Dear colloquium participants, this essay is still a draft. Among other things, it is missing footnotes and references to other works. I look forward to our discussion. Thank you in advance for devoting the time to read the essay and for being part of the conversation.

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On Being Human

What are the distinct features of human beings that constitute them as moral subjects? The term "moral subject" means the kind of beings that impose on others moral restrictions and duties, and simultaneously place these subjects under those same restrictions and duties in their relations towards others. Animals, unlike humans, are partial moral subjects; animals impose restrictions on humans though they are not subject to those same restrictions. We morally condemn exhibiting cruelty towards tigers in zoos or circuses, but we don't blame a tiger when it devours a human being. Exploring these distinct features of being human doesn't aim at a general notion of defining what is to be a human being. Among the unique qualities and features of humans we might find some that are crucial for a variety of biological or evolutionary definitions, but they may not be morally relevant. Humans might be the only species whose members are capable of walking fully erect, but such a feature does not seem to make a moral difference. This applies to animals as well. We are not constrained by any restrictions and can do to a stone whatever we wish, which is not the case with animals. Animals as organisms might be distinguished from inanimate objects such as stones by their capacity to reproduce and initiate movement. These features are biologically essential to being an organism, but neither of these features constitute animals as creatures which generate moral restrictions. The relevant feature of animals that makes them beings that are partial moral subjects, in distinction from inanimate objects, is their

capacity to experience pain. What is it about humans that constitute them as full moral subjects?

There seems to be a rather straightforward answer to the question. One such feature that immediately comes to mind is a human being's capability for choice and rule-following, which makes them subjects of blame unlike animals. But further reflection will reveal that different answers to the question of what it is to be a human have been given in the history of philosophy, and it is striking that these varieties of answers in turn gave rise to different sets of moral regimes. In examining these moral regimes, it would be worthwhile exploring their various conceptions of humanity, conceptions that in many ways inform the particular sets of moral positions that each of them stands for. Illuminating these underlying conceptions, which are sometimes implicit, leads to a deeper understanding of what the moral regime stands for. It could, as well, reveal flaws or weaknesses in the moral approach, realizing that a moral regime might be based on a questionable conception of being human, or rest on a feature of a human being that might be present but that doesn't seem to carry the moral weight that is attributed to it, or that there might be equally good alternatives to a concept of a human being that would generate alternative moral regimes.

The connection between an underlying conception of what is a human and a moral regime that stems from it is manifested in two very different moral and political worlds – Kant and Marx. I will start my exploration of the question with the examination of Marx's and Kant's conceptions of being human and the way these conceptions shape their moral regimes. Uncovering their notion of being human will help in critically examining it and in reevaluating the moral normative world that stems from it. Following this examination, I will

attempt to articulate an alternative view to what is a human being and what constitutes humans as moral subjects.

Marx's conception of what it is to be human can be stated roughly in the following manner: Nature is initially encountered by humans as inadequate for their needs and for their well-being; in that respect humans are both part of and separate from nature. Through their creative productive powers, humans transform nature to suit their goals and aspirations making of nature a kind of home, a home of their own crafting, and the transformed product objectively embodies their self-realization as creators capable of reshaping the material world through work. In freely exercising their productive capacities, these human productive capacities evolve and become more complex as they are enacted, which in turn creates a greater range of goals and needs that are fulfilled through further free deployment of human creative work powers.

From this perspective of what constitutes human essence, Marx engages in a thorough denunciation of social relations in a Capitalist society. The only path of economic survival in a Capitalist society is such that workers must sell their labor to the owners of the means of production who pay them enough to subsist so that they can perform further work. These relations of production involve a radical alienation on varying levels. Workers deploy their productive capabilities not as an expression of their self-realization as humans but directed entirely by the owners of the means of production, who determine the purpose for which their labor will be used. The product of their labor is also not owned by the workers, and in producing it through monotonous repetitive work in a factory's assembly line they are prevented from developing their productive capacities. The worker's relation with others is also humanly distorted under these conditions. Rather than being recognized as providers

for other people's needs as when they produce freely and supply for the actual needs of others, the owners of the means of production, who are solely interested in profit, create false needs which are anonymously addressed through mass production. The labor market, which is the defining feature of capitalism in which people are forced to trade their humanity, is thus a dehumanized social structure, which can be thoroughly changed only in a post-capitalist social structure of shared ownership of the means of production.

