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Theoretical and practical difficulties in implementing the right to dignity in a multicultural, democratic society. The case of Israel

Teoretyczne i praktyczne trudności w realizowaniu prawa do godności w wielokulturowym demokratycznym społeczeństwie. Przypadek Izraela

STRESZCZENIE: Rozważania Autorki oscylują wokół kategorii godności w perspektywie praw człowieka, obywatelskich oraz demokracji. Termin „prawo do godności” zaprezentowany jest w perspektywie teorii konfliktu oraz w ujęciu edukacyjnym. Autorka w szczególny sposób uwzględniła specyficzne problemy zagrożeń prawa do godności wynikające z konfliktu z innymi prawami demokratycznymi, z charakteru systemu społeczno-politycznego, organizacji struktury społecznej oraz z sytuacji skomplikowanego kontekstu społeczno-kulturowego funkcjonowania społeczeństwa wielokulturowego.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Godność, prawa człowieka, demokracja, wielokulturowość.

ABSTRACT: The author's reflections oscillate around a category of dignity, framed by the Human Rights, the Civic Rights and a democratic perspective. Presentation of the category of 'right to dignity' takes place

* Autorka jest znaną w Europie badaczką problematyki demokracji i edukacji dla demokracji. W Polsce w latach 90. XX w. ukazały się jej książki: *Nie ma czegoś takiego jak trochę demokracji. O kształceniu ku demokracji i o demokracji w systemie oświaty*, Warszawa 1996; *BETZAVTA. Podręcznik nauczania demokracji przez gry*, Warszawa 1996 oraz *Proces edukacji w Instytucie Adama*, Warszawa 1997.

within the terminological dimension, the conflict theory's perspective and the educational context. The author takes into account the specific issues and dangers for the right to dignity when set against conflicts with other rights derived from democracy, the nature of socio-political systems or organization of social structures and the complex socio-cultural functioning of multicultural society.

KEYWORDS: Dignity, human rights, democracy, multiculturalism.

What is the right to dignity?

The right to dignity is central to the democratic worldview and yet, at times, this right may clash with other democratic rights and principles. Conflicts between the right to dignity and other democratic principles present difficulties and may even prevent people from enjoying this right. In this chapter we will describe these difficulties and suggest educational methods to resolve them.

When viewed from within a democratic context, the right to dignity has two primary meanings. The first is that deprivation of any human right is a violation of dignity. "Dignity is not merely an ordinary human right, but the fundamental principle from which all human rights – freedom, equality, and due process of law – are derived" (Gavison 1991). Aharon Barak, the President of the Supreme Court in Israel, provides a broad interpretation of the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty: "The broad model is based on the view that »human dignity and liberty« lay the foundation for all human rights (civil, political, social, and economic)... Such all-encompassing protection of human dignity and liberty is anchored in the section on the Basic Law. This protection is a natural derivative of the view that »basic human rights in Israel are based on the recognition of the value of the human being, and the sanctity of his life and his freedom«"¹ (Barack 1994). According to this interpretation, education to foster respect for fundamental freedoms and liberties is no different to education for democracy and humanism in general. The second interpretation of the term "human dignity" is more limited and refers to the specific right of individuals not to be degraded by others. The right to dignity is that right which is not infringed solely by infringements of liberty, equality, and due process... (Gavison 1991, p. 263). The specific right to dignity is, then, the set of rights that protect us from injuries that do not directly involve an infringement of other values. For example, the right not to be subjected to

¹ Paragraph 1 of the Israeli Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, 1992.

humiliating or insulting treatment, the right to a good reputation, or the right to privacy. All these are elements of the right to dignity. We deal with them not because these infringements are salient offenses to property, liberty, or equality, but because they involve some clear case of infringement of dignity, which is sufficiently clear, sufficiently specific, that we want to mobilize our system to protect people from it (Gavison 1991, p. 263).

The above may seem to indicate that educating towards the more narrow definition would require a lesser educational effort. Yet as we shall see, if we want this principle to be honored, we must teach broad democratic and humanistic principles. As stated above, whether we are speaking about the concept of dignity in the first sense or in the second, it is a right that inherently and equally belongs to all people. Despite wide theoretical consensus on the importance of the right to dignity, a large gap exists between theory and practice. Why does this gap exist? What difficulties do people face in fulfilling their duty to protect the right to dignity, and how can these difficulties be overcome?

