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# THE REBEL AS SOVEREIGN: THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF DIGNITY\*

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines political theology through the Schmittian concept of sovereignty in conjunction with that of dignity. Both concepts are secularized theological concepts that combine to form the basis of continuity and change in society through status quo maintenance and revision. Dignity is shown to be the social value of the unique. The unique position of humanity generally and the individual person specifically presents a clear and present challenge to group leadership. Personal dignity, when actualized, requires the individual to declare himself to be exceptional and, therefore, an exception to the norms of the group. Dignity, therefore, catalyzes rebellion against authority and the assumption of self-sovereignty.

**KEYWORDS:** Dignity, Sovereignty, Rebellion, Honor, Exception

## EL REBELDE COMO SOBERANO: LA TEOLOGÍA POLÍTICA DE LA DIGNIDAD

Este artículo examina la teología política a partir del concepto schmittiano de soberanía, en conjunto con el de dignidad. Ambos son conceptos teológicos secularizados que planean formar la base de la continuidad y cambio en la sociedad a partir de la mantención y revisión del status quo. La dignidad se presenta como el valor social de lo único. Generalmente, la única posición de la humanidad y específicamente la persona individual, presenta una amenaza clara al liderazgo grupal. La dignidad personal, cuando se actualiza, requiere que el individuo se declare a si mismo ser excepcional, y por lo tanto, una excepción a las normas del grupo. Por ello, la dignidad, cataliza la rebelión en contra de la autoridad y la apropiación de la propia soberanía.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Dignidad, soberanía, rebelión, honor, excepción.

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## I. THE SCHMITTIAN TRIAD

Carl Schmitt's political ontology is founded on the relationship and interpenetration of three concepts: sovereignty, the political, and the exception. Not only do these three concepts interpenetrate one another, they are symbiotic –none can exist without the others. For Schmitt, the sovereign individual is “he who decides upon the exception”<sup>1</sup>. The political group is the “decisive entity” and, therefore, the entity that decides upon the exception and *is* the exception<sup>2</sup>. Schmitt's understanding of sovereignty is one that requires action –there must be a decision and social separation– a thing is categorically different. The sovereign is simultaneously exception and example; he stands apart from the group, but is always ever linked to the group. The sovereign is unique, just like everyone else, but assumes responsibility for his unique character vis-à-vis others. The sovereign can and does form political relationships.

To be made sovereign is to be beholden and dominated by a higher authority and, thus, is not truly sovereign. True sovereignty must, therefore, self-manifest. The manifestation is a declaration of being by the self; by realizing that one is unique and different, one creates a grouping based upon that difference. As Camus says, “I rebel –therefore we exist”<sup>3</sup>. The concept that links man together in unity while simultaneously separating each individual man from one another is dignity.

Dignity is a topic of great discussion throughout philosophical, religious, social, and political literature, though it is misrepresented in some of the last<sup>4</sup>. Examinations of dignity often manifest as pairs, the most common of which are: classical vs. modern, personal vs. human, and meritocratic vs. democratized. Although there is some variation in emphasis, depending on which pair is chosen, the same core lines of argument divide each such that a more accurate, though imperfect, reflection of the discourse on dignity would be the following combinations: classical/personal/meritocratic vs. modern/human/dematocratized. These combinations fracture between the metaphysical argument that all humans occupy a unique position as a living form that was created in a middle position between beasts and the divine vs. the existential projection of a unique cogito. These concepts are not

1 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005). 5.

2 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 43. Emphasis is mine.

3 Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* [L'homme Revolte], trans. Anthony Bower (New York, NY: Vintage International, 1991), 22.

4 Dignity is an internal evaluation of the self's value according to me. Dignity is often used as a demand for others to value the self in accordance with social standing, but that is more appropriately a demand of honor. These terms are not synonymous and should not be used interchangeably.

mutually exclusive; the universality of human dignity and the individuality of personal dignity reinforce and coinhere one another.