Marx's immense theoretical edifice, which had far-reaching moral and political implications, rests on a certain conception of being human. If this conception is challenged, much of the philosophical and human foundation of it crumbles. Let us consider a radically different orientation to being human that grows out of Aristotle's politics and ethics and its modern version in Arendt's neo-Aristotelian work, "The Human Condition." In this neo-Aristotelian view, labor and the power to change the material world is denigrated to the level of mere maintenance, which is never-ending and cyclical, and relegated to the realm of the private and inferior life of the economy. Humanity is fulfilled in a life free of labor, within the public realm, inhabited by people who have extricated themselves from the burden of maintenance, and who engage in the political action of self-rule, judging, evaluating, and legislating. In this stance toward being human, full humanity is achieved in the life of citizenship, since it is in the political realm that the human's distinct deliberative capacity shines through in shaping together the common life of the polis.

A commitment to reforming worker conditions might be promoted by movements that don't share Marx's conception of being human. Social democrats insist on a minimum wage, safety protections at work, limiting work hours, the right to collective bargaining and strikes, reduction of the income gap between owners and workers, and on worker representation

on the boards of firms. All these reforms can be implemented without any objection to the labor market as such. The objection to a labor market which results in a total denunciation of a capitalist social structure rests on a particular conception of being human that can itself be challenged.

In Kant's ethics we encounter a radically different and influential approach to being human which generated a moral regime of its own. Kant's concept of being human is intimately attached to the human capacity for self-transcendence. Many of our actions and rules are determined by our passions and needs, by our inclinations and the social environment we inhabit; given that we desire success for example, we adopt different rules of conduct to achieve it. In that realm, although we make use of our rational faculties, we are fully creatures of nature, determined by our embeddedness within the realm of causality. We transcend this condition and enter into the realm of freedom when we are capable of being motivated exclusively by our self-legislated moral duty, which consists of an unconditioned categorical imperative. By their definition, moral obligations are inescapable; they are independent of this or that circumstance that we inhabit, of our inclinations, desires and social reality. It is therefore only in following the moral imperative that we are free and that we can be considered as the full authors of our rules and actions.

Kant's concept of the person is expressed in the following section: "A *person* is a subject whose actions can be imputed to him. Moral personality is therefore nothing other than the freedom of a rational being under the moral laws, (whereas psychological personality is merely the ability to be conscious of one's identity in different conditions of one's existence). From this it follows that a person is subject to no other laws than those he gives

to himself (either alone or at least along with others)."[1] This human capacity for self-transcendence, manifested in being motivated by duty, is the source of the reverence and respect that is given to moral law and to the human person.

In another extensive passage Kant provides a fuller articulation of what makes a human a moral subject. It is worth quoting and analyzing this longer passage:

> It [duty] can be nothing less than what elevates a human being above himself (as part of the sensible world)…It is nothing other than *personality,* that is, freedom and independence from the mechanism of the whole nature, regarded nevertheless as also a capacity to be subject to special laws – namely pure practical laws [categorical maxims of morality] given by his own reason, so that a person as belonging to the sensible world is subject to his own personality insofar as he also belongs to the intelligible world; for, it is then not be wondered that a human being, as belonging to both worlds, must regard his own nature in reference to his second and highest vocation only with reverence, and its laws with the highest respect.

