST perspective: work is for humans, and humans have a right to be in God through work. As such, businesses have a responsibility to honor the right to work. Business is not merely material or worldly but also involves spiritual and other-worldly elements and should thus provide for the divine well-being of all whose lives it affects.

Another principle derived for business is *the weight and the glory*, whereby business must help people to build their lives by creating conditions under which they can grow and develop in relationship to God. Pope John Paul II said that business can and must not take a stand against making a profit, which is also relevant for its well-being; however, it must also take a stand for making human lives, which is far more important and necessary. In essence, the business of business is to serve man, and the business of man is to serve God³²⁵.

The *universal destination of goods* principle specifies that “every person must have access to the level of well-being necessary for his full development”³²⁶. This principle has two key aspects: while on the one hand, private property is required as the ground upon which humans can make lives for themselves, on the other hand, it recognizes that earth and its resources are God’s gift to all human beings to share and enjoy³²⁷. It includes the right to property and capital but does not classify it as unlimited—rather, it should be constrained to such a level that goods can be shared among humanity. For business, this means that the right to accumulate wealth and own private property is accepted but only as long as the significance of the human vocation to work and person development in and from their work is recognized³²⁸.

324 Sandelands 2015: 168-175

325 Lewis 2017

326 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004

327 Sandelands 2015: 172

328 Calvez/Naughton 2002: 10-11

The *principle of subsidiarity* describes the idea that every social activity should help members of the social body in a social manner and never destroy or absorb them³²⁹. It insists that responsibility should rest at as local a level as possible, while acknowledging that some issues, such as federal labor law, cannot be handled locally. This principle suggests that businesses' social activity must recognize the profound worth of the local employees of the enterprise³³⁰. This requires that workers be treated as autonomous and independent-minded subjects who participate in the creative will of God and equates workers' value with what they produce rather than with who they are³³¹. Additionally, workers must not only be paid a living wage but should receive enough remuneration to support their family. Wages must also be adapted to the person's needs and way of life, with particular respect for families and consideration of gender and age. The need for self-expression and self-development is also covered by this principle.

The *principle of participation* provides for "activities by means of which the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political, and social life of the civil community to which he belongs"³³². This entails free and independent human beings created in the image of God, who have a right to actively share in all profits of enterprises in a way that is properly determined and promoted³³³, which sends a strong message toward shareholder capitalism. This principle further calls for a the right to contribute to determining working conditions, as the future and children of the affected workers are directly influenced by the working environment.

Overall, the CST regards human dignity as based in God's image³³⁴ and the human being must thus be treated and as an end "for its own sake". The ability to participate in society and to be part of the "common good" are important components of a life lived with human dignity. Acceptance and respect on an individual basis for all human beings who have the freedom to create is also important. In that regard, the CST strongly considers human work to be fundamental to living a life with human dignity. Work can also express and increase human dignity, as individuals can express

329 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004

330 Calvez/Naughton 2002: 8

331 Sandelands 2015: 173

332 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004

333 Sandelands 2015: 173

334 Sison et al. 2016: 3

themselves as free and rational persons through work³³⁵. According to *Laborem Excerens*³³⁶, work is primarily the kind of human activity that aims to produce and procure the necessary means of life; however, it is not regarded as a purely instrumental activity but rather has a value “of its own”³³⁷. Rather than a simple economic activity, work is a “good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity” and “corresponds to a man’s dignity” The focus lies on the human person who is called to work, having been created in the image and likeness of God. In this context, “work bears a particular mark of humans and of humanity, the mark of a person operating within a community of persons”. Because humans are made in the image of God, they are subject to work owing to their capability to behave in a planned and rational manner and to exercise self-determination and to their tendency toward self-realization. Moreover, self-realization and human labor share an integral connection as part of human dignity. Work is always undertaken for the human person, rather than the human person being for work³³⁸.

The notion of freedom foster the assumption that humans produce and procure the means of life by means of free activities³³⁹, which imbues human labor with a distinct dimension of value. Even through activities aimed at creating a certain product, humans express themselves as free and rational. Therefore, human productive action alone has greater value than the item produced, as the action has a special dignity as the embodiment of free and rational agency. Success in this dimension does not depend on the product but rather depends on whether the action includes the appropriate use of human freedom. In this regard, all human work constitutes an occasion to exercise justice, charity, and involvement in the activity of God, and the ultimate goal of human work is participation in community of persons, human and Divine.

Human dignity and dignity of work are closely intertwined³⁴⁰. As Pope Francis tweeted in 2015, “where there is no work, there is no dignity”. This has practical implications for work and may be concluded with the help of the notion of *opus humanum*, whereby work is elevated into an object

335 Lott 2012

336 Catholic Church 1981

337 Lott 2012

338 Clark 2014: 27

339 Lott 2012

340 Sison et al. 2016

of dignity with a scope that has been widened to include both manual and intellectual work. CST³⁴¹ mainly perceives work as a duty rather than a right when approached from a biblical perspective (Genesis). However, from the perspective of human relationships with others, work is simultaneously a duty and a right, particularly where the right to earn a wage is concerned. Work is aimed at transforming an individual's environment while also allowing them to achieve fulfillment. Thereby, the personal or subjective dimension is invariably prioritized over objective dimensions or things. This leads to the conclusion that the worker with their individual skill set or knowledge base is more valuable than the external or material outcomes of their labor. Therefore, human beings should not be reduced to mere economic or mechanical resources or units of labor force.

The intrinsic and inherent quality of human dignity extends not only to all human beings but also to their actions, including their work. This applies to all labor irrespective of its nature, and everything they do exerts a social impact. In that regard, the consideration of one's own contributions to the common good and welfare of the community is required in a coordinated, collective, and shared effort. All these implications culminate in the "right to work", which is necessary to contribute to the common good of the human family while developing self-control³⁴². Work guarantees subsistence, which also affects one's family. The duty to work must also be complemented by the right to rest³⁴³. In this regard, work also includes the requirement to be able to provide for one's family and not only for the individual.

To summarize the Thomist perspective "it is by means of freedom that the peoples of the earth will have been brought to a common will to live together"³⁴⁴. This emphasizes the importance of liberty, which respects the meaning of dignity of the people. If they are aware of their communal dignity despite their diversity, they will also desire political unification. Nonetheless, they must want it and be sufficiently persuaded of their liberty and their dignity to pursue a pathway that will be tough and that will require sacrifices, as "living together" also means "suffering together"³⁴⁵. Dignity is thus not attached exclusively to the individual but also radiates on the peoples themselves, and thus to being-together, either in nations,

341 *ibid.*

342 Aquinas/Hibbs 1999; Rugani 2018

343 Sison et al. 2016: 12

344 Maritain 1998: 206

345 Maritain 1998: 207, cited in Valadier 2014: 268

or for the future, in a global society. In that regard, contributing to the common good—particularly through work—is crucial.

The CST genuinely rejects the subjectivist and relativist notion of work, which would affirm individuals' absolute freedom to choose their commitment and goals, even where this might allow for the experience of satisfaction in dehumanizing work³⁴⁶. In this context, meaningful work is another key aspect of CST, which enshrines a holistic, comprehensive, and coherent account of the idea. By exploring the conditions that relate to human dignity and work, the CST can offer guidance for meaningful work by recognizing that a person cannot be separated from their work, which is closely related to the meaning of life. This entails acknowledging that work has subjective and objective dimensions, which are interconnected, and calling for social and economic organizations of work to protect workers' rights so that work can contribute to flourishing and fulfillment.

