

AN INQUIRY INTO HUMAN DIGNITY ACCORDING TO GEORGE KATEB

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Abstrak

Fenomena diskriminasi, perbudakan, dan kekerasan seringkali menjadi warna khas dalam lukisan sejarah manusia. Ada orang atau kelompok yang merasa lebih tinggi dari manusia yang lain. Ada penindasan tak berkesudahan yang terjadi di antara spesies manusia. Ketika berhadapan dengan kasus ini, orang sering berbicara tentang hak-hak manusiawi. Di sisi lain sejarah manusia, ada juga fenomena kerusakan alam akibat ekspansi manusia yang tidak terukur. Ternyata bukan hanya penindasan di antara spesies manusia yang terjadi, melainkan juga terdapat 'penindasan vertikal' antarspesies. Aktor utama dari rangkaian sejarah ini adalah manusia. Fenomena ini membawa suatu pertanyaan mendasar mengenai "keber-ada-an" (ontos; ὄντος) manusia yang sesungguhnya. Dalam nama dignitas manusia, George Kateb mengangkat kembali "keber-ada-an" manusia dalam dua gagasan dasar: status manusia dan harkat manusia. Bagi Kateb, seorang filsuf harus bisa mengkaji hal yang lebih mendasar dari hak-hak manusiawi; "ada" dari manusia yang paling mendasar dan "ada" dari hak-hak manusiawi. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui kajian literatur, tulisan ini mengkaji dignitas manusia secara ontologis, berdasarkan sumber-sumber primer karya George Kateb, yakni pembedaan tegas antara status manusia dan harkat manusia. Disertai dengan penyajian fenomena teknologis dan alami, tulisan ini menyediakan kontekstualisasi persoalan dignitas manusia secara eksistensial dari perspektif ontologis George Kateb.

Kata kunci: Eksistensial, Harkat Manusia, Kesetaraan, Penjaga Alam, Status Manusia

Abstract

Discrimination, slavery, and violence have always been distinctive colors in the painting of human history. There have been men or groups feeling greater than others. There have been unending oppressions among the human species. When confronted with these cases, most immediately think of human rights. On another side of human history, there has also been environmental detriment caused by uncontrolled human expansion. It is oppression among men and 'vertical suppression' of inter-species. The main actors are humans. This phenomenon leads to a fundamental question about our actual Being (ὄντος). In the name of human dignity, George Kateb raises it in two fundamental concepts: human status and human stature. A philosopher should be able to examine human dignity as fundamental to human rights. Human dignity is human's actual Being as [a] Being of human rights. This essay uses qualitative methods through literature research to examine human dignity ontologically, based on the primary sources of George Kateb, namely the palpable distinction between human status and human stature. While providing technological and natural phenomena, this paper gives a contextualization of existential human dignity from George Kateb's ontological perspective.

Keywords: *Equality, Existential, Human Stature, Human Status, Steward Of Nature*

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INTRODUCTION

There are two fundamental concepts of human dignity: human beings have the same status on this blue planet, and nothing is higher than the dignity of the man himself. This basic idea of human dignity contains two meanings: (a) dignity concerns man's relationship with his fellow man; (b) dignity concerns the relationship of human beings to non-human beings (other beings).

These two fundamental concepts need to be understood profoundly. On the one hand, men's understanding of their dignity in relationships with fellow human beings is often understood as dignity based on certain qualities. As a result, classes or ranks

appeared within the human species. These classes then give rise to discrimination, e.g. by assuming that race A is superior to race B. This outlook is very erroneous. In principle, human dignity concerning others (human beings) emphasizes equality so as not to recognize classes or differences in status, let alone come to discrimination.

On the other hand, humans do have a higher degree than other beings. It is revealed by the intellect, language ability, and remarkable achievements the human species has made during its lifetime on this earth. Unfortunately, human pride will fall to one extreme. Because humans feel higher than others, in a particular way, this superior species claims to be the ruler over the others. The others noted here are the earth and all its contents, both living and not.