> On this origin are based many expressions that indicate the worth of objects according to moral ideas. The moral law is *holy* (inviolable). A human being is indeed unholy enough but the *humanity* in his person must be holy to him. In the whole of creation everything one wants and over which one has any power can also be used *merely as a means;* a human being alone and with him every rational creature, is an *end in itself;* by virtue of the autonomy of his freedom he is the subject of the moral law, which is holy. Just because of this very will, even every person's own will directed to himself is restricted to the condition of agreement with the *autonomy* of the rational being, that is to say, such a being is not to be subjected to any purpose that is not possible in accordance with a law that could arise from the will of the affected subject himself; hence this subject is to be used never merely as a means but as the same time as end. We rightly attribute this condition to the divine will

[1] *The Metaphysics of Morals* 6: 223 (edited and translated by Mary Gregor).

with respect to the rational being in the world as its creatures, inasmuch as it rests on their *personality*, by which alone they are end in themselves.

This idea of personality, awakening respect by setting before our eyes the sublimity of our nature (in its vocation) while at the same time showing the lack of accord of our conduct with respect to it and thus striking down self-conceit, is natural to the most common human reason and is easily observed.[2]

This passage is the most profound articulation of Kant's view of being a human. A human being inhabits two worlds - the sensible and the intelligible. In the sensible world humans are moved by external causes, they can generate only hypothetical rules that depend on their prior given natural condition. As creatures of the intelligible world, they inhabit the realm of freedom capable of both transcending and subjecting their sensible existence, since they can follow their self-legislating categorical law which is wholly independent from any natural condition in which they reside, and they can act as self-initiating agents that are motivated to do right because it is right.

In Kant's view, within every concrete and given person there is a human residing, and from that humanity a person's worth as a moral subject is derived. Humans are deserving respect and dignity as ends in themselves, unlike any other objects and creatures, because of that human capacity for freedom and self-transcendence. It can be formulated in the following manner: humans are moral subjects deserving dignity because they are capable of moral action. Or put differently: humans should be treated non-instrumentally because they are creatures capable of non-instrumental rules and actions, rules which they can self-legislate and to which they can subject their sensible nature. The moral concrete implication of this view of being human is that the violation of dignity is directed towards a violation of

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[2] *Critique of Practical Reason* 5: 86-87 translated and edited by Mary Gregor

autonomy, since it is autonomy that makes humans worthy of dignity, and it is violated when persons are treated in ways that they would not have agreed to be treated. There is thus an intrinsic connection in Kant's approach between his view on what constitutes our humanity and the moral regime that is derived from it.

Kant offers us a dualistic conception of human nature; not the old neo-platonic soul/body dualism, rather one that replaces it with another dualism, the dualism of the sensible conditioned dimension on the one hand and the free intelligible dimension on the other. A human being is a creature of two worlds, in a dualism that responds to a larger metaphysical Kantian dualism — that of the phenomenal and the numenal. Humans in that respect are not fully humans in their totality; their humanity rather resides *in* them, a humanity that makes them holy: "A human being is indeed unholy enough but the *humanity* in his person must be holy to him." It is only in reference to their second higher nature that humans are deserving as moral subjects. While their capacity to self-transcend is their source of dignity, the other pole of their dual nature - the sensible and conditioned pole - is their source of humility; it blocks them from self-conceit since it is that dimension which is an obstacle to their higher self, and thus they are constantly pulled by their other nature betraying their full humanity.

There are two lines of challenges that can be raised in critique of Kant's conception of being human. The first critique is aimed at the dualism which is at the center of Kant's conception. The dualistic picture devalues the "concrete" human being, the flesh and blood one we encounter. It empties the totality of our lives - our given conditioned being - from its genuine humanness, while granting dignity to the rare moments in which we manifest our self-transcending moral nature. Most people, even when acting morally or when perceiving