Failure to recognize the dignity of work and priority of labor is a characteristic of "economism", according to John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens*. In this sense, "economism" considers human labor solely for economic purposes and views human workers merely in terms of their productive potential, whereby human labor is merely another element in an economic process. This suggests that human labor is akin to a mere commodity, with greater or lesser economic value and bought and sold on the market.

In this sense, CST is supportive of the human good and advocates resisting attempts to consider the economy in a way that detracts from the "activity" of labor. The particular dignity of labor should always be kept in sight, beyond its productive effects, with an emphasis on the basic rights of human workers as the ultimate standard for an acceptable economic system³⁴⁷. This emphasis of the rights and dignity of labor against all forms of "economism" thus represents the view that work is constitutive for a life with human dignity owing to its good nature as such. This also includes solidarity with the weak and oppressed and emphasizes the basic rights of workers, which may often go overlooked for the sake of profit and material gain.

Conclusively, CST regards work as central to human dignity, as various other capabilities are strongly related or dependent on work. This is most succinctly evident in the concept of having a "right to work", which highlights the ground that work lays for income as well as other features, such as

346 Tablan 2015

347 Lott 2012

being creative or self-development. In that sense, the tweet by Pope Francis mentioned above adequately summarizes the CST position “where there is no work, there is no dignity”. Other concerns of CST in terms of work, such as education and dignity in the workplace, are already inherent in the ten central human capabilities.

3.4.1.2 Protestant ethic

There are an estimated 750 million to 1 billion Protestants worldwide³⁴⁸, representing approximately 36 percent of the world’s Christian population³⁴⁹. The influence of the Protestant ethic on human labor can be observed historically, particularly with respect to the foundations of modern capitalism³⁵⁰. It has evolved primarily as the perception of hard work as a path toward both immediate and future rewards³⁵¹ and has been closely associated with capitalism. This constitutes sufficient grounds to more closely examine the meaning of human labor from a Protestant perspective, particularly when in relation to human dignity. The discussion below encompasses several Protestant views: unlike the Catholic church, the Protestant faith has no centralized authority that speaks for all churches, and similarly, it has no internationally authorized documents³⁵² that universally suit the diverse nature of the multiple strands of Protestantism found across cultures and nations.

Nonetheless, specific Protestant contributions to the discourse on human dignity may be identified³⁵³. Freedom is central to the concept of work and moreover represents a human condition³⁵⁴. Christian freedom and human dignity are inter-related and can be traced back to the Reformation, which is widely regarded as the fundamental initiation toward the modern conception of human rights. The concept of “communicative freedom”³⁵⁵ aims to bridge the gap between individualized and overly communitarian understandings of freedom. Fundamental to the Protestant understanding

348 Brown/Palmer 2009

349 Liu 2011

350 Kaesler/Weber 2013

351 Porter 2010

352 Ziebertz/Ziebertz 2016: 52

353 Huber 2008; Huber/Toedt 1978

354 Fourie 2010: 250-260

355 Fourie/Huber 2012

is the experience of liberation in considering human dignity to be inalienable.

Protestant theology considers human rights to be an extension of the biblical understanding derived from the definition of human dignity offered in Genesis 1.26f, which recounts that God created humans as special beings in God's own likeness³⁵⁶. Another evolving factor of human dignity in the Protestant perspective is the emphasis on education and access to education as elements of human dignity in the pursuit of justice of enablement (*Befähigungsgerechtigkeit*), which may be associated with the capabilities approach³⁵⁷. Education cannot be reduced to the acquisition of work-related competencies but rather emphasizes the importance of education to meet human needs and individual interests rather than merely considering economic constraints.

Education is an important factor not only for human dignity but also for social justice³⁵⁸, as justice is a guiding norm or value for all Christian ethics and a central topic throughout the Bible. It can also be considered guidance for secular ethics, particularly regarding the equitable treatment of all people and the principle of equality itself. Educational justice is also related to intergenerational justice, as it largely affects children and youth if equality is not met.

Within the Protestant tradition, the moral duty to support one's family evolved largely from the tradition's individual-moral dimension rather than from the perceived importance of the family as a social institution³⁵⁹ itself. Here, the Protestant individual perspective differs fundamentally from the CST, being more closely aligned with libertarianism and emphasizing the economic and financial logics that characterize the social dimension rather than a system of ethics³⁶⁰. This also influences the concept of "economic humanism", which calls on an economic order to respect and promote dignity in human life³⁶¹. Qualities such as self-discipline, a sense of justice, honesty and fairness, public spirit, and respect for human dignity are defined as ethical standards that people must already possess upon entering the market³⁶².

356 Schweitzer 2016: 1-7

357 Nussbaum 2006a

358 Schweitzer 2016: 5

359 Spieker 2010

360 Felice 2010: 280

361 Roepke 2009

362 Roepke 1982: 370-376

Nevertheless, early Protestant teaching with *Freedom of a Christian*³⁶³ already exhibited a deep and distinctive understanding of human dignity, equality, and liberty³⁶⁴. The essence of dignity from this perspective may be found in the connection between human depravity and human sanctity. It describes a divine fulcrum that keeps depravity and sanctity in balance. In this regard, Luther's early teaching may be considered a "Protestant *Dignitatis Humanae*"³⁶⁵. One key consideration here is the essence of human equality that lies in our radical calling as God's prophets, with divinely assigned vocations to discharge. Another is human liberty, which is regarded as a divine means of keeping individuality and community in balance. The vocational aspect is particularly important for Protestantism, and Protestant ethics give greater value to non-religious life by regarding each person as called by God to whatever vocation they had, worldly or religious. This imbued work with dignity in new ways.

Of the different Protestant perspectives, Calvinism³⁶⁶ considers the worshipful nature of work as part of an intrinsic dignity. Calvinism posits that work attitudes help to define societies; therefore, basic perceptions regarding work are important not merely for understanding societies but also for their practical impact on how most humans experience life. From the perspective of Calvinist Protestant work ethics, values relating to hard work, thrift, and efficiency signify the individual's election of eternal election.

Several characteristics may be generally applied to Protestant Reformers' ethics based on Calvinist ideas regarding work³⁶⁷. First, work has an intrinsic dignity, with a direct link from the dignity of work to the dignity of Christ. Second, work is associated with vocation, which may be defined in this context as a "a certain kind of life, ordained and imposed on man by God, for the common good"³⁶⁸. Another concern by Protestant theology is the demand for a "humanization of work" whereby economic growth shall be reflected in qualitative criteria³⁶⁹ and will encompass items such as reduction of unemployment, work and health, and reduction of working

363 Luther 2018

364 Witte 2019

365 Catholic Church 1965, cited in Witte 2019: 157

366 Pennings 2008

367 Pennings 2008

368 Perkins/Pickering 1603

369 Ziebertz/Ziebertz 2016: 52

time. Humans are generally regarded as people in community with others and in partnership with God³⁷⁰.

