

Defining Dignity: Theological Roots of the Concept within the Abrahamic Traditions



Dr. Dan Sulmasy

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Dignity in Christian Thought

The use of the word dignity as an explicit, theologically significant term in Christian theology is a rather recent development, dating to the 19th century. The Jewish and Christian scriptures, for instance, make scant use of the term, even though the ideas we now associate with the term do have a scriptural basis and have been part of Christian thinking for centuries. The contemporary use of the term owes much to Kant, and was likely transmitted to Christian theology through the influence of Antonio Rossmini. In Catholic Christianity, the term first appears in the encyclical on the rights of workers, *Rerum Novarum*, in 1890. By the 1960s, the word had become ubiquitous in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. In contemporary English usage, there are three distinct senses of the word: intrinsic, attributed, and inflorescent dignity. The most fundamental theological sense of the word is intrinsic—the value a human being has by virtue of being the kind of thing he or she is. The value or worth of a human being depends both on having been created in the image and likeness of God and on having been deemed worthy of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This notion of human worth has profound ethical implications.

Learning Objectives:

1. To be able to define dignity.
2. To understand its use in Christian thought.

Bio:

Dr. Sulmasy is the Kilbride-Clinton Professor of Medicine and Ethics in the Department of Medicine and Divinity School at the University of Chicago, where he serves as Associate Director of the MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics and Director of the Program on Medicine and Religion. He received his A.B. and M.D. degrees from Cornell, his PhD in philosophy from Georgetown, and his internal medicine training at Hopkins. His research encompasses both theoretical and empirical investigations of the ethics of end-of-life decision-making, ethics education, and spirituality in medicine. He has written or edited six books—*The Healer's Calling* (1997), *Methods in Medical Ethics* (2001; 2nd ed. 2010), *The Rebirth of the Clinic* (2006), *A Balm for Gilead* (2006), *Safe Passage* (2014) and *Francis the Leper* (2014). He is editor-in-chief of *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* and serves on the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues. His numerous articles have appeared in medical, philosophical, and theological journals and he lectures widely.



Rabbi Dr. Barry Kinzbrunner

Chief Medical Officer, VITAS Healthcare, and Author of *End-of-Life Care: A Practical Guide*

Dignity in Jewish Tradition: Its Role in End-of-Life Care

Dignity in Jewish tradition is known by the Hebrew term *kavod haberiyot*. The concept is derived from the idea that man is created in the image of G-d, hence treating one's fellow humans with honor and dignity is akin to showing the same honor and dignity to the Almighty. Dignity in the form of *kavod haberiyot* is discussed at length in the *Talmud*, and is considered "so great that it suspends negative precepts in the Torah," although further discussions and commentaries on this statement have severely limited the specific circumstances when Torah prohibitions can actually be suspended. As most contemporary rabbinical authorities avoid directly invoking *kavod haberiyot* in their rulings, its stated role in end-of-life care is very limited. However, as will be discussed, the Jewish concept of dignity, as well as its limitations, can be extrapolated from rabbinical decisions related to care at the end of life.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the Jewish concept of dignity and how it differs from dignity as defined in a secular context.
2. Cite examples of how the concept of *kavod haberiyot* is incorporated into Jewish law.
3. Appreciate how *kavod haberiyot* is taken into account regarding rabbinical decisions pertaining to care at the end of life.

Bio:

Rabbi Dr. Barry Kinzbrunner has cared for the terminally ill and their families since 1984, when he started at VITAS as the medical director and a team physician in the Broward County, Florida program. As chief medical officer, he serves as liaison between VITAS' many hospice programs and community physicians providing care to almost 15,000 patients each day. A national leader in defining the role of the hospice medical director, Dr. Kinzbrunner has extensive experience developing professional performance standards, pain and symptom management guidelines, quality assurance, and hospice and palliative care education. He is a voluntary consultant in palliative and spiritual care for JDC Eshel in Jerusalem, Israel, and a voluntary assistant professor of medicine at Florida International University school of medicine. The lead author of *End-of-Life Care: A Practical Guide*, Dr. Kinzbrunner has published nearly 30 articles in peer-reviewed journals. He is board certified in internal medicine and medical oncology, and hospice and palliative medicine, and attained Fellow status with AAHPM in 2005. He has a master's degree in Jewish Studies from Barry University in Miami and was ordained an orthodox rabbi in August 2002.