themselves as acting morally, have not yet reached and exhibited this Kantian layer of humanity. Many such people are motivated by mercy and compassion in acting morally, or alternatively when they strive to love their fellow human as themselves, they see themselves as adhering to a sacred religiously sanctioned way of life. Some moral agents might be compelled by a utilitarian consequentialist view, attempting as much as they can to reduce pain and maximize pleasure in the world. According to Kant all these great varieties of humans have not yet established genuine contact with their higher self. They are conditioned either by external consequences or by their emotional inclination or they are merely acting heteronomously, being motivated by God's command; none of them reside in the realm of freedom, exhibiting full autonomy; none of them have discovered or experienced what is truly human in them. Their claim of moral worth rests, therefore, according to Kant, on pure potentiality; it is anchored in a capacity they have but might never realize. Kant's dualism has therefore two problematic faces: it devalues most of our actual life of human worth, and it anchors moral worth and dignity in a way that seems farfetched, grounding it in pure potential very rarely achieved and manifested.

One moral manifestation of this dualism is implied by Kant's intriguing view that a person should not treat herself as a means to an end. The prohibition on suicide according to Kant is an example of such a general duty of people towards themselves. In killing oneself in order to avoid pain, a person has treated herself as a means to her own happiness. This position can make full sense only within the dualistic conception of a person. In the case of suicide, the person in her aspect as a sensible creature has treated her inner self as a means; she has violated the holy self that resides within her.

The second critique stems as well from Kant's dualism but it relates more directly to what it is that we value about autonomy. Why is it that autonomy is conceived of as a value-conferring feature of a human, and to what degree do these initial accounts of the worth of autonomy relate to Kant's version of autonomy and its relation to self-transcendence and morality? In Kant's view the only way to be truly autonomous is to act morally. But if this is the case, all autonomous selves, when acting autonomously, act in the same manner; they all transcend to an abstract inner self that in each self is identical with the other self. But if we reflect on the possible way in which autonomy might be a worth-conferring feature, we attach such worth to the fact that an autonomous self-ruling person somehow owns her own life. Autonomous people chart their own lives; thus, their life is theirs, an outcome of their agency. But in what way can Kant's autonomous selves make a claim that their life is theirs, when they are, as autonomous beings, identical to one another? We expect that autonomy will result in diversity, but in Kant's view it is the other way around. People in relation to their "fallen," conditioned and caused nature, are diverse. When they transcend to the realm of freedom, they are all the same. This feature of Kant's view of autonomy blocks a possible way in which value can be ascribed to an alternative view of autonomy. If autonomous people chart their own way, they thus assert themselves as genuine individuals; their dignity resides in their distinctiveness. Such striving to distinctness will inevitably result in diversity. We also attach to this non-Kantian version of autonomy another good that has to do with creativity and open-enededness. Since autonomous people chart their own way in the world while not being bound to prior social restraints and to their own limitations, they will heroically discover new frontiers, they will open new horizons for themselves and for others. But Kant's autonomous selves, when self-transcending their condition, will necessarily discover again and again the same principle – the categorical

imperative. No new horizons will be viewed from the vantage point achieved by Kantian self-transcendence; from that lofty perch, the view will be similar and always the same to all autonomous selves. Thus, Kant's approach of equating autonomy with his particular vision of moral self-transcendence seems to undermine some important dimensions of what we might value in autonomy as conferring value to a person.

We have therefore deep reasons, internal to the very possible value-conferring role of autonomy itself, to reject the Kantian connection between autonomy and morality. If this is the case, then we are facing another question. In what way is the fact that I am living my own life, as a result of my own choice, per se a source of any worth? Isn't it dependent on the kind of life I live? Kant would have answered this challenge by arguing that by definition to live autonomously is to live morally, but we have seen that this is a problematic position. We will gain a clearer understanding of the challenge in examining Harry Frankfurt's position on what is a person, which is based on freedom and autonomy and yet detaches freedom from morality.