## II. PERSONAL DIGNITY

Aristotle's famous quote, "Dignity does not consist in possessing honors, but in deserving them", is a foundational source for the meritocratic interpretation of dignity. In this quote, honor represents sources of prestige that are actualized by an individual in a society that publicly celebrates his excellence. Dignity is the judgment of the individual by his self, St. Augustine's "largest continent"<sup>5</sup>. It is a phenomenon realized by the excellent who possess attributes and do deeds at a level that "ought" to elicit public honors. We are concerned with what a person "deserves", or, as the dictionary puts it, what he is "rightfully worthy of, or fairly entitled to, or able to claim rightfully by virtue of action done or qualities displayed"<sup>6</sup>. Ideally, the feeling of dignity as esteem (or self-esteem) would flow from the esteemed person being honorable or having some worthy quality that is acknowledged to be such in others and allows the individual to feel, as Aristotle so eloquently puts it, that he deserves the commensurate honors whether or not he receives them. In real life, however, the feeling of dignity as self-esteem is often induced not by the genuine possession of worthy qualities, but by mere external appearances that are often associated with it; people will strive to look a part or feign excellence<sup>7</sup>.

Speier agrees with Aristotle and emphasizes the personal nature of dignity in opposition to the social process of honoring:

To the excellence required by honor there always corresponds a specific form of behavior, which may be called dignity, varying according to the concrete content of honor. Dignity, be it that of a prince or a thief, always serves to demonstrate that the distinction between high and low contained in honor, and more specifically in the code of honor itself, are as compelling for the bearer as he expects them to be for the observers. This compelling force manifests itself in "personal honor," which determines a man's moral integrity, and through

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5 George Kateb, *Human Dignity*, Kindle ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2011), Location 164.

6 B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, Kindle ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1971), 51-52.

7 Andrew Brennan and Y. S. Lo, "Two Conceptions of Dignity: Honour and Self-Determination," in *Perspectives on Human Dignity: A Conversation*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Norelle Lickiss (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2010), 44; Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*.

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which the code becomes part of his personality<sup>8</sup>.

For Speier, the dignity of a person involves the excellence of his moral integrity. If an individual excels in a certain action, he knows it and will maintain his standards because it is personally important to him. He has bought into a value and internalizes it until the defense of that value manifests itself as a part of his ontological projection into the social that we call personality.

Personal dignity is a social construction. It develops within individuals through a process of introjecting value of some kind into the personality of the self. This process cannot be attributed to mere experience, but rather to proception. Proception is “the inseparable union between process and receptivity, of movement in nature, of things shaped with events accepted”<sup>9</sup>. The proceptive direction is a vector that results from the individual’s cumulative history; it represents not only the direction, but also the degree to which a person is propelled in life. This accounts not only for the values that a person holds, but also the level of internalization that we have deemed honorableness. Although Buchler denies that the proceptive direction has anything to do with an individual’s “purpose in life”, a person defines his purpose and commits himself to values based upon the depth to which proceived values are introjected and rejected<sup>10</sup>. Proception is a fact—it happens. Dignity is expressed through acts of commitments<sup>11</sup>.

Personal dignity represents individual perception of how personal qualities ought to be valued by others in a social system. When the personal qualities valued within a society’s honor system are immutable physical characteristics that are circumstantial to the processes of reproduction, the value of persons becomes situated in tiers of worth that cannot be navigated because excellence is defined by the action of being. When this happens, those on social tiers valued less than others effectively become worth less than those valued higher. In extreme cases, some groups lose their status of being persons and are seen as something less than human.

In terms of personal dignity, we are likely to emphasize individual equality, affirming—or insisting—that every person, simply by virtue of his or her humanity, is one whose dignity calls for our respect. Nothing we do or suffer can deprive us of the dignity that belongs to each person. We may offend against that dignity or fail to recognize it, but we cannot destroy it or blot it out<sup>12</sup>.

8 Hans Speier, “Honor and Social Structure,” in *Social Order and the Risks of War: Papers on Political Sociology* (Cornwall, NY: George W. Stewart, Publisher, Inc., 1952), 43.

9 Justus Buchler, *Nature and Judgment* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1955), 112.

10 *Ibid.*, 113.

11 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

12 Gilbert Meilaender, *Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person*, Kindle ed. (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2009), 7.