When the right to dignity conflicts with other human rights. The dialectic between the right to dignity and other democratic rights

As stated, the right to dignity is a central, vital human right. At times, however, it clashes with other rights. When this happens, people wishing to safeguard the right to dignity often feel they must choose between the two rights. Many people may choose to waive this right in favor of the others.

The following are several examples of situations in which the right to dignity and other human rights conflict:

- The right to dignity may clash with the *right to security*. Security may require confining people with handcuffs in a public place even before they have been proven guilty of a crime. People in this situation may feel that their dignity has been seriously compromised.
- The *right of the public to know* requires that the names of those suspected of committing crimes be made public. This does not enhance their dignity, especially if the people named are innocent.
- The right to dignity sometimes clashes with the *freedom of expression*. The duty to restrict forms of expression that infringe upon other people's dignity is derived from the obligation to respect others.

In all these cases, the clash between the two conflicting rights must be reconciled if we are to ensure protection of the right to dignity. Otherwise,

the other rights are likely to take precedence thus denying the individual the chance to realize this right.

The question then becomes: how should this fundamental problem be approached from an educational perspective?

It is generally accepted that educators instruct students to prioritize one right, despite the fact that this may preclude their ability to realize the other right. Therefore, we must find a way to address the conflict so that people are not forced to waive one right in order to exercise another.

The following methods have been proposed for dealing with this conflict: compromise and balance and transformation of the situation so that the conflict ceases to be a conflict.

The method of compromise and balance states that no important right should ever be entirely relinquished. It is impossible to formulate this method, and it requires personal sensitivity in deciding how to act in any given situation. Such sensitivity should be developed both educationally and in other ways. "The desire to protect human rights may clash with other rights or other values that are not human rights per se [...] In both cases of conflict, the infringements should be weighed against each other. When the clash is between basic human rights, it is clear that we have to »sacrifice« some of the protection of one right to protect the other... Different societies find different solutions to conflicts between the two rights, and it is important to remember that each solution exacts a certain price in terms of one of the rights. As stated, these solutions are not essential or even eternal..." (Gavison, Schnidor 1991).

The second option for dealing with conflicts that may arise between the right to dignity and other rights is to transform the situation so that the conflict simply ceases to exist. Finding a way to eliminate the conflict requires a shift of thought and creativity. For example, in an attempt to demonstrate what it means to show respect to others, educators may instruct their students not to criticize others nor to express negative feelings, as this may degrade others and strip them of their dignity. This point of view stems from a belief that when freedom of expression clashes with the right to dignity, the right to dignity should prevail. As previously stated, to prevent infringement of freedom of expression, situations in which people have to choose between the two rights must be avoided. One way to achieve this is by changing the societal norm that regards the expression of negative feelings as illegitimate and disrespectful. A new cultural norm can be promoted – namely, one which legitimizes the expression of negative feelings, enabling openness and drawing people closer together. By developing a new cultural norm, we can eliminate the conflict between the right to dignity and the right to freedom of expression.

This is not to say that changing social conventions is the best way of changing the situation; we simply recommend resolving the matter by eliminating the conflict instead of forcing those involved to relinquish one of their rights (Maroshek-Klarman 1995).

Difficulties in implementation of human rights in general and social rights in particular, due to social and political systems

Advocates of the welfare state claim that the state should provide adequate basic living conditions to protect the human right to dignity. A life of poverty strips people, in part, of their dignity. "Human dignity assumes a minimum of human subsistence. A homeless person who lives in the streets is a person whose dignity has been violated. A starving person is a person whose human dignity has been violated..." (Barack 1994, p. 422). Basic living conditions must be provided to **all** members of a given society, universally, regardless of an individual's financial standing or opportunities. For example, the state must provide free education to all, including those who can afford to educate their children without this assistance. The state must also provide medical care to all, even to those who can provide it for themselves.