Frankfurt establishes a connection between the concept of the person and the structure of the will.[3] We all have first order desires, the sort of desires that we find in us, moving us to this or that direction. Humans, according to Frankfurt, are capable of forming second order desires which are aimed at their first order desires. Through their second order desires humans express which of their first order desires they wish to be effective in moving to action. Human beings who haven't formed any second order desires are not yet persons; they are a mere "wanton", pulled sporadically by the desires that happen to be in them. In

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[3] Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 68 no1 (1971) pp. 5-20.

forming second order desires a person identifies which of their first order desires are not merely in *them* but are *theirs*, and in that they have become persons. Freedom is achieved not in opting between possible actions but when a person's action conforms to his or her second order desire. An addict who formed a second order desire not to be moved to action by his addiction and avoids the addictive substance is free even if there was no way for him to access the addictive substance. To be a person, in Frankfurt's view, an element of self-transcendence is crucial; desires that are second order are about desires, and in forming second-order desires a reflective distance is established within the self, a distance from the first order desires that inhabit us by our natural and social conditions. The second order desires constitute the self, they either adopt or alienate first order desires to and from the self, and they impose hierarchy and order between them.

Within our totality as desiring creatures, there is therefore an inner core, somewhat distant from the surface of first-order desires, which is necessarily established by an act of inner reflection, and this inner core defines us both as persons and as free beings. But Frankfurt's self-transcendence is not as radical as Kant's in two senses. Frankfurt's position doesn't assume Kant's dualism. In achieving a reflective distance from the first order desires a person is not in touch with her numenal rational self as against the conditioned caused self; she is not inhabiting two worlds in one subject. As Frankfurt is aware, second order desires might emerge as well from being conditioned; they don't belong to the causality-free stratum of being. An addict might form a second order desire not to be moved by his addiction, because he is threatened with firing from his job. Frankfurt's order of the will is purely structural; there is no commitment to what the content of the second order desires would be (a person might form a second order desire to be moved to action by his addiction.) What is important is the reflective nature of the will as such. Unlike Kant, in

achieving such distance no necessary connection to morality is created, rather second order desires can go to different directions. Thus, for Frankfurt, self-transcendence is necessary for becoming a person, but it is of a different quality than Kant's. It is not exposed to the two critiques that were raised against Kant's conception of being human. It doesn't pose a dualism that empties our actual lived life from its value while deriving our worth from a pure potential rarely achieved (we form second order desires as a constant feature of our life.) And, autonomous people do not all act the same since there are no constraints on the content of these second order desires; they can be as diverse and distinct as we might imagine.

If autonomy and morality are not necessarily attached, we are poised to return to the following question: To what degree does the fact that I am the author of my life endow worth to my life? Shouldn't such worth depend on the actual life that I lead? Consider the following case: Someone resides in a racist environment. He drifts into a whole set of racist reactions, he is disgusted by strangers, he feels threatened by them, resentful, blames them for every ill possible, and acts as if he and his kind are superior. In all this field of behavior he is a drifter, acting in accordance with Frankfurt's description of a "wanton", and never actually reflecting on his behavior. Having a strong sense that he has to own his life, he awakens from his condition of merely drifting here and there, reads racist propaganda available on line and forms a second order desire to adopt his first order racist desires as his own. Racism from now on is not only *in him* it is who *he is*. He is now charting his own life; he has a coherent self. It seems that from our point of evaluation, things have become worse with such a person. The fact that he owns his life doesn't endow it with any kind of worth per se, but quite the other way around. It seems that the weight of worth is in the life actually lived. If living a decent life, we don't mind a person acting on their first order

desires; there is even something attractive in being a naturally and unreflectively kind person. And if living an immoral life, the fact that one has become "an author" of one's life doesn't seem to provide any worth; it makes things worse.

A possible answer to this challenge might be that although, as a result of reflection, that person has ended up affirming his racism, if we did not have the possibility of distancing ourselves from our concrete condition, no change could ever be possible. In distancing and in self-transcending, a possibility of change has emerged; without it a person is doomed to stay in a drifting state. But if this is the case, then self-transcendence is not what makes us worthy, it is a condition for the possibility of being worthy; autonomy then is purely instrumental.