Regardless of how society values a person, dignity remains and is dictated by the sovereign individual.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. explores the loss of personhood for black individuals in the United States, but emphasizes the personal and group affirmation of dignity and the rejection of the value-system that fails to see the social-value of an entire being and group of beings based upon a single characteristic:

The tendency to ignore the Negro's contribution to American life and to strip him of his personhood, is as old as the earliest history books and as contemporary as the morning's newspaper. To upset this cultural homicide, the Negro must rise up with an affirmation of his own Olympian manhood<sup>13</sup>.

King shows that honor systems that remove the humanity from persons are a form of subjugation that is maintained through psychological assaults against individuality in the lower-castes. The higher-castes, however, also lose their individuality as they cower behind the ethereal shield of an honor-code to which the lower castes can never belong and, therefore, are neither subject to nor invested in. Rejecting such subjugation requires nothing more than an act of self-realization. He explains:

As long as the mind is enslaved, the body can never be free. Psychological freedom, a firm sense of self-esteem, is the most powerful weapon against the long night of physical slavery. No Lincolnian Emancipation Proclamation or Johnsonian Civil Rights Bill can totally bring this kind of freedom. The Negro will only be free when he reaches down to the inner depths of his own being and signs with the pen and ink of assertive manhood his own Emancipation Proclamation. And, with a spirit straining toward true self-esteem, the Negro must boldly throw off the manacles of self-abnegation and say to himself and to the world, "I am somebody. I am a person. I am a man with dignity and honor"<sup>14</sup>.

"The struggle for freedom and dignity has been formulated as a defense of autonomous man rather than as a revision of the contingencies of reinforcement under which people live"<sup>15</sup>.

Douglass emphasizes that there is a connection between the physical and psychological acts that project a self:

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13 Martin Luther King Jr., "Where Do We Go From Here?," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1991), 246.

14 Ibidem.

15 Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, 125.

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I was a changed being after that fight. I was “nothing” before; I WAS A MAN NOW. It recalled to life my crushed self-respect and my self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be A FREEMAN. A man, without force, is without the essential dignity of humanity. Human nature is so constituted, that it cannot “honor” a helpless man, although it can “pity” him; and even this it cannot do long, if the signs of power do not arise<sup>16</sup>.

For Douglass, being a man –maintaining personhood– requires liberty that must be defended with force from anyone who would wish to take it. Violence, which Douglass describes as undignified is nonetheless an acceptable and necessary recourse for maintaining his dignity. Personal dignity inspires rebellion against honor systems that eradicate personhood.

Skinner projects his own value system into the debate regarding dignity when he suggests that the valuation of survival and wealth accumulation is greater than the valuation of dignity and freedom because peoples of the former caliber will have a longer lasting impact than those of the latter<sup>17</sup>. He uses this to promote the idea that cultures of “science” are superior to cultures of “literature,” and that the achievement of a Utopian society favors survival and progress over freedom and individuality. His argument is a reduction to a value system that alienates the individual actor from his actions by those who honor him. Skinner shows how excellence can be monetized and therefore controlled and exchanged by others<sup>18</sup>. Meilaender warns against this, “We may turn naturally to the quantitative language of “value” and conclude that the lives of some people are “worth” less than the lives of others”<sup>19</sup>. What Skinner arrives at is Speier’s understanding of Honor as a form of social control by the sovereign authority and sees the control as a good without paying sufficient attention to the interplay between individual and group in which affiliative honor allows one to reinforce the value of the other and vice versa<sup>20</sup>. He is thus valuing the opposite of Douglass in the name of science, a position shared by the Nazis.

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16 Douglass, “My Bondage and My Freedom,” in *The Collected Works of Frederick Douglass* (Halcyon Classics, 2009), Locations 4008-13. His emphasis.

17 Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, 181.

18 *Ibid.*, 51.