To avoid falling into a mistaken view of human dignity, George Kateb gives an unequivocal distinction between dignity concerning fellow human beings: *human status* (Kateb, 2006) and dignity in relationships with other beings: *human stature* (Kateb, 2011). What and how are human status and human stature as the fundamental elements of human dignity according to George Kateb? What is the eccentricity of George Kateb's idea of human dignity? By using qualitative methods through literature review, this paper will specifically answer these two fundamental questions by referring to primary sources, namely the works of George Kateb himself. The primary reference sources used in this paper discuss human dignity, specifically regarding *human status* and *human stature*.

DISCUSSION

1. Common Sense of Human Dignity

Exiguous works of literature explicitly discuss human dignity. However, we often encounter writings about the meaning of life as human beings. Some literature has reviewed how humans treat their neighbors and nature. In the context of local Indonesian cultures, for example, the discussion on human dignity is not only found in

writings. It is more abundant in oral literature, either in ancient verses or in the hereditament of legends.

Philosophically, the idea of human dignity is at least traceable to ancient Roman times. Since the word *dignitas* (dignity) discovered philosophical relevance in the ancient Roman sphere, two meanings have survived until our contemporary time. On the one hand, '*dignitas*' refers to man's unique but superior position in the center of the cosmos. On the other hand, '*dignitas*' refers to one's particular position towards another in public life. From these two notions, it can be concluded that *dignitas* (dignity) relates to the fact that man differs from other parts of nature in that he is an *animal rationale*; and that everyone is different from his fellow human beings regarding public life. In the first sense, human dignity concerns the *hierarchy of nature*. In the second comprehension, human dignity is related to the *social hierarchy* (Becchi, 2019). The *hierarchy of nature* has a universalist connotation in the sense of being a *natural endowment*. Meanwhile, *social hierarchy* results from public efforts, services, or actions carried out by each individual through the encounter in social life or social contract.

By all means, the hierarchy of nature has fertile ground amid Christianity. God created man in the image of Himself. Human beings have dignity as a natural endowment; it comes from God, the Creator. However, this concept of God's image does not offer a social hierarchy. On the contrary, Christianity offers a lightening power to assert a universalist dimension to human dignity. In other words, it offers equality among fellow human beings. Every human being, without exception, is the image of God. Everyone, without exception, has equal dignity before God. The similarity between man and God is precisely emphasized, which explains his privileged position among the earlier creations. In Scripture, it is even said that man and woman were created distinctively among other creatures. "God created mankind in His own image...God saw all that He had made, and it was very good" (Gen, 1: 27-31). God created man in His image and bestowed transcendent dignity upon

men. In other words, men's preeminent position among other creations lies in their likeness to the Creator (Pabubung, 2021).

Unfortunately, secularization has presented a thorny and unimaginable challenge to the religious idea. The manifesto of Italian humanism in *De Hominis Dignitate* (1486), written by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), shows that man is the designer (architect) of his life. This argument leads to the idea that man's existence must still be completed. Thus as a free human being, one needs to shape himself according to what he wants (Mirandola, 1965). It is not surprising that later Francis Bacon (1561-1626) said that a scientist is considered to be a valuable contributor to society, as their research and findings have the potential to bring about benefits and enjoyment for humanity (Bacon, 2000).

This new humanistic vision implied human dignity as a task and conquest: the conquest of new lands and knowledge. The vocation of man then became an active life: a working and productive human being. It was the beginning of the glory of *homo faber*, who have used the power of their mind since then. In this sense, man almost no longer needs God to acknowledge and reflect on himself. The pride of human beings in themselves has exacerbated the dignified feeling of their achievements. What matters is the production and results achieved. The higher the achievement, the higher the dignity. Such is the concept of human dignity *a la* this new humanism (Becchi, 2019). Based on these different human attainments, a social hierarchy was born.

This social hierarchy concept flourished in Thomas Hobbes's (1588-1679) ideas. Hobbes said that human dignity lies in each person's degree or measure in the middle of the public sphere. According to him, dignity is no longer placed concerning the natural base (human nature), nor is it from its transcendence. For Hobbes, dignity is now pursued through reciprocal relationships regarding *mutual recognition* among human beings. The value of a person depends on the *selling price*, not determined by the seller but by the buyer. The value of every human being, who constitutes their dignity, depends on the recognition of others. Hobbes asserts: "The

value of a man is his selling price; that depends on the needs and judgments of others" (Hobbes, 1997: 53). In Hobbes' opinion, human beings are invariably goods that have a selling point. If the quality is good, it will be acknowledged. Otherwise, it will be removed, thrown away, and worthless.