There are two further reasons to question autonomy as the source of value conferring dimension of persons. Autonomy, even in its non-Kantian version is a feature that is ascribed to people too easily in contemporary philosophical literature, as if it is a given that we are autonomous. In fact, it is a rare achievement, and I have met only a handful of people in my life that I can say are or were genuinely autonomous – authors of their lives. Autonomy is many times a spectral achievement; its full realization — if it ever materializes — is a lifelong work. People are generally creatures of their environment, and ascription of genuine individualism and autonomy is usually misdirected. But besides the rare achievement of full autonomy and agency, I am in doubt as to whether it has a non-instrumental value. Some of our deepest and most important experiences in life, such as truth and love, are marked by the fact that we did not make an active choice in relation to them; they were almost forced on us, they arrested our will. The beauty and the joy of a complex mathematical theorem is that it could not be different, however much we wish or

will it to be. It is the same with love, which is not something we choose. The experiences of truth and love are exhilarating not in spite of the fact that they are necessary, but because of it. Well, some might say that truth and love are not forced on us, in the same way that breathing is not forced on us. If we hadn't assented to those truths or to the subjects of our love they would have been experienced as an obsession. Yet they are not an expression of our agency, self-initiated by us as sovereigns. It would thus be worthwhile to explore the notion of being human in a realm different than autonomy and self-transcendence.

What constitutes a human being as a moral subject lies in another feature of human life, that of vulnerability. We are prone to illness and never secured in our state of health; our bodies are possible sites of excruciating pain. One tiny virus might paralyze our world. Our political and economic security is fragile and tentative as well, depending on forces we don't control and to which we are subject. We are vulnerable to a whole range of emotional distress and mental suffering. We experience a devastating sense of loss at the death of beloved family and friends, and we are prone to deep disappointment in the failure of something in which we have invested our hopes and energy. We are capable of extreme fear and anxiety, of experiencing loss of meaning, detachment, loneliness and depression. We are prone to shame, and we might be made to feel marginalized and superfluous. We are deeply in need of recognition, attentiveness and love to have any sense of individuation, and we are capable of being rejected and betrayed. Our inner state is dependent on the well-being of the people and communities we are attached to, a well-being that too often we have very limited capacity to affect. What is unique about the concept of vulnerability, above and beyond suffering and pain, is that it captures a sense of the utter fragility of our state of being, even when we are not directly exposed to pain, suffering and loss. A sense of fragility that looms and pervades moments of joy and achievement. This immense scope of

human vulnerability is the feature that constitutes human beings as moral subjects. The magnitude of moral restrictions and duties that we have towards a human being, one which is far greater and broader in scope than towards an animal, stems from the breadth and depth of human vulnerability.

Humans are full moral subjects not only due to the scope of restrictions and duties they impose on us, but because they themselves are morally obligated to the same restrictions and duties in relations to others. This symmetry is connected to a deep feature of being human in which all these vulnerabilities have their root in human capacities; they are immanently generated from them. Humans are prone to disappointment because they have a capacity to plan; they experience depression since they are capable of constructing meaning and of valuing aspects of their life; their exposure to rejection, loneliness and betrayal is intrinsically related to their gift of forming deep and lasting attachments; they are vulnerable to frustration and melancholy because they are gifted with the power to imagine how things could have been radically different. Melancholy is the emotion of the possible, dawning when a longing for another possibility casts a dark shadow over the lived reality; melancholy is thus inseparable from the power of imagining. Human's excruciating longings are, as well, related to the depth of their capacity for memory. The gripping and paralyzing force of anxiety depends on a combination of capacities - the capacity to remember what happened in the past and in the power to imagine the looming future. People's agony concerning the suffering of their loved ones or other beings stems from the human blessing of empathy and compassion. Humans' experience of being desperately marginal is bonded to their capacity to stand out, to make a difference. The acute pain of humiliation, which is mainly about being made to feel utterly helpless, stems from the

power that humans have to take charge and control some of their life, and the maddening force of guilt is conditioned by the unique human capacity of self-evaluation.