Shaykh Yassir Fazaga

Religious Director, Orange County Islamic Foundation, and Director of the Mental Health Department, Access California Services

Dignity in the Islamic Tradition

While the concept of human dignity is often implicit in religious traditions, the Qur'an provides a clear foundation for the ontological dignity of all human beings, and indeed all forms of creation. In a number of places, God addresses all humanity as "Oh Children of Adam!", indicating that there are certain fundamental precepts of existence and honor that precede the division of humanity into tribes and differentiated groups. The normative teachings of Islam affirm that all people have a personal relationship with their Lord, and God's mercy and justice apply to all. This presentation identifies a number of core Islamic concepts that shape the understanding of dignity and how this affects end-of-life treatment and care.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the Qur'anic basis for all human dignity.
2. Review core values and conceptions of dignity in Islamic tradition.
3. Explore how a dignity perspective informs end-of-life care.

Bio:

Yassir Fazaga is an inspiring, multi-lingual, international speaker. He was born in Eritrea and moved to the United States at the age of 15. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Islamic Studies from Imam Saud University, Institute of Islamic and Arabic Sciences in Virginia in addition to his Master's Degree in Psychotherapy from the California State University of Long Beach. He serves as the Imam (Religious Leader) of the Orange County Islamic Foundation (OCIF) in Mission Viejo, California. He is involved at Access California Services as Director of the Mental Health Department. He also helps families with different challenges including domestic violence issues, communication problems, marital matters, generational gap, difficult teens, some mental and personality disorders, divorce, grief, and single parenting among others. Shaykh Fazaga has taught the Arabic language and Islamic Sciences for many years and has taught Islamic courses on Scriptural Exegesis, and Islamic financial contracts for American Open University. He has given numerous interviews about Islam on television news stations and radio stations around the globe. He speaks on Islam and related topics for conferences, churches, high schools, colleges and universities. He also participates in many outreach and interfaith events.

Moral and Medical Tensions in an Age of “Medicalized” Care for the Dying



Dr. Lydia Dugdale

Assistant Professor of Medicine and Associate Director, Program for Biomedical Ethics, Yale School of Medicine

Ars moriendi, the Art of Dying Well

For Christians, death exists as a paradox – as something at once lurking and vanquished. Death is the enemy that at long last will be destroyed, and death has already been swallowed up in victory. This enigma partially explains why many among the fervently religious are zealous users of life-extending technologies, while others are not. The *Ars moriendi*, or *art of dying*, body of literature – highly popular from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries – acknowledged this tension and sought to encourage the faithful to recognize both death’s sting and death’s impotence. These “how-to-die-well” manuals provided the instruction for community and individual preparation for death. This paper considers the implications of the reinvigoration of a modern art of dying for medicalized dying, and specifically addresses orthodox Christian perspectives on the distinction between killing and allowing to die.

Learning Objectives:

1. To understand Christian views of death.
2. To explain the *Ars moriendi*.
3. To appreciate the distinction in Christian thought between killing and allowing to die.

Bio:

Lydia S. Dugdale, MD, is an assistant professor in the Section of General Internal Medicine and associate director of the Program for Biomedical Ethics at Yale School of Medicine. She is also co-founder and co-director of the Yale Program on Medicine, Spirituality, and Religion. Dugdale is editor of the book *Dying in the Twenty-first Century: Toward a New Ethical Framework for the Art of Dying Well* (MIT Press, May 2015). She has published widely in peer-reviewed and popular press journals, including *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, *Annals of Family Medicine*, *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, *Hastings Center Report*, and the *Huffington Post*. She has served as a guest editor for the journal *Christian Bioethics*. She is a past recipient of grant funding from the John Templeton Foundation in conjunction with the University of Chicago’s Program on Medicine and Religion. Dugdale received her medical degree from the University of Chicago’s Pritzker School of Medicine and completed her clinical training at Yale-New Haven Hospital. She practices primary care medicine with Yale Internal Medicine Associates.