Other perspectives in the Protestant tradition to Christian humanism, in which social ethical thought plays a fundamental role³⁷¹, distinguishing between individual and social rights that bear a certain relation to CST, wherein the individual's responsibility also invariably relates to the social dimension. Diverging positions³⁷², however, perceive the Bible as lacking an essential interest in the situation of work. Work, for instance, may be regarded as a simple necessity, with the argument that those who are not prepared to work should not eat or that work has no specific value given that the Bible never refers to it as a vocation. Work, according to this interpretation, contributes to humans' divided, separated, and indifferent condition. Work itself is perceived thereby as an alienating factor, irrespective of social or economic conditions or ideology. This specific Protestant position holds that "work is simply part of the order to which we are subject—no more" and when work produces joy or is meaningful, it is important to recognize that this is an exceptional event, a grace, a gift of God for which we must give thanks.

Departing from Calvinist views, Puritan ethics in general heavily emphasize the dignity of labor as a consistent theme through the writings of Luther, John Cotton, Jonathan Edwards, Joseph Bellamy, or Samuel Hopkins, among others³⁷³. Ordinary work in this tradition was singled out to demonstrate the subordinate quality of all worldly activity to a creation whose true value is discerned in the image of spiritual piety that God brought to his creations. Sustaining this piety requires not only a spiritualization of work but also an aesthetic conviction that the individual in God's calling was made for the sake of creation rather than the other way round. This yielded the conclusion that no calling was more or less than another and so all occupations were equal before God and work was thus sanctified. In this sense, although the Protestant Reformation may be considered a crucial development for the birth of modern capitalism³⁷⁴, the idea of work as a value and a vocation itself remained part of Protestant ethics³⁷⁵.

370 Renaud 2017: 493

371 Rosmini 1993

372 Ellul 2000: 99; 103

373 Constantin 2017: 561

374 Weber 2013

375 Serratelli 2016

Work must leave room for contemplation and fellowship³⁷⁶. The wealth that work generates should be held in trust, and neither ownership nor profit is intrinsically evil. These features can be humanly fulfilling and good when they are not exploitative and are part of a mutually beneficial circulation of goods and services, aimed at building community and serving the common good. Hence, there exists an obligation to hold corporations responsible for society.

In sum, most Protestant views highlight the importance of work for human dignity, particularly in terms of a vocational understanding. Creation furthermore plays a key role, and work has a specific dignity as a fundamental aspect of human existence³⁷⁷. In addition, education may be regarded as a key to work and dignity.

3.4.1.3 China

With around 1.44 billion inhabitants, China is the world's largest country by population size³⁷⁸. It has a dynamic history with respect to human labor and is among the largest economic powers in the world today³⁷⁹. Therefore, the Chinese perspective will be discussed in the following with a focus on Confucian ethics, which also affect nations such as Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The Confucian ethic espouses a considerable esteem for education and self-development and holds that dignity is tied to an individual's education level³⁸⁰. In this regard, prestigious jobs may be regarded as a measure through which dignity may be secured in what is a highly conditional perspective on dignity as something that is hard-earned. Dignity may also be lost when expectations in the social system are no longer met, which may happen in the short term or even overnight. Further conditions and criteria are applied to define dignity in China based on Confucian ethics—for instance, in terms of material objects, such as designer clothes, or the ability to host a lavish wedding.

Chinese culture considers dignity as something that must be achieved by a higher income or prestige. The same principle applies to the role of work

376 Herdt 2021: 42

377 Junge 2011: 5

378 Koop 2021

379 Yueh 2013

380 Koehn/Leung 2008: 486-488

and considers “traditional” Chinese work ethics based on collectivism and altruism³⁸¹ rather than emphasizing individualism or individual rights. This Chinese approach has been marked by a mindset of utilitarian tradition that emphasizes the maximization of collective interests at the expense of minority interests, thereby disregarding individual rights and justice.

The individual work ethic in the Chinese traditional sense has been largely overruled by collectivistic interests. The same relates to discussions around basic legal individual freedoms that might also affect human dignity, such as religious freedom or equality³⁸². According to the “traditional” Chinese understanding, work is considered important for living a life with human dignity from a merely instrumental perspective, when defining an individual’s status as “dignified”. Respect for personal dignity, as understood from the individual and universal perspective, does not play a crucial role in contemporary Chinese politics either³⁸³. Nevertheless, from a collectivistic standpoint, work has always played a key role throughout history.

3.4.1.4 Islam

Islam represents the world’s second most popular religion after Christianity, with approximately 1.8 billion affiliates³⁸⁴. Furthermore, it is currently the fastest growing religion and is expected to become the most populous on a global level in the coming decades.

The Qur’an states that human dignity is not earned by meritorious conduct but rather that it is an expression of God’s favor and grace, pertaining to the equality of mankind as seen through the eyes of the Creator³⁸⁵. It is considered the basic right of all human beings to live a life of dignity, complemented by peace and comfort and the freedom to pursue what brings one happiness and perfection through all lawful means, which additionally includes creation and enjoyment of beauty, good health, and a clean environment for a dignified lifestyle³⁸⁶.

381 Cooke et al. 2019

382 Halliday/Liu 2021

383 Pils 2016

384 Lipka/Hackett 2017

385 Kamali 2002: 3

386 *ibid.*: 8

In terms of justice, the Qur'an may be interpreted as specifying that all people are equally entitled to benefit from universal resources, because no human can rule over the universe³⁸⁷. No nation, group of nations, class, or subdivision of *Homo sapiens* can claim more resources than another. This advocates for humans' shared responsibility to protect the environment and fight pollution and natural calamities as part of a common and equal humanity, irrespective of race, color, or religion³⁸⁸. It calls for equality in human rights, rights to justice, equality in terms of protection of the law, respect for education and employment, and enjoyment of basic liberties. Social justice from the Islamic perspective is defined as the aggregate of all conditions that enable the development of human capacity for the fulfillment of the general welfare and progress of the community as a whole³⁸⁹. Consequently, the absence of social justice deters the individual's ability to attain their fullest potential owing to the lack of freedom and dignity. Further Islamic sources from the legal, philosophical, and sociopolitical traditions incorporate in their definitions of social justice the struggle against oppression, inequality, and the promotion of dignity, all of which are broadly compatible with international human rights frameworks.

Islamic writings, such as the Qur'an or Sunnah, frame harmonious employer–employee relationships as a form of moral suasion³⁹⁰ analogous to the ILO labor standards, further discussed below. In that context, Islam encourages the state to contribute to the regulation of the labor market, and, furthermore, these moral persuasions serve as forceful legal rulings with the belief in the hereafter. Islam, like the other Semitic religions, regards worldly efforts and actions as worthy of award or punishment in the afterlife.

The concept of dignity in work is expressed in Islam as follows: “a laborer deserves to be respected because he earns his livelihood by his sweat”³⁹¹. Thus it is based on the notion that the Prophet insisted on a share in all work performed—that is, he never considered any lawful work to be beneath his dignity³⁹². Moreover, work is useful not only for fulfilling the needs of the stomach but also for maintaining honor and human dignity³⁹³.

387 Kamali 2002: 38

388 *ibid.*: 45–47

389 Reda 2016: 201

390 Ahmad 2011

391 Alazhari/Alazhari 2017

392 Shia Studies' World Assembly 2021

393 Azislam n.d.

As such, it possesses an intrinsic value, and dignity also implies the potential for growth in the context of a specific job or work.