Human vulnerability to shame is a striking instantiation of the intrinsic relationship between vulnerability and capacity, which relates to a basic texture of being human and the nature of self. If a person's thoughts were written on their forehead, exposed before all, the distinction between interior and exterior would vanish, and with it also individuation. Therefore, privacy, expressed through the possibility of concealment, protects the very ability of persons to define themselves as individuals. Furthermore, the self may create a special relationship by displaying differential measures of exposure and intimacy. The self moves through social space by allotting revelation and concealment and different measures of distance and closeness. The self defines himself or herself and distinguishes between friends and others and between intimates and strangers through the privileged position a person has to his or her interiority. Humans are the animals that dress; they present themselves to the world and their very notion of selfhood is dependent on some power they have to "appear." Improper exposure, contrary to a person's will, results in shame, and every moment of shame, even the slightest, is a profound wound to one's consciousness of boundedness, a sort of a death blow. In this sense, shame is to be differentiated from guilt. Guilt is expressed in the desire to remove a stain that sticks to the person; shame, by contrast, colors the entire self. Shame does not stain but defiles the entire surface. It arouses the desire to disappear and be effaced, because it results from an injury to the tissues that constitute the self and its boundaries. The experience of shame is a confrontation with the loss of control of self-presentation, as someone might experience when his or her image appears in social media against their will. It is for this reason that with shame the desire to disappear is so strong since it is triggered by the violation of the

capacity to appear. The vulnerability to shame is thus intrinsically related to the capacity to "appear".

In the sphere of social, economic, and political subordination, the nexus between human vulnerability and capacity is the most pronounced. Humans are unique in their extensive capacity to create schemes of cooperation and division of labor that can generate collective action. These social collective structures are maintained by the human capacity to set norms and legal systems, to follow rules, and to construct ideologies that anchor hierarchies and roles as just and worthy. The wrongs that are unleashed on humans by their own collective entities are immense in their magnitude and they far exceed any harm that can be done by individuals to each other, since the power and means of violence at the disposal of tribes, states and empires is exponentially greater given their ability to act with coordination and to generate collective action. Social structures are essential to human security and well-being, and yet human groupings are extremely dangerous to humans who are exposed to the vast collective crimes of exploitation, expulsion, imprisonment, enslavement, torture, mass murder and rape. This immense scope of social and political vulnerabilities that puts millions of people at the sheer mercy of sovereign bodies is inseparable from the great human capacity to shape political communities. What is particularly paradoxical or painful about this complex nexus of vulnerability and capacity is that the drive to develop strong and viable political communities, originates among other things in the human need to withstand the horror and the fragility that is inherent in the contingencies of fate, to ameliorate the power of "fortuna". A strong political body cannot prevent pandemics, droughts, earthquakes and even wars, but it helps its members to survive them because of its resourcefulness and capacity for collective coordinated action. And these same collective

bodies were and are the source of so much fragility and the dread that they cause to humans.

The human capacity to generate justification and produce systems of beliefs and shared communal values which ground and solidify social structures unleash immense human pain as well. Humans are the only species that kills and harms not only out of sheer self-interest but with justification and out of conviction. "Principles" are an important source of protection for humans, but they can get extremely dangerous. In following principles and answering a calling - be it a religion, revolution, the nation or other entities and ideologies, people transcend themselves, and this self-transcendence is in many ways the source of moral action. And yet in human affairs, especially in their collective mode, misguided self-transcendence is far more lethal than exaggerated self-love.

The extended list of human vulnerabilities is not therefore a way of showing what pitiful, miserable, and fragile creatures humans are, but rather the human condition is such that this range of vulnerabilities springs from what is best about being human. This deep nexus of vulnerabilities and capabilities is the reason why humans stand on both sides of being moral subjects; their vulnerability is the feature that generates restrictions and duties on others, and their capacity, which is internally related to their vulnerability, is the reason why they are under these same restrictions and obligations in their relations to others. The core of being human lies in the deep intrinsic connection between vulnerability and capability.