However, another understanding arose from a thinker named Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694). He did not depart from the natural quality of man (the possession of reason), the quality of social status, or the Christian tradition, but refers to the idea of *freedom*. He believed that freedom was a distinguishing hallmark for human beings. Freedom is a prerequisite for the existence of moral order that is distinguished from the rule of nature (natural order). According to him, man has dignity not in his ability to conquer nature but instead because he is a moral agent (Pufendorf, 2009). It was in response to Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), who previously said that the fullness of human dignity lies in his thinking (Pascal, 1995). Pufendorf did not mind the capacity of human beings to have the ability to think as Pascal had noted. Pufendorf was only willing to assert that human dignity lies not in his thinking ability but in his moral faculties that reveal the deepest essence of men.

According to Pufendorf (2009), a man stands on two divergent foundations: *entia physica* and *entia moralia*. This segregation is similar to Kant's divergence between *the realm of nature* and *the realm of ends*. According to Kant (1991), a human being has absolute intrinsic value as a subject of the categorical imperative only through the moral imperative toward the other. Only in the ideas of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) can we find that respect for others has been based on a personal moral value understood as the end (Becchi, 2019). This idea contributed to his time with the abolition of torture and terrible punishment (Becchi, 2019).

In the eighteenth century, the concept of human dignity was not heavily emphasized. In such well-known documents on humanity as the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (26 August 1789) and the *Declaration of Independence* (4 July 1776), insistence on human dignity is difficult to find. The idea of human

dignity has only come to the fore since the end of World War II. In the name of *human dignity*, which had been understood as the equality of every person, various charters of human rights were promulgated in many parts of the world to claim their rights. In the Preamble to the 1945 Indonesian Constitution (Pembukaan UUD 1945), for example, it is mentioned, "*Bahwa sesungguhnya kemerdekaan itu adalah hak segala bangsa, dan oleh sebab itu maka penjajahan di atas dunia harus dihapuskan karena tidak sesuai dengan peri kemanusiaan dan peri keadilan*" (Whereas independence is a right of all nations and any form of occupation should thus be erased as not in conformity with human dignity and justice). Indeed, liberty is the *right* of all nations, and therefore the world's colonization must be abolished because it is incompatible with *human dignity* and justice values. Human dignity, in these documents, has been understood as fundamental for human rights (cf. Pesurnay, 2021). However, little is said about human dignity and how it is essential for human rights and other rights. The idea of human dignity has been considered axiomatic, so it has not required theoretical defense (Kateb, 2011).

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973), Hannah Arendt (1973: 296-297) wrote: "We become aware that there is a right to have the rights [...] only when millions have lost their rights and can no longer obtain them". In this sense, *dignity* is defined as the right to have rights. Soon after World War II, German law conceptualized the protection of human dignity as protection against humiliation, torture, exile, etc., including resistance to discrimination (Becchi, 2019). However, there is no denying that the concept of human dignity has a new meaning today. The main focus of this research is the idea of human dignity according to George Kateb (1931 - ...), a contemporary thinker from Princeton University. He ontologically inquired into human dignity in two fundamental ideas: (1) human status and (2) human stature.

2. Human Status

According to Kateb, the fundamental idea of human dignity is that on this earth, humanity is the noblest form of existence (greatest type of beings) and that each of its members deserves to be treated according to the high value of the human species (Kateb, 2011). The dignity of each human being is the same as that of other individuals, namely that everyone has the same status (Kateb, 2011). Therefore, the idea of individual dignity must be applied in relationships with fellow human beings (Kateb, 2015). Someone can only affirm his dignity by treating others with the same dignity as he treated himself. Nor should he claim dignity only for his group, race, ethnicity, or class but also for everyone without exception: "Each person must claim for all, and all for each" (Kateb, 2011: 6).