19 Meilaender, *Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person*, 7.

20 Hans Speier, “Freedom and Social Planning,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 4 (1937): 463-83.

### III. HUMAN DIGNITY

Dignity is not only the affirmation of individuality but also of the human species as a uniquely situated species among all others in nature<sup>21</sup>. Kateb succinctly explains, “The core idea of human dignity is that on earth, humanity is the greatest type of beings—or what we call species”<sup>22</sup>. Dignity is a phenomenon derived from an interpretation of human nature that has both religious and secular defenders. The religious origin of human dignity comes from the special position of man in the creation of the universe by God. Pico della Mirandola articulates the monotheistic origin from the book of Genesis:

We have given to thee, Adam, no fixed seat, no form of thy very own, no gift peculiarly thine, that thou mayest feel as thine own, have as thine own, possess as thine own the seat, the form, the gifts which thou thyself shalt desire. A limited nature in other creatures is confined within the laws written down by Us. In conformity with thy free judgment, in whose hands I have placed thee, thou art confined by no bounds; and thou wilt fix limits of nature for thyself<sup>23</sup>.

The secular source for the origin of human dignity is very similar:

The human species is indeed something special, that it possesses valuable, commendable uniqueness or distinctiveness that is unlike the uniqueness of any other species. It has higher dignity than all other species, or a qualitatively different dignity from all of them. The higher dignity is theoretically founded on humanity's partial discontinuity with nature. Humanity is not only natural, whereas all other species are only natural<sup>24</sup>.

Humanity is defined by having no defined seat in the natural order. Each individual can proceed in any direction. He may assume an atavism and become a human animal or he may strive for divinity. He may accept no limits to his agency and project his will regardless of the social implications or he can cede his position to the will of others and internalize his relational positions such that his self is the representative of his unique location in the social world.

Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal have. We made thee. Thou, like a judge appointed for

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21 Kateb, *Human Dignity*, Locations 106-08.

22 Ibid., Locations 108-09.

23 Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis, Kindle ed., Hackett Classics (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998), Locations 307-10.

24 Kateb, *Human Dignity*, Locations 133-35.

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being honorable, art the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine<sup>25</sup>.

Meilaender emphasizes that this freedom of self-realization is not absolute. He writes, "Human life is marked by characteristic powers and capacities, but also by characteristic limits and, even, weaknesses"<sup>26</sup>. Humanity contains a nature in that we have physical and mental strengths and weaknesses, but we also share community with others. This community is initially defined by the particular condition in which an individual is located:

To be born of human parents is to be connected in particular ways. We are located; we are not just free-floating spirits or citizens of the world. We do not spring up like mushrooms from the ground, and we therefore have special attachments to some, even obligations to which we never consented and which we never chose. These special attachments, loyalties, and obligations are part of what it means to be a human being<sup>27</sup>.

Human dignity is a combination of being able to be whatever instantiation of humanity that an individual seeks to personify and demonstrate along with the perception that this individuality is not unique to that individual. Humanity is lived uniquely, but no individual is unique in being human.

The Catholic Church asserts that honor is the "social witness given to human dignity", and is charged with articulating the value in each individual because, "everyone enjoys a natural right to the honor of his name and reputation and to respect"<sup>28</sup>. From a secular perspective, human dignity is a shared value expressed for each individual for living in a world in which none fit; it is the recognized in others as selves and it is promoted as a good because individuals are not only abandoned by God, but also in an absurd existential simultaneous separation from others (for not being able to fully know an other as a holistic person, but only relationally) and anguish (for knowing that his actions as an individual exemplify a form of humanity to all others)<sup>29</sup>.

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25 della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, Locations 311-13.

26 Meilaender, *Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person*, 5.

27 Ibidem.

28 U. S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York, NY: Image Books, 1995), 655.

29 Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," in *The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York, NY: New Directions, 2007); Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*.

Human dignity is manifested uniquely and “is to be found in the kind of life that honors and upholds the peculiar nature that is ours, even if there is no recipe book that can always show us how properly to unite and reconcile body and spirit”<sup>30</sup>. Aristotle sees dignity as the connection between the individual human being, humanity, and the infinite universe<sup>31</sup>. There is value in being in the in-between state that is human. Aristotelian virtues typically reside in rejecting extremes and striking a golden mean between them. Human nature allows for it and so humanity has dignity. Human beings are capable of manifesting it and those who do earn dignity by realizing their worth regardless of any corresponding bestowal of honor.