Islamic provisions regarding labor rights may be considered compatible with international labor standards³⁹⁴. Although many Islamic countries are fraught with issues regarding the oppression of individual and collective rights on religious grounds, these measures do not reflect the frameworks enshrined in fundamental Islamic texts; rather, such acts of oppression can be largely traced back to monarchic states' attempts to legitimize their rule. Muslim scholars and writers from over several centuries exhibit a degree of consensus on the importance of worker rights and "decent work", goals also defined by the ILO.

3.4.1.5 Hinduism

Hinduism represents the third-largest world religion, with approximately 1 billion affiliates worldwide³⁹⁵, representing approximately 15 percent of the global population. With its growing population, India is expected to become the world's most populous country within the next 30 years, surpassing even China. As a growing economic power, the Indian approach toward human dignity based in its culture also exerts a substantial influence, particularly given India's reputation for state-of-the-art technology hubs and provision of information technology (IT) services worldwide. The country is also associated with controversies regarding its treatment of the poor and women, highlighting a certain need for a revision of its traditional views on human dignity³⁹⁶.

Regarding human rights and human dignity, the *sadharana dharma*, which covers universally valid moral commands for everyone and not just for certain groups or individuals, provides an indication as to how this topic may be approached from a Hindu perspective³⁹⁷. Two levels may be identified—individual and social—regarding the right to life and a worthy standard of living. These basic rights include the right to bodily integrity and to the means that are necessary for and appropriate to the sustenance and development of life: primarily, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and the necessary social services. Therefore, a human being has

394 Ahmad 2011: 26

395 Liu 2012

396 Drèze/Sen 2013

397 Neli 2014: 134-145

the right to security in the case of illness, inability to work, widowhood, advanced age, unemployment, or any other occasion of deprivation.

This implies an entitlement to moral and cultural rights, including the right to respect, freedom in seeking truth and in expressing and communicating one's opinions, and the pursuit of art within the limits set down by the moral order and the common good. Moreover, a person has the right to be informed truthfully about public events. Furthermore, individuals have the right to share in the benefits offered by culture and are thus entitled to basic education and to technical and professional training in keeping with their stage of educational development.

This is further connected to the freedom of religion or the right to family, where family is considered the first and essential cell of human society. Parents are thus obliged to raise their children and support their education. Human beings have the natural right to free initiative in the economic field and the right to work. Indivisibly linked to economic rights is the right to labor conditions in which the individual's physical health is protected, morals are upheld, and young people's normal development is encouraged. Women have the right to working conditions in accordance with their needs and duties as wives and mothers. In terms of dignity, humans also have the right to engage in economic activities according to the degree of responsibility of which one is capable. In addition, individuals are entitled to a fair wage, and workers and their families deserve a standard of living that serves to maintain the dignity of a human person³⁹⁸.

The Hindu traditional work ethic is strongly influenced by the caste system, wherein different types of work are aligned with different types of "dignity"³⁹⁹, as each caste historically had its own collectively predefined work in society. According to the societal perception, certain jobs had no influence at all in terms of the ability to live a dignified life owing to the lack of dignity associated with labor in general⁴⁰⁰. However, historical efforts on the part of the Gandhi movement following India's independence from British rule emphasized the importance of all kinds of labor, which essentially strengthened the national identity through respect for even lower-caste jobs⁴⁰¹. Ultimately, however, these efforts are always in contrast to the influence exerted by the caste system, which enshrines a strictly

398 Neli 2014: 153

399 Pinch 1996: 102-124

400 Bhattacharjee 2015

401 Suryanarayanan 2009

“hierarchical” view of dignity⁴⁰². This view posits that work can be seen as instrumental to living a life with human dignity only when acquiring sufficient financial resources to form part of a conventionally considered upper class. However, as outlined above with respect to Vedic traditions, the *sadharana dharma* offers certain indications that there exists a right to a just wage and the duty to give the worker and their family a sufficient standard of living to maintain human dignity⁴⁰³. This has implications regarding the importance of work for living a life with human dignity, including the right to appropriate working conditions with access to health care and education.

3.4.2 The International Labor Organization (ILO) and the United Nations (UN)

As the organization charged with promoting human dignity in the workplace by the UN, it is appropriate here to include the perspective of the ILO for the normative aim of this section. The institution has focused on fighting poverty and poor labor standards all over the world and is thus one of the major opinion leaders in terms of establishing a standard of living that promotes human dignity. As such, the ILO has considerable experience with the topic of poverty.

The ILO⁴⁰⁴ mentioned in its declaration that “fundamental values of freedom, human dignity, social justice, security and non-discrimination are essential for sustainable economic and social development and efficiency”. From a historical perspective, the ILO’s foundation was substantially influenced by the Catholic Social Movement⁴⁰⁵. As early as 1893, Pope Leo XIII called for a congress of workers’ delegates without distinction according to nationality, religion, or political union. The extent and level of institutionalization that the ILO has reached today exceeds any of the most optimistic expectations at the time of its inception. It has become an essential cog in the modern world through its unrelenting effort to achieve social justice. It has remained true to its principles while adapting to new situations, new labor environments, and new technologies. Its nature and

402 Rajeshwar 2011

403 Neli 2014

404 ILO 1944

405 Roy 1957

commitment constitute proof that it is possible for the world's nations to cooperate with one another on behalf of the international common good.

The ILO has been working to establish labor standards and to promote the idea of dignity of labor. The organization's goal—historically, at least—has been to provide support on a common global issue—namely, that humans may earn their living in peace, support their families, raise their children, be protected against all the hazards of existence, and, after a life of labor, spend some years in rest and contemplation. In that regard, the ILO has understood the dignity of labor from the first day of its existence and operation. From an institutional perspective, the organization and its office must maintain close contact with government, workers, and employers. The ILO has worked operationally with any private organization who wished to do so and has both informed and been passively informed. In general, it works in a universal manner that affects all humanity⁴⁰⁶ by providing nation states with a degree of liberty in implementing policy recommendations.

In addition, the ILO⁴⁰⁷ has highlighted various criteria for human dignity in labor, including education, social security, access to healthcare and appropriate working conditions that must be applied to labor. Consequently, the “decent work agenda” of the ILO⁴⁰⁸ states that work is “one of the few experiences common to most of humanity. It not only plays an obvious and crucial role in the well-being of workers and their families but paves the way to the broader social and economic development of individuals, their communities, and societies”. In addition, the organization aims to secure full, productive, and decent employment for all humans, underlining the constitutive role that work plays in living a life with human dignity from an ILO perspective.

The ILO's perspectives have also influenced the UN, which incorporated the topic of labor at an early stage, and collaboration between the two has been solid since the beginning⁴⁰⁹. The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁴¹⁰ states in Article 23.1 that “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment”. The concept is also recognized in

406 Roy 1957: 64

407 ILO 2019

408 ILO 2022a

409 ILO 2022b

410 UN 1948

international human rights law mentioned in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which “affirms the obligation of States parties to assure individuals their right to freely chosen or accepted work, including the right not to be deprived of work unfairly. This definition underlines the fact that respect for the individual and his dignity is expressed through the freedom of the individual regarding the choice to work, while emphasizing the importance of work for personal development as well as for social and economic inclusion”⁴¹¹.