Dr. Kenneth Prager

Professor of Medicine and Director of Medical Ethics, Columbia University Medical Center

Lessons from *a Goses*

Judaism has always emphasized the sanctity of life. Halacha--Jewish law--allows violation even of the Holy Sabbath in order to save a life. The medical profession has always been esteemed by Jews because of its goal of restoring patients to health. Nevertheless, the concept of *a goses*—a moribund person—was introduced in the Talmud some 2000 years ago. Because life is sacred even as one approaches death, merely moving *a goses* is prohibited lest this hasten death. However 500 years ago, a rabbinical scholar wrote that it is permitted to remove an impediment to the death of *a goses* because we “do not force one not to die quickly.” This tension between the sanctity of life and shielding the dying from unnecessary suffering underlines the balance in modern day medicine between prohibiting interventions that will intentionally shorten a patient’s life and yet avoiding impediments to the death of a moribund patient.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understanding the concept of *a goses* in Jewish tradition.
2. Appreciating the tension in modern medicine between aggressively treating a critically ill patient and yet avoiding unnecessary suffering at the end of life.
3. Considering ethical end-of-life challenges physicians will face as technology makes it harder to die in peace.

Bio:

Dr. Prager is Professor of Medicine at Columbia University Medical Center and Director of Medical Ethics. He spent two years in the Indian Health Service practicing general medicine on the Cheyenne River Sioux Indian Reservation in South Dakota after his medical internship. Dr. Prager held clandestine medical clinics in the Soviet Union during a visit to Refuseniks in 1986, and later set up the first U.S. - Soviet medical student exchange program between Columbia P&S and the First Moscow Medical Academy. Dr. Prager has been a pulmonologist for 42 years. He is heavily involved in teaching pulmonology and medical ethics to medical students, physicians and nurses and lectures widely. His writings on medicine and medical ethics have appeared in medical journals and textbooks as well as on the Op-Ed pages of *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. He has received multiple honors for his teaching, clinical expertise, contributions to organ donation, and medical humanism.



Dr. Aasim Padela

Assistant Professor of Medicine and Director of the Initiative on Islam and Medicine, University of Chicago School of Medicine

Islamic Perspectives on Clinical Intervention at the End-of-Life: We Can but Must We?

The ever-increasing technological and technical advances of modern medicine have increased our capacity to carry out a wide array of clinical interventions near the end-of-life, and have brought to fore new “types” of human living where behavioral functions of persons are reduced all the while biological functions remain intact. Against this biomedical backdrop, patients (and their surrogate decision-makers) and clinicians are challenged to select the most ethically appropriate courses of action from among the many possible interventions at hand. Religious teachings about the obligation to seek medical care and the care of the dying might help some patients and clinicians navigate the ethical challenges of end-of-life care. This presentation will discuss the classical Sunni Islamic ethico-legal assessment of the obligation to seek medical care in order to open up the space for non-intervention at the end-of-life. This conception of the ethico-legal status of medicine, along with critical theological constructs such as dignity, will serve as touchstones to discuss Islamic juridical rulings regarding brain death and withdrawal of life support.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify Islamic Rulings Regarding the Status of Seeking Medical Care.
2. Describe Islamic Juridical Verdicts on Brain Death.
3. Explore ethico-legal tensions in the care of the dying from an Islamic Perspective.