Universal provision of these welfare services is important for protecting human dignity. Providing this right to all reinforces the sense that it is a right and not charity; accepting charity is an infringement of the recipient's human dignity while strengthening the feeling of worthiness inspired in the giver.

Welfare state advocates claim that when basic conditions are supplied only to the poor, income tests are needed to determine eligibility for state support. Such tests impose a label on those who are required to prove their need to the authorities, thus violating their dignity. "What characterizes the welfare state with respect to the provision of welfare services is that it is based on the desire to avoid all means of allotment and rationing of welfare services that tarnish, humiliate and deter; and abandons the use of various means and income tests that differentiate between the general population and the population in need of welfare services. This approach is called »universality in welfare services«"(Doron 1995).

Opponents of the welfare state argue that their opposition to the universal approach does not stem from a desire to violate people's dignity, but that this approach infringes on the principle of equality. When the state gives equal support both to those with and without economic means, it perpetuates the gap between population groups.

Thus, the choice to use income tests (and the ensuing infringement of human dignity) stems from the approach that when there is a clash, other rights take precedence over the right to dignity. In this case, an essential contradiction between equality and dignity is assumed, and advocates and opponents of the welfare state disagree over which of the two should prevail.

The education system should work to heighten the students' sensitivity to the fact that when attempting to secure the rights of individuals, the means are frequently no less important than the ends. The means used to ensure the freedom to exercise one right may violate another right. For example, ensuring that all members of society enjoy their right to accessible healthcare or education is extremely important, but so is the manner in which these services are provided. We must strive to find a way that does not violate the dignity of those who are eligible. However, it is also important to understand that the decision to show respect may, at times, require the infringement of other interests and rights. To minimize conflict, we repeat the suggestion made in the previous section that students be given tools for creative problem solving. For example, conflict may be eliminated by instituting income tests for high-income individuals to determine whether they should repay some of the cost of the education they receive from the state.

The relation between the social-organizational structure and realizing the right to dignity

The desire to recognize every person's equal right to dignity is a necessary condition for ensuring that people are free to enjoy this right, but it is by no means sufficient. There are times when people would like to show respect to others, but are prevented from doing so by the organizational structure in which they operate.

The social structure of the State of Israel, like that of other Western countries, is based on the assumption that there will always be a certain level of unemployment. As previously stated, the right to dignity requires adequate living conditions, which may not be attainable by an unemployed person. People who work are held in higher esteem than those who do not, regardless of whether the unemployment is due to socioeconomic factors or to the person's unwillingness to work. In such a system, we may consider showing equal respect to everyone, but in fact we maintain a system that shows respect only to some of its members.

How then are we, as individuals, responsible for safeguarding the dignity of the unemployed?

To illustrate this further, let us look at another example. The aim of an academic school is to help the students pass their matriculation exams in academic subjects. The students who succeed at the task defined are regarded as successful, and therefore enjoy higher status. The school proclaims the equal right to dignity as an educational goal, but in fact, the same degree of respect and admiration is not enjoyed by students whose goals differ from those of the establishment and whose talents and motivations are in other areas. Only if the school aims to promote individual choice would each person's place in the school receive equal respect.

Israel's Declaration of Independence obliges it to show equal respect to all its citizens, irrespective of religion, race or gender. The state is defined as a Jewish state, and its goal is to preserve this definition. Non-Jewish citizens are not included in this definition and therefore feel rejected by the system. To them, this definition precludes their full identification with the aims of the society in which they live. It is extremely problematic to show equal respect to all citizens under these conditions (whether respect is defined as equal rights for all or as non-humiliation; unwillingness to grant equal status to every person in the social structure poses a tremendous difficulty).

The entity's purpose determines each member's place within it, and thus those who contribute to achieving this goal receive more respect than others. What, then, does it mean to show respect to those who do not contribute to the entity's goals? Can they be shown equal respect? Or should the structure of the establishment be changed for this to be possible?

In other words, how should we deal with individuals or groups who wish to exercise their right to dignity, when the system in which they operate ignores the dignity of some? In systems not committed to protecting the equal right to dignity, how should people behave when their dignity is violated? How should others who identify with them act?