3.4.3 Identity and work

Human beings’ identities may be significantly intertwined with their work and profession. Identity is a complex construct with multidisciplinary origins and, consequently, a range of associated conceptual meanings and theoretical roles⁴¹². Moreover, identity is among the primary motivation sources for human behavior. It can have an important impact not only on an individual’s feelings, thoughts, or behavior in the present but also on what they aim to achieve in the future. Identity may therefore provide a frame of reference within which to interpret social situations and potential behaviors and actions across all domains. It signifies who we are both in relation to and how we differ from others. An individual’s sense of identity is heavily defined by considerations of social desirability⁴¹³. Labor can influence social identity, which is focused on social affiliations, whereby one identifies with others⁴¹⁴ in the same profession for instance—which relates to the political environment and has a political aspect. Personal identity, on the other hand, may be concerned with our existence and the personal “sameness” that may relate to the factors that individuate us and distinguish us from others. The role of identity in the context of labor and its potential impact on living a life with human dignity will be discussed below.

Acceptance of an individual’s identity may be defined as “approaching people as being neither inferior nor superior to you”⁴¹⁵ and giving them the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of being negatively judged. Furthermore, such acceptance includes interacting without preju-

411 UN 2016

412 Leitch/Harrison 2016: 177-178

413 Falck et al. 2009

414 Sen 2009: 285-286

415 Hicks 2011: 1-43

dice or bias and acknowledging that race, religion, class, etc., may be at the core of others' identities. Treating others with dignity and accepting their inherent worth is crucial, consisting in the universal acknowledgment of the human need for appreciation and recognition, independent of one's background. From a biblical perspective, "human beings are attributed a personal dignity by God, even if our personhood is both incomplete and distorted"⁴¹⁶. Some have perceived the demise of the "work ethic" in societies in which production is no longer as important for identity as evidence of participation in the rising consumer society⁴¹⁷. This also affects the role of employment, whereby an "age of insecurity"⁴¹⁸ is evolving as a result of an ever-changing labor market. Work has arguably lost its privileged status in terms of self-constitution and identity-building⁴¹⁹. The modern workplace is a locus of ostensibly constant change, which affects how work influences the human life experience⁴²⁰. A consumption-dominated society could therefore shift the nature of work toward the perception that "interesting" work is the privilege of the few and judged by "aesthetic criteria"⁴²¹. The rest would need to accept jobs that offer no aesthetic satisfaction. The flexible labor market would thus offer neither commitment nor dedication, and attachment to one's job and the identification of one's place in the world with the work performed is unlikely, given the short-lived nature of any employment⁴²².

Labor has primarily been regarded as a means of securing income in recent decades. However, one's pay determines one's livelihood and standard of living as well as how and where an individual lives additionally to extrinsic benefits. When work is stable and well paid, it can also provide economic security and independence⁴²³. Furthermore, work can exert a formative influence on character and intelligence, thus providing opportunities for personal growth. Therefore, work is crucial in terms of individual achievement and accomplishment and is highly relevant to self-identity⁴²⁴, also within the context of community or society. In that sense, the industrial age

416 Gregersen 2021: 398

417 Bauman 1998: 24

418 Beck 2000; Sennett 2004

419 Bauman 1998: 32

420 Doherty 2009; Fevre 2007

421 Bauman 1998

422 Bauman 1998: 35

423 Weeks 2011

424 Russel 1930

made work the “axis of living”⁴²⁵. Traditionally, there was a homogenous and collective experience of employment and the labor market, through an interlinked process of education, mobility, and competition. This placed workers within social groups and presented opportunities for the development of a broader array of relationships outside the family⁴²⁶. Linking the purpose and social dimensions of work further served the need to have a place in society and the need to contribute, including the need to belong and to be depended on⁴²⁷.

Contemporary work, however, is increasingly unstable and, particularly in the age of digital transformation, is becoming increasingly flexible, whereby a parallel may be traced between flexibility and the apparent proliferation of inherently insecure, non-standard work⁴²⁸. This development has become the driving force in the individualization of people’s lives⁴²⁹. In this regard, the concept of “work ethics”—namely, the assumption that work has a moral dimension that is valued by society—involves new dimensions. Work itself has traditionally been considered “good”, and “secure work” has been a characteristic of standard labor based on the notion that humans are part of a productive process. Digital transformation has thus changed how work ethic is perceived by society.

Employment relationships may be defined by task discretion—that is, the degree of initiative or control that employees can exercise over their work tasks⁴³⁰, which also affects work-related identity. The segmentation of the modern labor market in the context of this definition could promote the dichotomy between aesthetic and non-aesthetic work. On the one hand, there are a small number of privileged core employees, who as a result of technological change and higher qualification levels, can experience a greater task discretion, participation, and aesthetic satisfaction. On the other hand, a substantial portion of peripheral, insecure employees experience tighter management control and coercion. The individualization of modern life, driven by digital transformation and associated labor market changes, along with the demise of the work ethic and the rise of workplace insecurity, can therefore have serious consequences⁴³¹. Traditionally, work

425 Beck 1992: 139

426 Budd 2011; Catholic Church 1981

427 Phelps 1997: 12

428 Beck 2000

429 Beck 1992; Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 2002

430 Gallie et al. 2004

431 Doherty 2009: 86

has been regarded as an important point of social relations for informal social interaction and the creation of ties, as well as small-group solidarity with work colleagues⁴³². The consumer society may lead to a working life that is increasingly atomized and fragmented which could demean the work-related identity of those who are no longer able to perform “aesthetic” work.

Work experience is generally inherently valuable to the individual in terms of the task itself and in terms of social relations at work⁴³³. In terms of identity, therefore, “work matters”, and this still seems to be the case when collective identity or social identity⁴³⁴ as an important pillar is endangered, despite the increased atomization and fragmentation of working life. For instance, the related workplace affiliation and solidarity-based collective action becomes crucial when working conditions are subject to deterioration, as illustrated by a recent case at Amazon⁴³⁵. In this specific case, the potential for collective action as an aspect of identity was possible despite the delocalized working style. Workers used other means of protecting their dignity through an identity-based collective action campaign with the successful creation of a company-specific trade union.

As the advancing flexibility of the labor market heavily influences worker identity, particularly through digital transformation and the rise of the consumer society, “entrepreneurial identity”, which is defined by a “founder identity”, is becoming increasingly salient⁴³⁶. Entrepreneurship has always been marked by the individualization of work and it is becoming the reality for more “workers” through the “sharing” platforms of the “gig economy”, such as Uber⁴³⁷. It is dynamic rather than fixed and unchanging and is shaped by different life episodes and their associated patterns⁴³⁸. It may be viewed as a fluid, multi-level, and multidimensional construct comprising multiple sub-identities rather than a univocal and unchanging self. In times of digital transformation and a swiftly changing human labor market as a result of the automation of professions and tasks, an entrepreneurial mindset that embraces creation and development could become increasingly important for humans in terms of their work identity. Entrepreneurial

432 Felstead et al. 2005

433 Doherty 2009: 87-98

434 Sen 2009

435 Weise 2022; Scheiber 2022

436 Fauchart/Gruber 2011: 954; Navis/Glynn 2011

437 Ravanelle 2019; Dubal 2019

438 Lindgren/Wahlin 2001

activities are infused with meaning as a result of the expression of an individual's identity⁴³⁹, and related roles are closely attached to behavioral expectations from a social standpoint. In that regard, identity can serve as one of the most powerful elements driving entrepreneurial actions⁴⁴⁰. Given that entrepreneurs do not build their identities alone, it may be regarded as a fundamental bridging concept between the individual and the social⁴⁴¹, creating a medium through which the entrepreneurial self and the social interact, as norms and prescription that arise from social interaction impact⁴⁴² individual behavior⁴⁴³. This emerges as particularly relevant given that firm creation is both an individual and team activity as well as being inherently social, and organizations may be regarded as social constructions. In that sense, social affiliation also continues to play an important role from an entrepreneurial identity perspective, even in times of digital transformation.