Bio:

Dr. Aasim Padela is the Director of the Initiative on Islam and Medicine, Assistant Professor of Medicine in the Sections of Emergency Medicine, and a faculty member at the MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics. Dr. Padela holds an MD from Weill Cornell Medical College, completed residency in emergency medicine at the University of Rochester, and received an MS in Healthcare Research from the University of Michigan. His Islamic studies expertise comes via a BS in Classical Arabic from the University of Rochester, seminary studies during his formative years, and continued tutorials with Islamic authorities. His research assesses how religion-related factors affect the health behaviors and medical practices of American Muslim patients and physicians. Dr. Padela also explores how scientific data can work in concert with Islamic moral reasoning and theology to develop a comprehensive, theologically-rooted Islamic bioethics. As a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholar from 2008-2011 he developed a program studying American Muslim health behaviors and healthcare challenges. In 2010, as a Visiting Fellow at the Oxford Centre of Islamic Studies he studied Islamic moral and theological frameworks, and from 2013 to 2015 as a Templeton Foundation Scholar he is conducting a national survey of Muslim physicians’ bioethical attitudes and professional experiences and leading a multidisciplinary working group at the intersection of Islamic theology and contemporary biomedicine.

ABRAHAMIC BIOETHICS SYMPOSIUM - PANEL 3

Religious and Professional Narratives on Being Present and Witnessing the End of Life



Rabbi Anne Brener

Professor of Ritual and Human Development, Academy for Jewish Religion, California; Author of *Mourning & Mitzvah*

Walking the Path through the Wilderness of Grief: A Spiritual Journey

The ancient Temple that stood in Jerusalem on a place holy to all Abrahamic religions had special a mourners' path. The field of Psychotherapy has replicated this ancient healing journey. With great respect for this work, I strive to remind those who seek to heal, as well as those who suffer, that grief is not an illness. It is a challenging healing journey through which we come to terms what it means to be human in the face of our finitude. In this paper, I have drawn on ancient and modern spiritual and psychological texts and practices to approach grief as a spiritual path. In an effort to remove any pathology from our thinking about the process of bereavement, and to give people tools to confront their lives' most profound turning points, I have reframed the stages of grief, giving them holy names, to create a modern guide for this healing journey.

Learning Objectives:

1. Participants will learn to see grief as an essential spiritual journey rather than a purely psychological process.
2. Any stigma related to grief's intense responses will be removed.
3. Students will learn Hebrew words that describe universal experiences.

Bio:

Rabbi Anne Brener, LCSW is Professor of Ritual and Human Development at the Academy for Jewish Religion, California, where she trains rabbinical, cantorial and chaplaincy students to create caring and healing spiritual communities. She is a Spiritual Director and Psychotherapist, specializing in grief and healing and assists institutions in creating communities grounded in compassion. Her writing has appeared in many anthologies on Jewish spirituality and healing and she is a frequent contributor to the Los Angeles Jewish Journal. Her book, *Mourning & Mitzvah*, is translated into Spanish. Sections have also been translated into several African dialects for AIDS hospice workers on that continent. A founder of one of California's first shelters for victims of Domestic Violence, she has worked as a Hospice Chaplain and co-founded Moreh Derekh, a Jewish Spiritual Direction Training Program. Rabbi Brener serves on the steering committees of the Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Medicine and the Southern California Jewish Burial Society.



Dr. Faisal Qazi

Associate Professor of Neurology at Western University of Health Sciences, College of Osteopathic Medicine; Director of Stroke Center, San Antonio Community Hospital, Upland

Neural Substrates of Consciousness and Metaphysics of the Soul

Is there a link between consciousness and a soul-body connection? The presenter will review the neuroscientific advances regarding consciousness as related to brain functions. He will also discuss a historical narrative of leading “western” theories in the arena of philosophy of mind and Islamic theological conceptions of the soul. Common and overlapping features in all three fields as it relates to idea of soul will be identified. The presentation will close with a critical commentary reflecting on logical gaps in a reductionist and physicalist argument for the central role in Brain in consciousness.

Learning Objectives:

1. Review Neuroscientific technologies now accessible for assessment of brain and its various functions.
2. Identify trends in philosophical discussion of the mind-brain-body complex.
3. Discuss an Islamic theological conception of the soul.