All human beings have inherent equality in the name of human status (Kateb, 2015). According to Kateb, the principle of equality of human status is guaranteed when the state does not undermine the dignity of each individual and treats everyone equally (Kateb, 2002; Panani *et al.*, 2021). Likewise, each respects the other's human status as an equal. This equality is based on the belief that the rights of every person are absolute (Kateb, 2015). The main point to be attained from this rational defense is the protection of each individual.

According to Kateb, human status is existential. He elevates this existential feature as distinct from the moral. He views that the moral can only examine the problems that cause pain, for example, poverty, hunger, incarceration, slavery, and humiliation. For him, those things of a pain-inducing nature would become a moral realm. However, certain things cannot be included in the moral realm. It also concerns seemingly painless dehumanization, for example, surveillance and violation of *the rights of adults*. Behind the dehumanization (human diminishment), there is tyranny. The pain of suffering is a crucial fact. Nevertheless, we must not turn a blind eye to the existential loss that sometimes comes in the absence of suffering. Life is loaded with negation, control, and boundaries. The

ruling regime further aggravates the variety of living situations in the dystopia of enthusiasm (Kateb, 2011).

For Kateb, there needs to be a particular belief that human status can be threatened and even hurt at any time. Nevertheless, existential threats and wounds are often painless. People can be subtle (yet complicated), sometimes invisible, manipulated, or conditioned, without feeling threatened or demeaned. It is an existential loss. Hidden cameras are a tool to protect store employees from outside attacks, even though the hidden cameras also watch the employees' acts. Some people can even find pleasure or various benefits from the situation to feel grateful and appreciative to those who have ruled them paternalistically though they are being subtly oppressed, for example, in the use of advanced technology cameras based on artificial intelligence (AI) on the streets for traffic order. However, nothing guarantees how each individual's data is processed, and the weakening of privacy in living together (Feldstein, 2019).

In the experience of dictatorial regimes, society is likely less aware that its dignity has been harmed by the ruler (Kateb, 1971). Systematically, *targeted groups* are excluded from access to human dignity, e.g. in terms of education, as is the case with the Uighur community in China (Andersen, 2020). In authoritarian regimes, defending dignity was abolished and replaced with other means that looked pleasant. It might be done by eliminating lessons about individual rights and replacing them with certain more exciting games. In this example, it is only natural that the victim does not know his human (individual) status has been injured. The victim does not know because it is conditioned not knowing, or at least not given any access. In such a situation, it takes an outsider or an alienated subject to rediscover the dignity horizon that has been (deliberately) veiled. In other phrase, people are made to live in false consciousness and conditioned pleasantly.

There is a benefit of human dignity for human rights theory. The concept of human dignity elevates the possibility of painless oppression. It is a form of oppression that sometimes goes unnoticed

(Kateb, 2011). Thus, outsiders *who know and are aware of human status* must dismantle this *false consciousness* because everyone, without exception, has human status and has the right to know (about human status). No one should prevent others from knowing and claiming their human status. Not only does it not hinder, but every human being must also recognize the status of another human, even if necessary, to make aware of the existence of the others' human status. Each person must claim for all and all for each. It aligns with the *golden rule*: do to others what you want others do to you. If a man does not want a threat to his human status, he has to defend the people whose human status has been violated.

So far, the problem of painless oppression or the problem of *false consciousness* does not present the most significant problem in human dignity. At least it is infrequent to find anyone talking seriously about human dignity when dealing with such painless oppression and false consciousness. Sometimes it is not even considered a problem because people focus more on the pleasure obtained, then forget about the existential problem behind it (Kateb, 2006). Most people's mindset suggests that something is only a problem if it directly causes pain. So far, there has been a belief that the greater the suffering experienced by society or a group of people, the more pressing the questions about human dignity. Unfortunately, the suffering resulting from a system of disaffirming the people's rights has yet to be made into a whole story that needs to be seriously weighed. More often, moral issues are only examined from the outer shell without being included in an in-depth analysis of oppression or human diminishment (Kateb, 2011). The rights of citizens, for example, the freedom to have an opinion and not to be watched, are often forgotten because the promise of common security often tempts people.