The attitudes of different societies toward the disabled offer the opportunity to examine ways to protect the right to dignity in systems that do not consider this right a priority. In societies that believe it is important to allow people with disabilities to maintain their dignity, efforts are made to create an environment that allows them to function autonomously so that they do not have to depend on those who are able-bodied. In such societies, the doorways to all public institutions are especially wide to allow easy access to the wheelchair-bound and to people with limited mobility. The disabled do not have to ask for help, thus retaining their dignity. Can the dignity of the disabled be protected in a society that does not have a law requiring government institutions to build wide doorways and install appropriate elevators?

If so, how? Is it possible for disabled people to maintain their dignity when they have to be carried wherever they go? People with disabilities often feel powerless and stripped of their dignity because the system fosters a sense of helplessness, dependency, and inequality between the disabled and the able-bodied. When they do have to accept help from others, these feelings are heightened.

The following methods are proposed for restoring people's dignity in a society that does not actively promote this goal: redefining the situation and taking democratic action to achieve social change.

There are some ways of *redefining existing social norms* to protect human dignity.

1. People needing state assistance ask for the equal right to contribute to society.

As we have seen, income tests violate the dignity of the recipients of social aid such as welfare. "Financial assistance for those in need is an awkward, inefficient arrangement that requires that people accumulate points to prove their misfortune. It humiliates those who are eligible, and in particular, it deprives the large number of people who live slightly above the poverty level, but still have a hard time exercising their rights" (Yatziv 1986). Prof. Gadi Yatziv², agrees with welfare-state advocates that state assistance should be granted universally. However, he considers it problematic to link state assistance to the concept of distributional justice. He argues that the allocation of state resources to citizens to ensure their ability to exercise their rights should be presented as more than a just distribution of resources. It should also be presented as resources that the state allocates to the general public so that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute equally to society and to the state.

When the state grants all citizens equal opportunity for education, it can be viewed in two ways. The first regards it as the allocation of resources to citizens who claim the legitimate right to an education. The second views it as a request for the opportunity to contribute equally to society and to the state. When people with disabilities demand that elevators be installed in public buildings and in their work places, this can be regarded as a legitimate demand that society give them the opportunity to earn a living with dignity. In essence, the disabled are asking for the opportunity to equally contribute their talents to society.

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The estimated value of the individual's contribution to the wealth of the nation is known to be of paramount significance in a capitalistic society... If wealth is to be distributed justly, the criterion for distribution must apply equally to all individuals in society. The criterion, as previously stated, is the opportunity to contribute to the wealth of the nation... An additional system of equal rights that includes the right to housing, healthcare and education enables people to contribute to society on more equal terms (Yatziv 1986, p. 76–77) “The ability to contribute must be regarded as a fundamental right granted to the individual, and it is important to ensure that it, too, is granted equally to all citizens” (Yatziv 1986, p. 82).

When citizens think of themselves as people who take from society, and society, in turn, regards them as seeking a handout, a relationship of mutual respect cannot develop. However, when both the general public and the state view these citizens as people seeking the opportunity to contribute equally, they will be regarded with more respect. Therefore, the concept of “contributational” justice should be adopted alongside the concept of distributional justice. “The time has come to shift the focus of the struggle from the effort to achieve distributional justice to the effort to achieve justice in terms of contribution to society. This can be accomplished by respecting each individual's right to equal worth and by allocating equal rights of determination in terms of contribution to society. In other words, justice will be achieved through the democratic exercise of equal opportunity to contribute...” (Yatziv 1986, p. 88).

If people with disabilities seeking social assistance regard themselves as claiming the right to contribute equally, they will feel more dignified.

2. A request for the distribution of resources to ensure that rights are exercised is actually a demand to fulfill a moral and/or civil obligation

When the poor perceive asking for “assistance” as a demand that members of society fulfill their moral and/or civil obligation, their dignity is violated less than when they ask for charity. In this case, the refusal to help those in need lowers society's opinion of those who have the ability to help but fail to fulfill their moral obligation.

3. Needing help from others can be portrayed either as asking for assistance or as social collaboration

If we examine our overall relationship with our environment, we find that we constantly need help from others. The division of labor in society is based, among other things, on the fact that we function and contribute in areas where we have the ability to do so and receive contributions in areas

where we lack the ability or skills. This reciprocal relationship between the individual and society is a collaborative relationship.