Appiah defines dignity as “a fundamental right to respect” that “every human being has”<sup>32</sup>. He argues that it is a personal sense of owned dignity that enables an individual to seek justice within society for recognition of said respect. Dignity is given to each person because they represent an instantiation of humanity that is unique. “Indeed, the term dignity here is really just a placeholder, a shorthand expression for a certain vision of the human”<sup>33</sup>. This conception of human dignity asserts that there is a minimal amount of social-value that each individual represents to humanity generally simply by being human. The minimum honor shown to each person must be reflected in some form of observation if it is to be manifested, but as each individual’s dignity (their unique perception of their social-value) is unique, it becomes problematic to value dignity in a universal fashion.

Every individual reserves the right to reject Appiah’s minimal respect of their dignity as being insufficient. It is their dignity that allows for such a rejection. It becomes clear that dignity is defined by each individual proceiver. Dignity requires psychological liberty so that the individual can attempt to project his will; he does not need to do so successfully. Free will therefore illuminates the dignified individual as a sovereign being. Only the individual can determine what authorities to which he will cede sovereignty, but his humanity does not allow him to relinquish his ability to reclaim it at any moment he deems exceptional<sup>34</sup>.

#### IV. COINHERED DIGNITY

Dignity is examined as value both from being human and from the individuality of expressing a unique personality. Humanity is dignified because it has the faculties to escape the subsistence living of the natural

30 Meilaender, *Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person*, 5.

31 Aristotle, “Physics,” in *Works of Aristotle* (Mobile Reference, 2008), Locations 17925-27.

32 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010), 177.

33 Meilaender, *Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person*, 4.

34 Schmitt, *Political Theology*.

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world be it through the divine intervention of creation or the benefit of evolutionary selection. Personality is dignified because each individual represents a unique form of humanity that will only manifest as it does and portray a singular portrait of what it means to be human that cannot and shall not be duplicated. "In the idea of human dignity to recognize oneself as sharing in a common humanity with every human being is the primordial component of individual identity. Its positive center, however, is belief in one's uniqueness together with the uniqueness of every human being"<sup>35</sup>. Dignity is the honor of the unique.

Because honor is greatest when the bestowal of said honor is rare, the unique represents a truly great form indeed. However, as all individuals share in any form of human dignity, it is unique only in instances of man v. nature, which makes its social value questionable. Because personal dignity manifests itself out of difference, its unique quality is socially apparent, however, person-hood is a quality of humanity, which means that personal dignity is a value that can only be enjoyed by humans and thus, is derived from the shared identification of species. Humanity is dignified because of personal individuality, and individuality is dignified because it is the human trait par excellence.

Meilaender initiates the conversation on dignity as a coinhered pair of concepts. He writes, "each of us is both human being and person, and we experience this inner distance, this embodiment and transcendence of the body, in everything we do"<sup>36</sup>. Kateb sees the link between personal and human dignity as a process of identification, "human dignity in its concern with status and stature has to do with the proper recognition of the identity of every human being and the identity of the human species"<sup>37</sup>. Personal dignity may, therefore, be an evaluation of the individual's example of how best to be human, a reflection on his authenticity as an authoritative source of direction<sup>38</sup>.

"Kierkegaard thought of the individual not only as 'the one and only,' however, but also as 'every man.' At issue here is not human dignity but what I will call personal dignity"<sup>39</sup>. Individuality is, as Sartre shows, a source of anguish because he must be unique and express individuality such that others who emulate him do so as a means of being a "better" person. Individuality is forced upon humanity by its condition, "every human being is unique and individual without having to try to be"<sup>40</sup>. Persons thus

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35 Kateb, *Human Dignity*, Locations 295-97.

36 Meilaender, *Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person*, 103.

37 Kateb, *Human Dignity*, Locations 235-36.

38 Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, Kindle ed., *Thinking in Action* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), Chapter 1.

39 Meilaender, *Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person*, 6.

40 Kateb, *Human Dignity*, Locations 231.

experience dignity in both of its forms; they enjoy it by identifying as and affiliating with humanity and they express it through their personality.