In *Patriotism and Other Mistakes* (2006), Kateb alludes that camera surveillance is one form of painless oppression. Camera surveillance can track a person's movements, making it almost impossible to distinguish between public and private spaces. It is a form of painless oppression. People do not know that camera

surveillance can decipher their private dimensions, dehumanizing their dignity. Even if someone also notices it, no one dares to speak out because they will later be judged as supporters of the rebels. Gradually, people become indifferent to their privacy. People become ignorant of privacy. However, do we realize we are giving ourselves up to be *spied on* without a clear purpose by ignoring these privacy concerns? Even if there was a clear purpose, privacy should be maintained because it concerns personal matters that are not public consumption. Privacy becomes part of personal uniqueness and a fundamental element of democratic life (Kateb, 2006).

Today, there is extreme systemic repression that degrades humanity. This model of oppression seeks to abolish individuals' personhood and leave only biological entities unable to do anything to survive despite being surrounded by pleasure and (visible) possessions. Degraded human beings lose their identity as human beings, unique, and distinctive particular persons (Kateb, 2006). Individuals who have lost their human status are dying, because they have been forced to lose almost all their uniqueness as human beings and their personhood. They are victims of ignorance and neglect. They are no longer manifest reasons that can be juxtaposed with the dignity engraved exquisitely in every human being. Except in rare cases, they can no longer actualize themselves as free agents or moral agents.

Threats to human status exist in extreme existential suffering. It is almost invisible to the naked eye. The victim is conditioned to accept this threat as a blessing and a gift. It is supposed to be the benevolence of the perpetrator, even in the more sacred form of the *common good*. The victim has been made to forget that he is human. Those who commit crimes through policy regard the victim (or the object of the policy) as non-human. Victims could be identified as those who were given psychotropic substances free of charge, which feel good to consume and do not need to spend money but create dependence on the giver. At a particular time, the damage would be on the addict's hand.

In some instances, threats to human status are not only directed at one individual but also particular groups. The target is usually a minority or opposition group. The "extreme will" to negate the humanity of certain groups can quickly manifest into ideological and fantastical beliefs, culminating in antipathy or even hatred towards these groups. This may result in the implementation of projects aimed at oppressing them. This project can be present in policies that look embracing but indeed pushing back. Policies that emerged out of this are part of volitional extremism. Extremism of the will directed at fellow human beings is a crime that violates the equality of human status (Kateb, 2011).

Evil treatment of certain people, e.g. an extermination system by a totalitarian regime, intentionally allows its victims to lose their existential dimension, which is the worst. Inevitable existential loss can happen to everyone who is dehumanized at any time because of the conditioned situation or the suffering caused. On the one hand, the existential loss can be seen clearly, but on the other hand, and most importantly, it is invisible. Loss of humanity is multidimensional (Kateb, 2011). Kateb does not say that human dignity represents indifference to suffering (Kateb, 2001). He is not saying that visible suffering is insignificant. On the contrary, he wants to remind and emphasize that the wounds a person bears as a victim of inhuman treatment are beyond an experience of pain (Kateb, 1988). He reminds us that invisible violations of human dignity, which he calls extreme suffering, are often forgotten and overlooked (Kateb, 2011).

According to him, human status also involves the imperative that no policies violate individual privacy or treat adults as children who should be watched and supervised. That is, the government should refrain from interfering in the private affairs of society as if each individual could not know what was best for him. Violating individual privacy is tantamount to making society a means, not an end. Violating individual privacy is contrary to Kant's moral principle, which emphasizes that humans must always be the end, never as a means (Kateb, 2006).

Technology has indeed changed world civilization and provided significant benefits. Philosophy should not be anti-technology (Wahyudi & Mahaswa, 2020; Pabubung, 2021). Kateb believes that the presence of technology recently, however, has brought us into a situation where privacy violations have hurt human status. Nevertheless, no one dares to speak out loud against these privacy violations as violations of humanity. As a result, privacy violations continue. At the same time, many people do not feel that their privacy has been violated. We do not feel aware that human status is being diminished. Why is it said that intrusion into privacy is a wound to human status? Each person is unique and equal to other people in terms of freedom. Violation of privacy is tantamount to denying the existence of a unique person and refusing to be free to have his secrets. The proliferation of surveillance cameras everywhere shows we have almost no private space (Shen, 2020). We are almost no longer free to have secrets. No one can ensure the confidentiality of a person's bank account or medical records. It is ironic today that since in the womb, a fetus has been monitored and will continue to do so until an unspecified time in his life (Kateb, 2006).