Bio:

Dr. Faisal Qazi is the founder of MiNDS (Medical Network Devoted to Service) established in 2012, a community development and charitable healthcare foundation. He is also a Commissioner for the City of Fullerton serving on its Citizen’s Community Development Committee as of 2014. He is the recipient of 40 under 40 Outstanding Service award by New Leaders Council in 2012 and Excellence in Leadership Award by the Representative of CA State Assembly via Access California in 2013. Dr. Qazi founded and became the first CEO of HUDA (Health Unit on Davison Avenue) free clinic in Detroit in 2004. He had the distinct honor to present the works of such institutions at a Congressional briefing in October of 2008 in Washington DC, where he proposed opportunities for safety net clinics in the health reform process. Dr. Qazi’s research interests involve concepts in Neuroethics and he has presented about Disorders of Consciousness on various occasions. His latest research has included reviewing neuroscientific advances in the field of consciousness, metaphysics of soul, and the philosophy of mind. Dr. Qazi has been practicing Neurology in greater Pomona Valley and the Inland Empire area since 2006 and in North Orange County since 2012. He is the Associate Professor of Neurology at Western University of Health Sciences, College of Osteopathic Medicine in Pomona, California. He is currently the Director of Stroke at San Antonio Community Hospital. Dr. Qazi’s work has been featured in interviews to NPR, Voice of America, CNN and PBS. His columns have been printed in Inland Valley Daily Bulletin and San Bernardino Sun.



Reverend Dr. Patrick J. Ryan

Professor of Religion and Society, Fordham University; Past-President, Loyola Jesuit College, Abuja, Nigeria

Accompanying the Dying: Muslim and Christian Perspectives

The presenter shares real-life experiences that indicate how methods of dealing with death in one tradition can serve to inform and mediate bereavement in another. Furthermore, a comparison of the story of the People of the Cave (*Ashab al-kahf*) as narrated in the Qur'an and in Christian tradition elucidates how a shared heritage can offer succor and support by strengthening Muslim-Christian relations. The presenter stresses that a care context that involves theological and religious considerations can transform a sterile, clinical end-of-life environment to one imbued with meaning and hope.

Learning Objectives:

1. Appreciate the power of interfaith relationships as a unifier rather than divider at end-of-life.
2. Understand how narrative scripture can shape patients' preparation for death and sense of time and destiny.
3. Understand how hospice care can provide a faith-filled option for the dying.

Bio:

Patrick J. Ryan, S.J., is the Laurence J. McGinley Professor of Religion and Society at Fordham University. A native New Yorker, Fr. Ryan entered the Society of Jesus in 1957, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1968. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in English Language and Literature at Fordham, and a Ph.D. in the comparative history of religion from Harvard University (with a specialization in Arabic and Islamic Studies), where he studied with the famous Canadian scholar of Islam, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and the German scholar of Islamic mysticism, Annemarie Schimmel. For about half of his life as a Jesuit priest, Fr. Ryan worked in West Africa, mostly in Nigeria and Ghana. He has had faculty and administrative appointments at the University of Ghana, the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, and Hekima College in Kenya, and the Gregorian University in Rome. He served as the first President of Loyola Jesuit College, a secondary school in Nigeria's federal capital, Abuja. Fr. Ryan has held numerous positions at Fordham. He taught Middle Eastern Studies from 1983-1986, held the Loyola Chair in the Humanities from 1996-1998, and served as Fordham's Vice President for University Mission and Ministry from 2005-2009 until his appointment in July 2009 as the McGinley Professor, succeeding the late Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J. "I have increasingly centered on what I call the 'trialogue' of Judaism, Christianity and Islam," Fr. Ryan told Fordham's newspaper, *The Ram*, when asked what he hopes to accomplish in his new role. The author of numerous articles, scholarly and popular, Father Ryan has published three books: *Imale: Yoruba Participation in the Muslim Tradition: A Study of Clerical Piety* (Scholars Press, 1978); *The Coming of Our God: Scriptural Reflections for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany* (Paulist, 1999), and *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross: Scriptural Reflections for Lent* (Paulist, 2004).