The coinherence of dignity's two forms has successfully moved the conversation on dignity from the metaphysical to the existential. Kateb examines the connection:

Existential values, values of identity, includes such cherished aspirations and attainments as developed or distinctive selfhood, autonomy, authenticity, freedom, equality, power for its own sake, virtues for their own sake, perfectionism of character or style of life, honor, glory, and fame. All these values may pertain to individual uniqueness and hence are allied to the idea of human dignity; but they figure in uniqueness as a project, not as a given<sup>41</sup>.

Dignity requires the expression of an identity and identity is, as has been shown previously, a reflection of an individual self either holistically or relationally. Uniqueness, personality, individuality are the processes of actualizing one's self as an authentic being within a social environment.

Krause advances dignity as the form of honor by which an individual or group asserts "self-rule" and refuses to bend to external power-projection<sup>42</sup>. She focuses on Frederick Douglass as an exemplar of dignity: "For Douglass, the honorable act of resistance vindicates his 'manhood,' or what he calls his 'essential dignity' as a human being not his status as a member of some particular social class or the inhabitant of a specific social role"<sup>43</sup>. This form of resistance is a clear assertion that all forms of honor, dignity included, both has a social element and manifests only through action, "it was not sufficient for him simply to be; he also had to act [...] individual action was the key"<sup>44</sup>. The social element is the resistance against an other's denial of the self's value. The act that asserts dignity is any will to power or will against the power of an other because it showcases the individuality of the unique person as sovereign agent. "Without the 'signs of power' that issue from the exercise of individual agency [...] one is 'without the essential dignity of humanity'"<sup>45</sup>. Krause borrows the term "self-sovereignty" from Elizabeth Cady Stanton to reflect individuals' "capacity to carve out their own destiny"<sup>46</sup>.

Krause has made an important observation about honor in her emphasis on resisting despotism and demanding equality. Dignity is the

41 Ibid., Locations 226-28.

42 Sharon R. Krause, *Liberalism with Honor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). 117.

43 Ibid., 146.

44 Ibid., 147. Krause is citing Douglass.

45 Ibidem. Krause is citing Douglass.

46 Ibid., 161.

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honor of a rebel, the excellence of individuality that cuts against the grain of the value-system into which he may be accidentally located. If we follow Aristotle, we come, likely against his will, to the same conclusion. The individual who deserves honor because of his excellence has a dignity –but I include the caveat that he has to understand his excellence. “What we may call the struggle for dignity has many features in common with the struggle for freedom”<sup>47</sup>. Political conflicts for freedom are demands upon the group, typically the state, to include a group once excluded, to value other humans as people with full citizenship.

Dignity represents a minimum expectation of value placed upon an individual for being authentic. In personal dignity, it is a limit set by the individual that determines the minimum amount of value he will stand before asserting himself against the will and wishes of the group, trading in the groups’ honor-systems for his own value-system. Human dignity’s minimum value manifests itself in international politics as rights that are promoted, but not guaranteed. When dignity is denied, individuality is suppressed (this happens as a matter of everyday life) and this oppression is nothing short of a denial of individual personhood and humanity. Some persons and some people may draw a proverbial line in the sand that, once crossed, will initiate absolute resistance against the will of others regardless of the consequences. Others will commit suicide rather than suffer indignity or allow themselves to be annihilated materially, socially, or ontologically. The rebel is an honorable individual who seeks to restore his dignity and the dignity of those others who share his plight, but not every dignified being will embrace rebellion.

## V. REBELLION

Rebellion is not mere resistance against the will of the sovereignty of a group’s leadership, but outright defiance against their will and a rejection of their sovereignty because the rebel is establishing himself as an exception. A rebel is rejecting the denial of value in either the self or an other with whom he identifies<sup>48</sup>. His decision to determine what is valuable is reflected in Camus’ revision of Nietzsche, manifesting in a will against power that begins with the self’s assumption of sovereignty over value-judgments<sup>49</sup>.

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47 Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, 54.

48 Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, 16-17.

49 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, Vintage Books ed. (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 1968); Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989); Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 195-201.