Such a definition of the relationship between the individual and society prevents infringement of the dignity of those who need help in a particular area, because this philosophy assumes that all people are “needy” in one respect or another. If our attitude toward the needy comes from the narrow perspective of one particular aspect in their lives, specifically, their limited skills or abilities, we reinforce their feelings of weakness, inequality, and indignity. By changing our perspective, we can greatly enhance the dignity of all people.

4. The problems of the needy: personal failures or failures of society?

“Dignity is manifested in perceiving the request for help not as a sign of weakness or dependence, but as an expression of a need for a professional service....The weak are prepared to accept the problems from which they suffer as justified and to thereby reinforce the prevalent negative opinions about them” (Sadan 1997, p. 78). “Empowerment theory views helplessness as a societal problem rather than as an individual problem and is critical of the conservative tendency to label manifestations of helplessness, dependency, despair, and self-blame as personal (and sometimes cultural) problems of individuals” (Sadan 1997, p. 99).

When we become aware that personal weaknesses are related to the means that society makes available to its members and are not objective states of being, we will sense our unfulfilled potential for empowerment. When individuals perceive their weaknesses as objective facts, their sense of inferiority and humiliation intensifies. For example, if the light switches in our homes were designed for particularly tall people, average height would become a weakness. Of course, average height is not an objective weakness per se. This insight boosts the individual’s self-esteem and motivates people to engage in social activism to bring about change.

Efforts to change society by democratic means as the second way can be seen in another situation. When the system is not committed to respecting human dignity, people prefer to actively engage in social change rather than ask for assistance or charity. Under certain circumstances, when two sides are engaged in a struggle, the sense of inequality and helplessness is diminished and the sense of dependency becomes mutual. Under the new circumstances, those fighting to exercise their rights, as well as their opponents, understand their mutual dependency better. For example, in a non-crisis situation, labor relations are primarily perceived as the employees depending on the employer. When workers strike, the awareness of the employer’s dependence

on the employees is heightened. As we saw in the introduction to this section, inequality, dependency and helplessness create a sense of humiliation that must be addressed if we are to restore people's dignity. A societal struggle for change can certainly contribute to self-esteem and a sense of dignity. Education for protection of the right to dignity thus requires that we address the connection between a person's sense of self-worth in society and the structure of the social establishment. Furthermore, educational programs in this area must provide students with the tools to preserve the dignity of people in societies that do not regard this right as fundamental.

Educating for dignity in a multicultural society

Multicultural societies give rise to a number of problems related to the implementation of the right to dignity.

1. Most members of multicultural societies are familiar only with their own subcultures and may therefore inadvertently offend members of other groups dignity.

When people wish to respect their fellow citizens but are not familiar with their cultural norms, educational efforts can be made to increase the frequency of encounters between the different cultural groups. Increased familiarity of the cultures will help prevent inadvertently offending others. When a person is insulted or offended, the source of the offense should be clarified and a dialogue should be held to enable forgiveness and lessons for the future. "All children have to acquire a certain amount of knowledge about the culture, religion, and heritage of the different groups in their society and learn to respect them" (Tamir 1998, p. 85). Intercultural familiarity, awareness of the limitations of intercultural communication and the existence of open channels of communication can further the implementation of the right to dignity.

2. In a multicultural society, differences between groups create situations where what one group regards as disrespectful another considers a sign of respect

In this societal situation it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to decide what constitutes offensive behavior and who is guilty of offensive behavior.

"The idea of tolerance comes up frequently in discussions of hurt feelings, but the conclusion is never clear. In other words, who is supposed to be tolerant of whom, and how should tolerance be expressed? To illustrate, let's imagine an incident during the Jewish holiday of Passover, during which observant Jews do not possess and do not eat hametz (leavened food). Are people who eat hametz, such as bread, in public during the holiday being

inconsiderate of other people's sensitivities, or are the religiously observant Jews being intolerant when asking others to modify their behavior?" (Statman 1998, p. 157) "It would appear that, among normative emotional insults, the most effective are those that infringe on the other's dignity" (Statman 1998, p. 139). The question we should then ask ourselves is: When the norms of different cultures conflict, according to which group's cultural codes should respect be shown, according to the cultural codes of those wishing to show respect or the cultural codes of those whom they wish to honor? The following two scenarios illustrate this point:

- A man and a woman are walking to the man's car. The man opens the door for the woman as a sign of respect. The woman is an ardent feminist and regards this behavior as a gesture that perpetuates the beliefs in inequality of the sexes. She rebukes him. Did the man treat her respectfully? Did the woman treat him respectfully? How should the man have behaved? Should his behavior have been determined by what seemed to **him** to be an expression of respect, according to his cultural code, or what seemed to her to be an expression of respect, according to her cultural code?
- A group of secular educators visits a religious school. If the hosts wish to show respect for their guests, can they ask them to come dressed modestly? If the guests wish to show respect for their hosts, should they come dressed according to the dress code of the school?

Reciprocity is the key to dealing with situations in which different cultures espouse conflicting behavioral norms. If members of one group feel they always modify their normal behavior as a concession to members of another group, it is unlikely they will be willing to continue to show respect for the other group and behave according to its cultural codes. "You cannot ask for concessional gestures without being willing to make them; similarly, you cannot ask others to be considerate of your feelings if you are unwilling to be sensitive to other people's feelings when necessary" (Statman 1998, p. 155). When cultures meet, the principle of reciprocity can help us deal with the challenge of acting respectfully. However, it is important to understand that reciprocity does not fully resolve the issue of whether to show respect according to one's own cultural codes or to those of the other person or group.

One reason it is so difficult to show respect to others according to their cultural codes is that this sometimes requires that we relinquish aspects of our own identity.

3. The conflict between implementing the right to dignity and each individual's right to preserve his or her personal and cultural identity.

As mentioned above, certain situations require that members of one group concede some elements of their own identity in order to show respect to members of another group and behave according to their cultural norms. When these situations arise infrequently this does not pose a problem. However, if required frequently, the individuals making the concessions may feel severely imposed upon by the other group. In a multicultural society, such situations may certainly arise.

Dr. Dan Gibton (2001, p. 59–64) of the School of Education at Tel Aviv University tells the story of a religious man who gave him a ride to one of his lectures: "I remember that when he arrived at my house about twenty minutes earlier than had been arranged, I gave him a cup of coffee and cookies until I was ready to leave. He thanked me, ate the cookies and drank the coffee. Now I wonder how a man who only eats food certified as kosher by the most stringent authorities was willing to eat food whose kashruth was dubious at best. When asked about this, he replied: Extremism is wrong. I won't insult you if you brought me food. Such an insult is a desecration of God's name, and that is the most serious sin". Eating kosher food is unquestionably a very basic tenet in the identity of a religiously observant Jew. In this story, the religious man chooses to be less strict about the Jewish dietary laws of "kashruth" so as not to offend the other person. This concession, if required frequently, may become a fundamental insult to his identity. Awareness of the conflict that exists between our duty to show respect and our right to maintain our personal and cultural identity is extremely important if both are to be protected.

4. Recognition of youth culture as a legitimate culture

The conflicts that arise when different cultures meet are present also in the encounter between youth culture and adult culture (Alon 1986, p. 205). Educators working to teach students how to respect others are acutely aware of these issues. However, appropriate behavior, as defined by the educational community, is the expression of respect according to the norms of adult culture. The desire to impose adult behavior on the students may lead educators to ignore the students' cultural codes for showing respect.

The operative question then becomes: Should educators require students to show respect for both adults and their peers by using adult cultural norms and symbols, or should educators respect the norms of youth culture? Insisting that teenagers adopt the codes used to show respect in the adult

world may indicate that the students are respectful, but it may also indicate the opposite.

Educating young people to recognize the inherent right of all people to be treated with respect requires intercultural familiarity and good communication with teenagers. Such communication can help adults discover what teenagers consider a violation of their dignity and what they consider a sign of disrespect. Educating all people to respect the dignity of others requires a dialogue based on a commitment and desire to respect one another. It also requires willingness to work together in examining the difficulties and deciding how to show this respect. This is true of relations in many sectors of society, including relations between Orthodox and non-observant Jews, adults and teenagers, and people from different cultures.