In sum, work exerts a strong influence on human identity, even amid digital transformation and an increasingly automated consumer society. The example of entrepreneurial identity illustrates that although the existence of certain professions or jobs might be short-term, they nonetheless contribute to identity formation. The individualization character of contemporary society might even enhance job-based identity for a time. In addition, work-based identity is relevant for political and social inclusion and the ability to mobilize forces if required—for instance, when working conditions substantially deteriorate. This leads to the relationship with dignity, whereby identity can represent commercial interests for working conditions, particularly if they violate dignity. Nonetheless, the identity–work relationship in that regard is already incorporated into the capabilities approach as part of the 10th Control over One's Environment capability (part of the 7th affiliation capability in an earlier version⁴⁴⁴ of the approach), which emphasizes building adequate “work relationships” based on mutual recognition with co-workers. Based on the diverse identity forms that are observable from a work perspective, this definition is sufficiently holistic to cover this particular dimension.

439 Leitch/Harrison 2016

440 Murnieks/Mosakowski 2007: 2

441 Watson 2009; Ybema et al. 2009

442 Fauchart/Gruber 2011: 947

443 Laakkonen 2012

444 Nussbaum 2008

3.4.4 Meaningful work

Meaningful work may be regarded as integral to human flourishing⁴⁴⁵. Aside from receiving a paycheck or other extrinsic benefits, work can have substantial intrinsic value for the worker themselves. In that regard, labor cannot be defined as a paid activity only, but rather as a productive, purposeful, or goal-oriented endeavor. In addition, there has even been a call for a “capability for meaningful labor” which includes and defines meaningful labor as part of the capabilities framework for living a life with human dignity⁴⁴⁶. Below, it will be considered how the term “meaningful work” may be considered relevant for a life with human dignity.

3.4.4.1 Characteristics

The definition of “meaningful work” is diverse and can vary in with respect to its meaning for all individuals. In general, “subjective and social accounts of meaningful work have limited practical value to help people pursue it”⁴⁴⁷. Nevertheless, the exploration of certain characteristics of the term may help yield insights as to whether and meaningful work they might be instrumental in human dignity.

A substantial portion of one’s waking hours may be dedicated to work that offers key opportunities to develop and exercise abilities in contributing purposefully to communities⁴⁴⁸. Work affects workers both on and off the job; it can drain and damage people, or it may be a source of fulfillment and self-development. Predominant economic theories approach work as an element of cost that characterizes a sacrifice of time and energy on the part of employees and money paid in wages and benefits on the part of employers⁴⁴⁹. This implies the assumption that work exists only to enable people to earn a living and achieve greater potential for consumption or leisure.

In discussing the meaning of work and elaborating the factors that define “meaningful work”⁴⁵⁰, the power of work goes beyond extrinsic

445 Veltman 2016

446 Weidel 2018

447 Michaelson 2021: 413

448 Veltman 2016: 1-4

449 Budd 2011

450 Veltman 2016: 4-8

factors, such as pay or retirement plans. The intrinsic features of work may enhance the flourishing of a worker, for instance, as illustrated by the psychological effects that work can have on individual workers. All human labor includes mental processes, and, as humans, workers are affected by events and circumstances that occur around and through them. Most empirical literature has demonstrated that well-being in the workplace is influenced by intrinsic rather than extrinsic features, such as wages or job security. Options within work to exercise one's abilities, learn new skills, and so on exert a greater impact on mental health and happiness⁴⁵¹. In addition, work itself can provide personal fulfillment through, for instance, meaningfulness, self-development, self-expressiveness, and the satisfaction of purposefully contributing one's talent to communities. In that sense, the extrinsic features of work can contribute to a meaningful life in a particular manner; however, discussions of how work can contribute to a flourishing and meaningful life requires closer examination of the intrinsic features of work rather than the extrinsic benefits exclusively.

Amid the individualization of work in the age of digital transformation and related automation, a pluralistic account of meaningfulness appears to become even more appropriate. One definition of meaningful work would be to consider how different elements of meaningful work may be used to describe its nature⁴⁵². First, work may be meaningful by virtue of its potential to develop and exercise workers' human capabilities, specifically as this expression meets with demanded recognition and esteem. Second, meaningful work should support virtues such as self-respect, honor, dignity, and pride. Third, meaningful work should be purposeful and should specifically produce something of enduring value and worth. Fourth and finally, it should be an integrating element of a worker's life and support the construction of or reflection on personal relationships or connection to the relational context that is essential for the individual's identity.

Another definition would be the "subjective experience of existential significance resulting from the fit between the individual and the work" where the "subjective experience of existential significance refers to the process of personally perceiving work as contributing to, or, making sense of, one's reason for existence in the world"⁴⁵³. Yet another definition would

451 Murphy 1993

452 Veltman 2016: 19

453 Both-Nwabuwe et al. 2017: 12

regard the following components as relevant⁴⁵⁴: “The subjective experience of work as intrinsically significant and worth doing, the experience that one is able to realize oneself through work, and the work serving a broader purpose”.

Various challenges arise in attempting to define “meaningful work”, although the term is becoming increasingly ubiquitous in modern business settings. First, the term is consistently affected by conceptual ambiguity⁴⁵⁵. Second, subjective experience is an important factor in meaningfulness, and even “harmful work can be experienced as meaningful”⁴⁵⁶. Third, the term’s notoriously pluralistic character is intensified when considering other sociodemographic factors, such as generational differences⁴⁵⁷.

3.4.4.2 Dignity and meaningful work

Dignity is often identified as a feature of meaningful work⁴⁵⁸ and inherent to humane working conditions. Work can be seen as a primary means of securing or reinforcing virtues such as dignity⁴⁵⁹ and has been characterized by many thinkers, such as Martin Luther King, as dignified in any form—that is, all forms of work have meaning, purpose, or dignity. Moreover, several discussions in the past have acknowledged the intrinsic benefits of meaningful work as elitist, likely because the discussion appears to view meaningful work as a marker of socioeconomic privilege as opposed to arduous, low-waged labor⁴⁶⁰.

However, the measurement of life’s meaningfulness is a need that can be observed among all people and may be identified as a basic human desire that is not limited to the elite⁴⁶¹. Furthermore, nearly all work allows for a measure or experience of meaningfulness, and additionally, some forms of manual work may be considered as more meaningful than other types of “intellectual work”. In addition, as we shift further toward an age characterized by changes in human labor, the inclusion of meaningful labor in the discussion may provide a normative foundation for social change

454 Martela/Pessi 2018: 12

455 Both-Nwabuwe et al. 2017: 1

456 Michaelson 2021: 413

457 Weeks/Schaffert 2017

458 Laaser/Bolton 2022; Ayers et al. 2008

459 Veltman 2016: 27-29

460 Tokumitsu 2014

461 Yeoman 2014

with respect to the changes in working life that are due to automation. This approach illuminates the misfortunes of some and the moral failures of social and political orders, which may then promote a life characterized by dignity and flourishing for more than just a few. This can lay the foundation in alignment with the aim of critiquing the current economic system, particularly in terms of the efficiency-driven digital transformation.