Rebellion is a battle of will that ends only in annihilation: the rebel can be killed, a material annihilation of the self; the rebel can win and have his value incorporated into the group's value-system, a social annihilation of the conflict; or the rebel's will can break resulting in the group's win through the ontological annihilation of the rebel's existential self<sup>50</sup>.

Rebellion is the actualization of ontological dignity in the social realm. Though the values promoted by the rebel have been influenced by his memberships and identities in the social realm, the dignified value-system is introjected rather than inscribed and is absolute rather than relative. The dignified individual suffers when forced to compromise these particular values and may reach a breaking-point after which he can no longer be himself if he follows the actions prescribed or mandated by laws, norms, and honor-codes that require him to act against his conscience. Reaching the breaking-point will result in either the breaking of the individual and the shattering of the self, the breaking of the self's relation with the group(s) that cause suffering, or rebellion: the ontological defiance against social oppression that stems from a lack of or negative valuation of actions or characteristics by which individuals are identified.

Dignity reveals itself in rebellion because it requires the individual to separate himself from the group, to grant himself distinction based upon his value-system with himself as exemplar par excellence. The rebel directly challenges the leadership of the status quo because his absolute defiance against the value-system of the group requires the development of a competitive value-system that the rebel personifies and defends to the death<sup>51</sup>. The rebel is a juristic sovereign who stands simultaneously inside and outside of the juridical order<sup>52</sup>. The rebel is an exception who defends an immanent possible social reality that has not yet manifested<sup>53</sup>. The rebel is a human par excellence, freely moving back and forth between divinity and atavism, using his will to shape his reality<sup>54</sup>. The rebel is a true political animal, preferring conflict to the death against his Leviathan rather than

50 Terry Eagleton, *On Evil* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010). The rebel is a reflection of evil to higher sovereignty. Eagleton's examination of Pincher Martin shows how rebellion must end in such annihilation and that the grace of God would allow it to be a mere physical death and material annihilation. The assumption that a group is best positioned to determine the values of individual members rests upon the assumption that the leadership of the group have a right to sovereignty rather than the capacity to enforce it with the promise of annihilation for rebels.

51 Alexander Welsh, *What is Honor?: A Question of Moral Imperatives* (Yale University Press, 2008), Chapter 1.

52 Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, 13.

53 Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell, Kindle ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Niklas Luhmann, *Theories of Distinction: Redefining the Descriptions of Modernity*, trans. Joseph O'Neil, et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

54 Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Meilaender, *Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person*.

submit to its unquestioned will<sup>55</sup>. The dignified individual's rebellion seeks to "limit conditions of belonging" by promoting plurality of "whatever-beings" as socially-valuable and is therefore the "principle enemy of the state"<sup>56</sup>.

Rebels attain an identity similar to Agamben's *Homo Sacer*, who is "included solely through...exclusion"<sup>57</sup>. The challenge of rebellion forces the common citizen, the follower, to choose between value-systems as defined by the exemplars, thus between the status quo and the rebel's revision of it. "Exception and example constitute the two modes by which a set tries to found and maintain its own coherence. But while the exception is...an *inclusive exclusion*..., the example instead functions as an *exclusive inclusion*"<sup>58</sup>. The set of the group is formed by the tension inherent in the struggle to define the group. The example forms the nuclear center of value and the exception the perimeter of the value system. The conflict between status quo and revision, as personified by exemplars and rebels respectively, generates a tension that simultaneously strengthens and fragments the group around value<sup>59</sup>.

The set of a group can be examined by comparing it to a normal distribution curve. In the figure below (*figure 1*), the vast majority of the group is comprised of common members. On either side are those who excel. On the left are the exemplars who represent the value-system of the group as it is and therefore are leading the status quo. On the right are the rebels against the status quo who are seeking revision of the value-system. At this point, the group is depicted as a whole, though the value-system may change, the group remains. Those who are considered exemplars and rebels may change depending upon the evolution of the group, but the group itself is not endangered by rebellion.