The difficulty of showing respect in a multicultural society is due in part to the absence of a sense of reciprocity.

The challenge of fulfilling the obligation to show respect in the absence of reciprocity

In this chapter, we examine the sources of the difficulty in showing respect in the absence of reciprocity. We also examine whether or not this is an issue that needs to be addressed and, if so, how to best deal with it. This question is particularly important for educators, who often feel tempted to react with insults and humiliation when they sense that their students do not treat them respectfully.

Non-reciprocity in fulfilling the obligation to show respect can take any of three forms:

- Absolute refusal of one party to respect the other (for example, racism).
- Refusal of one party to respect the other in accordance with the other side's cultural codes.
- Failure to show respect for the other party's worldview and espoused beliefs, but willingness to respect the individual who has performed specific acts that are consistent with our worldview.

To what extent does the duty to show respect depend on reciprocity? This question is the subject of debate for theorists discussing the right to dignity. A desire to make the duty to show respect contingent upon reciprocity generally refers to the first type of non-reciprocity – that is, situations in which one side absolutely refuses to respect the other. The extreme example of this type of non-reciprocity is racism. Indeed, the question of whether to respect racists is by no means simple.

The main positions in the argument are as follows:

1. As a matter of principle, we are not required to respect someone who refuses on principle to respect certain people.

“The obligation to be considerate of other people’s feelings stems from the understandable and justified desire to prevent people from suffering pain, whether physical or emotional. When the source of the (emotional) pain is an immoral philosophy, as is the case with a racist, there is nothing wrong with returning the pain” (Statman 1998, p. 155).

2. We are required to respect others even when respect is not reciprocal.

The well-respected writer Salman Natour presents the opposite argument. He maintains that we should not make showing respect for others contingent upon their behavior towards us. As he sees it, we must distinguish between the respect we show to a particular person for their deeds or opinions and the respect we have for the potential inherent in every person to behave humanely. The respect that we show others must come from an appreciation of their humanity in general, regardless of their behavior. Natour (1992, p. 12) believes that appealing to the humanity of people who behave inappropriately will cause that person to behave appropriately. “I have heard many diverse theories about racism from friends, intellectuals, and prophets of doom. And all of them were absolutely convinced that if you scratch deep enough, there is a little racist inside everyone. As if racism were an inexorable fact of nature. And I wondered if it might not be the other way around: Perhaps deep inside every racist, no matter how infuriating, loudmouthed, violent, and insane, is a shred of humanity? And perhaps it is the job of those of us with lofty ideals to find and nurture the humanity hidden in the heart of a racist? Help this humanity grow within the dark soul; give it the light, sun, and air that it needs to blossom, grow and overcome the devil! Let it grow, but first you need to seek it out, because it is invisible from your ivory tower. This bit of humanity isn’t hidden beneath a pile papers; but dwells inside the person who terrorizes you and fills your life with misery”. Espousing this belief, Salman Natour joins a long line of humanistic philosophers.

The philosopher Paulo Freire argues that everyone should be respected, even if they themselves do not respect others. However, he explains that in some situations, respect for others means attempting to change their minds. Wanting to change people’s behavior is not necessarily a sign of disrespect. Sometimes a persistent attempt to change the opinions of people with whom we have a dialogue is an indication of our high regard for their ability to

reason and to change. Educators have no right to act otherwise. The basic belief in people's capacity for self-improvement includes the expectation that they can change their behavior. When we no longer expect them to examine their views, then, and only then, are we showing disrespect (and we might even be guilty of wanting them to remain in their present situation, which we consider to be unworthy of respect). However, we cannot try to change people's views the minute we meet them. First, we must get to know them well, come to understand their inner world, and make every effort not to offend them. The process of respectful change is based on in-depth knowledge, patience and sensitivity (Horton, Freire 1990, p. 130–133).

The views of Freire and Natour are similar to the religious Jewish position. According to this viewpoint, people are worthy of respect because they are created in the image of God. They deserve respect in all situations, because of their inherent potential. The attempt to persuade them to adopt religious customs is a sign of respect, not disrespect.