In essence, it would arguably not be helpful to classify any work as dignified or meaningful, as this would neglect the working conditions that are related to the working environment that an individual encounters at the workplace. Although the intention might be good—that is, to avoid forgetting or belittling socially necessary jobs⁴⁶², one might emphasize that no labor is dignified without an adequate salary. This resembles certain views aligned with the Protestant work ethic, whereby work is a commandment as well as a calling and no calling is more important than another⁴⁶³.

The belief that all labor is inherently dignified is based on an intuitive appeal⁴⁶⁴. It eliminates the social dilemma of who will perform distasteful work, since no work destroys the soul, according to this perspective. Furthermore, it serves as a social lubricant in communities in which people are primarily occupied with work that might otherwise seem undignified. For instance, it is an easy to offend someone by stating that that individual's work lacks dignity or is worthless. The removal of any offending stigma through the assertion that all work has dignity promotes the equality of all humans. This usually stems from the holy commitment to the moral equality of all human beings. Certain perspectives indicate that valuing some forms of work above others might suggest that some human beings are more worthy than others. Nonetheless, the appeal may support political calls for wage equality⁴⁶⁵.

It appears essential to differentiate the notion that all labor has dignity from the assumption that all human beings have dignity⁴⁶⁶, as the relevant definitions typically usually define criteria such as “labor that uplifts humanity has dignity”⁴⁶⁷ or to “lift labor up from mere drudgery and toil and love work for its own sake”⁴⁶⁸. This may be misleading, as not all work

462 King 1986

463 Ciulla 2001: 49-53

464 Veltman 2016: 29-34

465 Ung et al. 2021

466 Veltman 2016: 30-34

467 King 1986

468 Washington 2016: 148

genuinely serves humanity or serves the development of humanity, and some work actively undermines the worth of humans—that is, work that does not possess dignity.

Dignity at work surpasses the extrinsic characteristics and circumstances of work to involve features that are intrinsic to the activity of work, features that have the ability to develop and exercise human capabilities and to convey goods and virtues such as dignity, honor, self-respect, and autonomy⁴⁶⁹. Workplaces can undermine human dignity by hindering self-respect, pride, and attempts to use intelligence, initiative, and agency to complete work⁴⁷⁰. A key strategy for asserting human dignity would be to evaluate worker opposition to mismanagement, abuse, overwork, and exploitation in the context of heavily bureaucratic organizations, entirely profit-driven workplaces, and impolite managers, who have little or no respect for workers⁴⁷¹. An extreme example of this would be slave labor and its associated extraordinary indignities⁴⁷².

Such modes of “employment” can reduce the worker to a mere thing, ridicule their human capacities, and fail to foster the virtues associated with work, such as honor or pride, on account of the lack of agency required for the work. It does not uplift or build up humanity or support the social transformation of humans into a community of equals⁴⁷³. This demonstrates that not all labor is equal with respect to internal rewards and that only work that integrates conception and execution as well as enhancing capabilities and agency contributes to human flourishing⁴⁷⁴. Furthermore, the achievement of social equality would require that all people have genuine opportunities to develop their potential, master complex skills and contribute these skills to society in work that elicits social esteem⁴⁷⁵. Recognition of workers’ dignity may be viewed as an inherent aspect of work, and financial or intrinsic rewards are meaningless when dignity is absent⁴⁷⁶. This means that the sole provision of adequate financial reward is insufficient for meaningful work and dignity.

469 Veltman 2016: 31

470 Hodson 2001

471 Glucksmann 2009

472 Coser 1992

473 Veltman 2016: 31

474 Murphy 1993

475 Gomberg 2007: 14

476 Bal 2017: 62; Sayer 2007

Meaningful work may be considered part of a life lived with human dignity⁴⁷⁷, as living a meaningful life represents a fundamental human need; however, the precise definition remains unclear. In that particular view, non-meaningful work might even be regarded as harmful, owing to satisfy inescapable human interests such as scarifying humans health for money, including the experience of dignity. However, as mentioned above, the experience of harmful work is subjective. Nonetheless, a flourishing life without dignified working conditions is difficult to imagine⁴⁷⁸.

The notion of meaningful work is recognized as sufficiently crucial as to warrant inclusion in the list of ten central human capabilities as a separate capability⁴⁷⁹: “*Labor*. Being able to freely and successfully pursue an avenue by which a person can engage in meaningful labor, interacting with some aspect of nature (as well as other human beings) in a way that develops their faculties, utilizes practical reasoning, and provides them with a sense of dignity”.

The above definition expresses a Marxist standpoint and emphasizes the importance of meaningful labor, which deserves a prominent spot as a separate capability. While acknowledging the necessity to strengthen the position of work in the capabilities approach, the amendment covers yet another approach to meaningful work that can easily be challenged with respect to its applicability. First, the definition does not cover access to the basic necessities required to sustain a family, which gives meaningfulness to the vast majority of employees worldwide. Second, work may be regarded as meaningful without interaction with nature (or human beings), such as technical or intellectual work.

To summarize, meaningful work, although broadly recognized as an important factor in flourishing, does not necessarily need to be narrowed down in the context of living a life with human dignity. On the one hand, the definition and features are too pluralistic to integrate the term into the capabilities approach in a sufficiently precise manner. On the other hand, although dignity is mentioned as part of “meaningful work”, it is not regarded as an overlapping or integral component of it. Nevertheless, the dimensions discussed above highlight the importance of appropriate working conditions that meet a certain standard, such as providing an income to support individual and family, or other capabilities. This would

477 Yeoman 2014

478 Morris 1884

479 Weidel 2018: 79

also avoid the pitfall that arises in relation to the declaration that “all labor has dignity”. For the purpose of the present research, however, the concept of meaningful work will not be further specified with respect to the capabilities approach; however, certain of its features, such as the consideration of working conditions, may be regarded as an important characteristic of dignified life and are already included in the ten central human capabilities.

3.4.5 Implications for the capabilities approach

The normative views outlined above may be distilled into a single essential conclusion: Work is overwhelmingly regarded as constitutive for human dignity, from an individual perspective and community standpoint, whereas the individual perception is relevant for the capabilities approach. Throughout time and its vicissitudes, work has always been related to prevailing social practices⁴⁸⁰. Accordingly, without available work, there can be no dignity. In addition to the constitutive role for human dignity, work is instrumental in the achievement of other capabilities. Work also offers a link between individual freedom (capabilities) and community: human work constitutes participation in a community of persons, which leads to the necessity that access to work requires protection by rights. In that sense, work is fundamental and is invariably *for* the human person, rather than vice versa. As illustrated, work is essential to many aspects of human life, including development, education, identity, or social justice to name a few. Moreover, the right to work entails “inherent claims” such as “rights to leisure, to an adequate standard of living, and to live”⁴⁸¹, which constitutes a direct link to the capabilities approach.