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55 Aristotle, "Politics: A Treatise on Government."; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Kindle ed., Oxford World's Classics (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

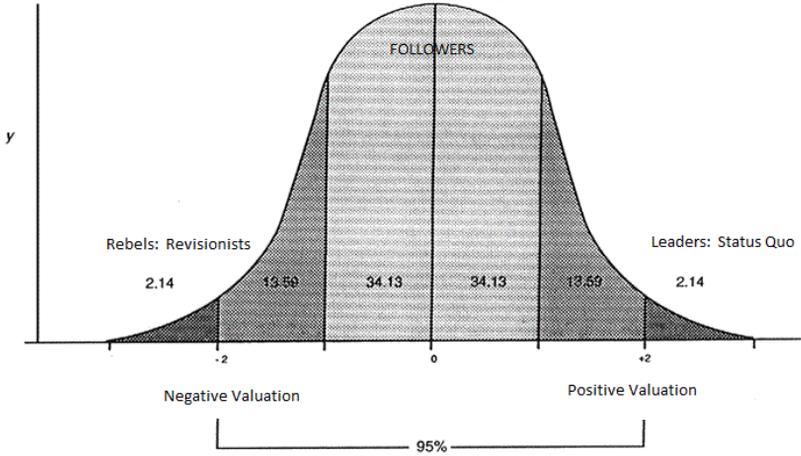
56 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London, UK: Continuum, 2005); Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, Theory out of Bounds (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Sergei Prozorov, "Generic Universalism in World Politics," *International Theory* 1, no. 2 (2009): 215-48.

57 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Kindle ed. (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), Location 210.

58 *Ibid.*, Location 253. Emphasis is Agamben's.

59 Georg Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations*, trans. Kurt H. Wolff and Reinhard Bendix (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1964).

FIGURE 1: EVOLUTIONARY TENSION BETWEEN STATUS QUO MAINTENANCE AND REVISION



Individuals may place themselves in a political relationship with their group or state. Although Schmitt perceives this to be practically suicidal, logic and probability have very little say in situations that are absolute in character and irrational according to social norms. Leigh Jenco beautifully develops Zhang Shizhao's political philosophy of social change based upon effective political action. Zhang's focus is on cumulative rather than concerted victories. Talent is personal and "self-use of talent (*ziyong cai*)" is the irrevocable weapon of the dignified rebel<sup>60</sup>. Talent refers to excellence in an act –to whatever degree– and is a democratizing power as talent can be cultivated, but cannot be seeded. Zhang's society is one where personal idiosyncrasy and political dissent forms the expressions of self as distinctly different from all other selves. It is where such difference is accepted that societies flourish as inclusive communities. Zhang shows how the exceptional talent of excluded individuals within group challenges hierarchical exclusivity with the "always destabilizing potential of democratic action"<sup>61</sup>. According to Zhang values change through the action of individuals. When they are cumulative, but not concerted, change occurs through social evolution by rebellion. Concerted acts against the status-quo is a revolutionary political challenge.

60 Leigh K. Jenco, *Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 18-20.

61 *Ibid.*, 20.

## THE REBEL AS SOVEREIGN

The dignified individual rebels against being as defined by an other according to a value-system external to, and perhaps anathema to, his personal honor<sup>62</sup>. The dignified rebel exists within a social world, but views social activity ontologically, which includes an introjected value system that, to him, is absolute. It is possible for others to emotionally identify with him, to become emotionally infected by him, and/or to adopt his value-system as their own<sup>63</sup>. Charismatic leadership hinges upon a rebel whose values are in ascension. When the rebel's values begin to successfully challenge not only the value-system of the group, he is seeking to change the value-system. If his personal honor-system becomes the value-system of a group, it can hijack the rebellion and challenge the political leadership of the group, the rebellion has ignited a revolution that is no longer dependent upon the dignity of the rebel. The rebel may become the exemplar par excellence of this new code regardless of whether he continues to support the new direction of the group, merely coexists with the group that gradually differentiates itself, or is ousted by the group (in some form) to remove the absolute character of the rebellion. Dead heroes achieve a legendary status and can never diminish the socially constructed importance of their own deeds as articulated by the sovereign authority<sup>64</sup>.

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