It is easy to accept this viewpoint when the question is what attitude to have towards a racist (whose opinion we must change). But in other cases, an attempt to change someone's worldview may easily be perceived as disrespect for the other person. For example, non-observant Jews often feel offended because the Orthodox believe that people do not behave appropriately if they do not live according to the Torah and its precepts. The Orthodox, on the other hand, feel they are treated with disdain because some secular Israelis believe that progress is to be found only in the secular worldview.

Our question is whether showing respect means accepting diversity or trying to mold people according to the value system that we consider superior?

We seem to confuse the concepts of agreeing with other people, showing respect for their views, and showing respect for them as individuals. Prof. Daniel Statman³ attempts to equate showing respect for people with agreeing with their views; and he therefore rejects the idea of showing respect to a racist. In contrast, Salman Natour⁴ and Paulo Freire⁵ advocate that a clear distinction

³ Prof. Daniel Statman, from the Department of Philosophy, The Faculty of Humanities at the Haifa University.

⁴ Salman Natour – writer, an author of 24 Arabic books and one Hebrew novel, *Walking on the Wind*, humanitarian and leading writer and journalist for the Arab-Israeli and Israeli press and author of a wonderful and widely respected book published in Ramalah; the respected author and essayist whose writing in Arabic and Hebrew is widely read throughout the Middle East.

⁵ Paulo Freire – Brazilian adult educator. His legacy of commitment, love and hope to American educators can be found in the critical pedagogy which infuses hundreds of “grass roots” organizations, college classrooms, and most recently school reform efforts in major urban areas.

be made between the person and their racist views. According to them, respect for others does not necessarily derive from agreement or disagreement with their opinions. Therefore, it is possible to respect others even when we abhor their views.

According to Freire, respect entails an expectation and attempt to change other people's behavior. We can add two clarifications to Freire and Natour's position, which maintains that we should respect others even when they do not show us the same respect:

1. When we are tempted to humiliate others because they have humiliated us, we perpetuate the cycle of mutual disparagement. When we show respect for people who do not respect us, we sometimes cause them to change their attitude towards us, as in the proverb "Who is honored? He who honors others".
2. When we are tempted to humiliate others because they have humiliated us, we damage our own self-esteem. We disparage not only the other person's humanity but our own as well. People who show us no respect have won a great victory if they cause us to act as they do: they have damaged our identity and framework of values.

In short, when all parties are mutually respectful of each other, it is much easier to fulfill our duty to show respect. Therefore, we must increase our educational efforts to promote mutual respect. When reciprocity is absent, however, we must seriously consider whether to treat others with respect. In extreme cases of racism, there is a difference of opinion.

Nevertheless, if we look deeper, the dispute is not as intense as it first seemed. The disagreement lies mainly in the differing interpretations of the concept of respect. Showing respect may be equated with agreement with the other person, willingness to agree or disagree, or willingness to attempt to change the other person's opinions and/or actions. On the educational level, it is essential to know when to adopt each of these meanings in showing respect for others.

In situations where there is no absolute denial of the other person's right to respect, justification exists for showing respect, even when such behavior is not reciprocated.

Conclusion

The right to dignity has two primary meanings in the democratic context. According to the broad definition, deprivation, to any extent, of a human right is a direct infringement of human dignity. A more narrow definition states

that deprivation of dignity, to any extent, degrades people, robbing them of both their own self-respect and the respect of others. Wanting to ensure that people are free to enjoy their inherent right to dignity (in both senses) is an essential condition for its existence, but it alone is not sufficient. There are objective difficulties involved in safeguarding people's right to dignity in a democratic, multicultural society. These difficulties are rooted in the conflict between the right to dignity and other rights. They also arise from problematic intercultural differences in interpreting the concept of respect and how this respect is shown.

Broad-based educational action is necessary to create an environment in which all people can enjoy their inherent right to dignity. Such action must familiarize students with other cultures, make them aware of the difficulty in dealing with conflicting rights, and teach them the skills they need to be tolerant of their peers.

Whether we are speaking of dignity in its broad or its narrow sense, some difficulties remain unresolved. We must regard students as partners in formulating new solutions that will enable members of our society to live with dignity and esteem for themselves and others.

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