In light of this elaboration, the right to work should be incorporated into the ten capabilities with a revision of the specific 10th capability (“Control Over One’s Environment”). In that sense, rather than “having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others” the specification must be “being able to exercise the right to work and receive a sufficient income to support all capabilities”. This takes into account the essentiality of paid work for human dignity outlined in the different positions and leaves no space for vagueness in terms of whether someone has access to the labor market (“seek”) or not. As such, the centrality of work to dignity is emphasized and reinforced. This is also relevant given that an overwhelming ma-

480 Ryken 2002

481 Arat/Waring 2022: 68

jority of humanity lacks the privilege of choice to abstain from paid work to receive a sufficient income. The idea of amending a separate capability has been discarded, as stated above in the context of “meaningful work”. Therefore, the revised 10th capability is as follows:

10. *Control over one's Environment.*

2. *Material.* Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; *being able to exercise the right to work and receive a sufficient income to support all capabilities*; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

This definition does not exclude people who are unable to work—for example, for health reasons—and includes the notion that they also require a sufficient income to live dignified lives. Furthermore, individuals who already have a sufficient income do not need to exercise the right to work. As a direct illustrative implication of this revision from a policy standpoint, governments could be required to provide frameworks whereby work is incentivized as a means of living a life of dignity for the sake of work and all capabilities are supported through an adequate income. In addition, policy must identify ways of maintaining these capabilities, particularly where paid work is no longer available and cannot be further provided.

3.4.6 Potential critique

Certain views and positions are fundamentally opposed to the concept of work. These will be examined below as potential critiques of the role that human work might play in general that would resist the idea of a fundamental right to work. Of course, the examples provided are not exhaustive, but they are sufficient to illustrate the existence of normative views that are critical regarding the essentiality of labor.

3.4.6.1 Marxist critique of labor

The critique of work or critique of labor idea seeks to abolish work as such. Many ideas in that context are based on the Marxist tradition⁴⁸² that work is an instrumental characteristic of capitalism that must be overcome, introducing a “right to be lazy”. This concept seeks to offer an alternative to the right to work, with the aim of abolishing work rather than fighting for improved access to paid labor. From that perspective, a “work-centered” society generates associated social problems, such as mass unemployment, inequality, or diminished well-being⁴⁸³. This view promotes an anti-productivist politics that calls for the decentralization of work in everyday life. Unemployment could be reframed as a more human form of non-work time, allowing the individual the freedom to pursue self-directed endeavors, also with the help of automation⁴⁸⁴. Human labor, and, specifically, the need for human labor, is capitalist by nature and considered to be partially responsible for the social inequality that gives power to a ruling class. Labor, as a social form, can be perceived as a “real abstraction” that reduces all social actors to quantitative expressions of the same social substance without content that aims only at its accumulation⁴⁸⁵.

3.3.7.2 Online anti-work movement

In the recent past, the anti-work idea found numerous supporters who went on to form a movement out of the online platform Reddit⁴⁸⁶. It gained particular momentum during the COVID-19 pandemic, largely because people realized for the first time the extent to which fundamental processes continued despite the substantial changes in working modes, including, for many, significantly reduced working hours. The movement aims to alter the structure of society and may be considered a successor to the Occupy Wall Street movement. In that sense, it calls for “unemployment for all, not just the rich” and criticizes the unequal distribution of wealth in society and the ways in which labor supports society’s elite. The anti-work movement, however, does not call for a complete shutdown of labor, acknowledging

482 Lafargue/Kerr 2018

483 Frayne 2011

484 Lafargue/Kerr 2018

485 Jappe 2014

486 Todd 2021

that this would cause society to collapse—for example, if teachers, doctors, or postal workers simply ceased actively working.

Reddit's anti-work community can be broadly categorized into two groups, with one stating that "we should not work at all" and others that we should just "work better"⁴⁸⁷. Those who wholly oppose work, criticize the human need to generate revenue to be valued by society. The group has also been active in organizing boycotts, such as the Black Friday Boycott⁴⁸⁸, and opposes the view that food, housing situation, or general well-being should be tied to work. In that sense, the movement reexamines the social expectations around work.

The anti-work movement has called for new ways of working since the advent of Maxism, as well as for an abandoning of work as such. These ideas are not helpful in terms of the research question here, which is concerned with evaluating changes in human labor based on the capabilities outlined, owing to the lack of an adequate alternative framework and definition for how work could play a role in society (e.g., in terms of identity, solidarity, skill sets creation, etc.). In addition, the practical implementation of the approach might help to organize strikes but it does not support the reorganization of society in a sustainable and stable manner.

3.3.7.3 Ascetic tradition

Ascetism in general may be regarded as a mixture of abstinence, self-contraction, containment, and the purification of desire with the aim of living a virtuous life⁴⁸⁹. It has a certain normative relevance for religion and some political practices. It may be interpreted in multiple ways, and ranges from mere abstinence in a religious sense to abstinence for a secular pursuit, such as health.

Ascetism has close ties to Marxist ideas, with its strong sense of social justice and identification with the oppressed of the world⁴⁹⁰. Work is regarded as an expression of power, and workers are strictly limited in their ability to exercise their own will. Workers are absorbed by relationships with one another and their overseers, their relationships characterized by

487 Codrea-Rado 2021

488 Todd 2021

489 Flood 2009: 1-2

490 Flood 2009: 40-45; Weil 2001

the “technique” they employ and the production process, which restricting social interaction. From an ascetic perspective, this relates to the oppressive work, the hard and manual work of the proletariat. Nevertheless, when performed consciously, work can also be a form of asceticism, a way of reversing the flow of the body and time. The self can inwardly oppose power and overstep it through detached acceptance, insofar as work would become a form of ascetism in that it regulates the passion and facilitates self-mastery⁴⁹¹.

Work must therefore be seen as a “general theory of action” that relates to the body during the ascetic process and ordering “in time of discipline”⁴⁹². It is the place where degrees of subjectivity are expressed. Subjectivity relates also to the ability to become detached from the process and defines the degree of agency and freedom that we have, while determining the fullness of humanity. Work, therefore, is the area in which subjectivity can be stated and agency is exercised in the rejection of imagination and temptation to be automated.

Overall, although ascetism has its own definition of labor in a philosophic sense, it might not be suitable to fit in to the framework of the pursued approach that tries to conduct and evaluation and later, might make certain demands from a policy perspective. In addition, there are different ascetic views in various religions and philosophies, where abstinence is their main commonality. This also makes it difficult to cover a framework that would ultimately be representative on the one hand, from a religious-ethic perspective but also from a world population perspective on the other hand, as few human individuals generally practice ascetism. However, its ideas may be suited to further contemplation in the context of labor automation.

3.5 Justification of the ethical point of reference

The ethical point of reference may be justified based on the following reasons. First, the principle of human dignity can be universally justified based on the principle of vulnerability that satisfies generalizability, and its respect represents a moral imperative. Second, the capabilities approach that serves to more specifically define a dignified life has been strengthened with normative views on the meaning of human labor for dignity. Third,

491 Moulakis 1998: 95

492 Flood 2009: 43-44

the capabilities approach is additionally recognized as a suitable and justified framework to promote social justice and reduce poverty. Fourth, the capabilities framework has been used to ethically evaluate technological developments.