Surveillance cameras do not hurt us directly. Leakage of confidential data such as bank accounts or medical records may also not be directly painful. Nevertheless, these privacy violations severely threaten human status, which Kateb calls an existential problem. This painless dehumanization is an attack on human dignity.

3. Human Stature

Human status emphasizes that everyone has the same degree of humanity (Kateb, 2011), as described in the previous point. Another fundamental component is the uniqueness of humans among all species on this blue planet. It is called human stature. Humans are the noblest species in this world. This second element is the focus of discussion in this section.

Human stature exists concerning other species. Humans are unique because only humans are the species that emerge from nature but are not bound by nature. What does it mean? Humans can escape from natural boundaries. In other words, humans are dependent on nature but at the same time, they have the independent ability. One of his independent abilities concerning nature is the ability to think and speak. In his *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men* (1755), J.J. Rousseau said that the key to human uniqueness lies in the ability to speak. For Rousseau, language allows the creation of general ideas and concepts that humans can only do. Language allows the human brain to function appropriately and be a source of language notation systems (Rousseau, 1964). Language allows the human brain and mind to become two separate and uninterchangeable things. In all species, the brain is a prerequisite for paving the way for something greater than itself. In humans, the brain becomes a pathway prerequisite for the mind. This mind enables the human species to move against the direction of nature and avoid the same recurrence (Kateb, 2011).

Language is not as if it is the result of a magic game. Language has also not been born in the same way numbers or musical notation had. Numbers or musical notations can emerge at a particular time, but language cannot. It was born from the absence of language and continues to develop over time. We have never known how language appeared, the evolutionary process, and who spoke first. Nor can we say that the (standard) language we use today is the final work of human language. We can only say that it is the uniqueness of constantly evolving humans. Language is a miracle in human history and a discontinuity between humans and nature. Language is evidence of the separation of humans from their biological root. However, that does not mean that humans are not part of nature. Human remains a fragment of nature but simultaneously experiences discontinuity with nature through language.

From language arises thought, an intrinsic element essential for both free and moral agents. It is the central core of human stature and becomes the way for *stewardship of nature* in particular (Kateb, 2011). Human stature is a fundamental idea and belief in the importance of humans in this universe. Humans are creatures of the highest level, noble creatures. This glory in human dignity is not simply obtained but given in relation to other beings. Human stature is a nobility of humans, for they are the noblest among other beings. At the same time, they are also responsible towards those other beings. On the one hand, humans with extraordinary abilities from their brains manifested in the sense of language (and technology) are still part of nature, so they must become stewards of nature, for human stature is always maintained concerning others (Kateb, 2011).

Although a chimpanzee shares a close genetic structure with humans (Sayers *et al.*, 2012), it is not nearly the same as humans. It is still an animal, the same as other animals. It is closer to an earthworm than to humans. The minuscule genetic difference between humans and these *close cousins* is a vast difference in capacity and potential that can never be measured. Until now, there has not been a species higher than humans on this earth. No species is almost the same as humans. Humans are unique because they are 100% part of nature but separate from nature simultaneously (Kateb, 2011). It is the only species that can *change* its natural environment and the only species with very complex language abilities. According to Kateb, this human uniqueness deserves consideration because it is a trait unique to humans and not shared by other species. Other species are very different from humans (Kateb, 2006).

According to Kateb, humans' uniqueness does not first lie in the genetic structure but in capacity and potential. Only the human species existentially separates itself from its (biological) nature and thus is no longer utterly dependent on human biological nature as part of the *Kingdom Animalia*. A man does not take *destiny* for granted. Humans can knit clothes to cover the parts of the body

essentially, and also create shelters with numerous variations according to new ideas and needs. Not only that, they grow and conserve the food sources for life sustainability. In short, humans can process and change what nature has provided. This human potential has increased from time to time in historical records. So far, humans can create intelligence that almost exceeds the human brain's capacity (red. Artificial General Intelligence and Artificial Super Intelligence) (Pabubung, 2021). The most fundamental of this uniqueness is the very complex ability of human language. Humans can make an infinite number of names for one object or event through local languages that a group of people can understand. Although they have different languages, humans can understand each other. Other species cannot do these. Other species cannot escape their biological nature as they were formed and given. A chimpanzee whose genetic structure is nearly identical to that of a human (Sayers *et al.*, 2012) is not near the capacity and uniqueness of a human.

All humans can separate themselves from their biological nature (Kateb, 2011). All human beings have this peculiar uniqueness, so we are all equal. There is no difference in terms of different levels of IQ. Whether having high or low IQs, humans are equal regardless of their biological nature. According to Kateb, there is also no gradation in genetics among all human beings. Kateb opposed thoughts of biological determinism, such as the views of Francis Galton (1822-1911), Darwin's cousin, who said that the black race has a lower class than the white race because the black race had a lower intellectual capacity (Jaggar, 1995). Another view of biological determinism, for example, was from Richard Herrnstein (1930-1994), who proposed the need for a natural meritocracy that forms an upper and lower class based on IQ (Herrnstein, 1971).

Thus, does dignity depend solely on this unique human identity? In a particular case, the answer is no, especially if people are only amazed by the term unique, which is potentially misunderstood (Kateb, 2006). Everyone can mistakenly claim himself as having a uniqueness that only belongs to himself, thus

excluding others (Kateb, 2011). Some people can (erroneously) interpret uniqueness as a *peculiar advantage* and thus feel superior to others. Some may (erroneously) interpret it as position, wealth, intelligence, or skill. In such peril, it does not have to be held as a barometer for assessing the dignity of someone. The presence of every human being's face is enough to say he is unique: he is a human being, not bound to his biological nature. He has absolute dignity (human stature). Each person's *dimension of presence* is sufficient to measure everything (Kateb, 2011). When we talk about human dignity in the element of human stature, we touch on *dignity* in another sense, the dignity of what is humanly unique in its identity. A man's identity lies in unique traits and attributes, which enable him to work and exist (ways of Being). Unfortunately, the same traits and attributes can lead to different forms and levels of wrongdoing.

If there were only human wrongdoing in that capacity, it would be useless to talk about human dignity. Existential values become worthless without the realization of moral capacities. Human history has recorded extraordinary achievements with the good records it has achieved. Thanks to this uniqueness, man became the only creator and recorder of history. With its uniqueness, humans can design their world towards something better (although it is undeniable that there are also side effects in the form of war and damage to nature due to unstoppable ambition) (Kateb, 1973). Only humans have innate traits and attributes of existential moral values. Suppose we want other people to be treated fairly and appropriately through recognition and appreciation in the corridors of human rights. In that case, we must work hard to strengthen the perception that everyone has innate traits and attributes that are unique and deserve respect. Innate traits and attributes are our Being as humans. This human Being is present in our individuality, making us all unique and valuable. Likewise, we want humans to be present as stewards of nature. In such a case, we must encourage each individual to realize these inherent traits and attributes to form a great project of stewardship

that cannot be carried out by species other than humans (Kateb, 2011).

On the one hand, it must be admitted that the mechanistic way of human thoughts has damaged nature and fellow human beings. This flawed reality is influenced by a wrong mindset about humans and nature, which should be maintained wisely. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the reality of this defect should not be a reason to blame humans and keep them away from the earth (Kateb, 2006). No one should want human extermination because of their track record of destroying nature. Therefore, we need proper and commensurate accountability. This proper and commensurate responsibility is in the track record of humans and humanity: knowledge and admiration for nature, namely the earth and the universe (Kateb, 2011).

If we want to save the earth and nature, we must be fascinated by the enormity of nature. We have to be enchanted by the beauty and complexity of all. We should be amused by the reciprocal relationship between living things and between the living and the non-living. Above all, we must be amazed by being-there (cf. *Dasein* Heidegger), as being in the midst of creation (*in-der-Welt-Sein*) (Heidegger, 1927; Pabubung, 2022). As being-there (*Dasein*), man admires the others in the world as being with him and is responsible for those stunning others (cf. *Besorgen* and *Fürsorgen* Heidegger). When out of themselves, humans meet each other and nature. When he meets fellow human beings, he [*Dasein*] shows care (*Sorge*) in the form of respect for equality (*Fürsorgen*). When encountering with nature, humans, as unique ones, show this concern by protecting nature (*Besorgen*) or stewarding nature.

Stewardship of nature needs admiration of nature. It is a pivotal reason we need to raise. Aesthetic acceptance of nature extends from the earth to the universe beyond human research and empirical observation. Nevertheless, whoever admires nature must also admire the greatness of humans (Kateb, 2006). We must see this track record of human prowess as the record of the human species making meaningful achievements throughout human history

(especially in achieving technological sophistication). Not a few have committed crimes, violated individual status (Kateb, 2006), and destroyed nature. However, many do great and commendable things. These great and commendable things would become human optimism to maintain their identity as unique but also aware of their duty to protect nature. Thus, the steward of nature is the second element of human stature that is still in relation to human uniqueness.

In essence, human stature emphasizes two things: (a) humans are unique so that they must be adequately respected, and (b) human uniqueness brings a deep yet lofty consequence i.e. responsibility toward nature (stewardship of nature). Human uniqueness does not come from a natural endowment. According to Kateb, human uniqueness is an innate trait as well as an accompanying trait because humans are humans (Kateb, 2011). There is no supernatural or divine intervention in this uniqueness. Likewise, human responsibility towards nature is not given by an entity higher than humans. Humans become caretakers and stewards of nature because only humans can do it. Our uniqueness make us the only ones who can protect nature as our mother. If we want to maintain our species, we must protect nature. Vice versa, protecting nature is the same as elevating and acknowledging the dignity of fellow human beings.

CONCLUSION

Kateb's analysis of "human status" helps us solving the problem of discrimination. No one of us has higher "human status" than others. Therefore, there is no way to slavery or (painless) oppression because it will violate the dignity of all. Each person must claim for all and all for each (Kateb, 2011). Human status emphasizes equality among the human race. It maintains the equality of all human beings regardless of ethnicity, religion, race, class, and intellectual capacity in society. Someone can only assert his dignity by treating others with the same dignity he treats himself. Regardless of our shape, background, and attitude, we are

equal. Nor can someone claim dignity just for his group, race, ethnicity, or class but for everyone without exception. Each person must claim for all, and all for each (Kateb, 2011). When we demand to be treated equally, at the same time, we are also fortifying the equal rights of others. Likewise, when other people are demanding their rights, at the same time, our dignity is being affirmed. The defense of human status must reach the existential dimension, that is, to reckon the repression behind the painless oppression, for example, in camera surveillance.

Kateb's inquiry on "human stature" helps us solve the problem of violence. Violence is the lack of awareness that humans are unique. Being of uniqueness will make us be just and more civilized toward others and other beings (*in-der-Welt-sein*). Only humans can manage their natural surroundings or, in other words, can surpass their biological nature. Only humans *survive* not just for themselves but also to make efforts so that others and other beings can also exist. Human stature refers to uniqueness and a higher degree compared to other species. However, this high degree does not make us arrogant and domineering over other beings. Instead, it leads to maintenance efforts as the steward of nature.

Historical records have been engraved with violence, slavery, discrimination, and the destruction of nature. Nevertheless, our enthusiasm must not diminish in regarding humans positively. We have "human status" and "human stature" as our Being (*Sein, Etre, ὄντος*). This Being will always lead to optimism in living together amid this lovely, wonderful, and magnificent Mother Earth and the universe. Inquiring about Being, the existential dimension, must be an essential and foremost concern. During the disruption of modernity, George Kateb has attempted to find a new way of looking at humans through a fundamental matter that all humans need to consider "equally" yet "have uniqueness": human dignity.

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