The connection between vulnerability and capacity also works the other way around. Our capacities are fragile and vulnerable since more than any other species, they are not naturally given to us; they require nurturing, training, and development. Such nurturing is necessary for the most basic human skills such as mastering a language and literacy, and for

the higher forms of mental and emotional development which depend among other things on parenting and the social environment that humans happen to inhabit. This utter dependency of human flourishing on familial and communal care is the reason why humans are exposed to an immense magnitude of inequality among themselves, given that such care is differentially distributed to them. It is thus not only the case that our vulnerabilities stem from our capacities but rather our capacities are themselves vulnerable.

As was claimed above, particular moral regimes are informed by distinct implicit or explicit visions of being human. What is the moral sensibility and regime that grows out of a position that places vulnerability at the center of being human? In what way does it lead to a distinct version of morality that differs from other moral outlooks? In formulating the initial contours of such a moral sensibility, it is important to distinguish between micro-ethics and macro-ethics; in these two fields of ethics, vulnerability plays a different role. Micro-ethics relates to the norms that govern personal relations and encounters, while macro-ethics relates to the conduct of organized institutions and actions of communities and sovereign bodies, though the strict line that separates these two domains is not clear cut. I will offer some initial rough thoughts on possible implications of vulnerability in these two domains.

Let us begin with micro-ethics. Among the human vulnerabilities that were mentioned is that of experiencing being superfluous, of no use to anyone, of having nothing to contribute. Existing in such a state of being superfluous is a devastating harm to a person's dignity. It is not an accident that in Arabic the word "karam" stands both for dignity and for giving; in giving and in contributing people find their dignity. Dignity is related to a sense of having "weight", as the Hebrew kavod (dignity) derives from kaved (weight), and as the

Latin "gravitas" relates to gravity. Having some measure of making a difference is essential to a person's dignity, and the loss of such a place results in depleting a person from his or her weight, making them people that don't count, or people that are literally no-body. Such a permanent condition of being superfluous might result in a sense of pervasive despair and nihilism, or worse, it might cause a perverse form of restoring weight through violence, in which the one whose contribution was denied makes his weight felt by an act of violence, by inflicting pain.

In addressing the human vulnerability to being superfluous we therefore touch upon a matter crucial to our life. It would be very difficult to contain this moral predicament within the common language of moral regimes and their basic concepts - rights, utility or categorical imperative. A student might regress slowly to a sense of being superfluous in class, a child might experience that within a family or a worker in an office; none of them, I think, have a right to not being superfluous. If we move from rights-based language to maximizing utility, it is difficult to capture that crucial aspect of someone's life within the larger notion of maximizing preferences. The Kantian version of human dignity is as well too broad of a concept to address this complex issue. In that respect, Kant's version of a violation of human dignity as treating someone merely as a means doesn't capture the whole concern for dignity, since sometimes being of no use even as a means is a harm to someone's dignity. Think of the elderly and some of their experiences in modern societies. (The incapacity to capture that level of nuance through Kant's concept of dignity is another outcome of the way in which Kant's moral person within the self is so detached and abstract altogether.) We could come up with conceptual gymnastics that would manage to squeeze the concern with being superfluous into the conceptual frame of rights-based utilitarianism or Kantian ethics, but it would seem both artificial and crude. The perspective of

vulnerability allows for that kind of nuance in understanding the human condition and its moral relevance.

Let us examine another human vulnerability that relates to love and attentiveness. Humans have a deep need to be privileged by someone. For a person to be privileged doesn't exclusively mean that parents or friends give her concerns priority over concerns of others. Being privileged relates as well to the fine tuning of what counts as a concern altogether, and to attentiveness in responding to these concerns. Comforting a child who didn't get the grade she aspired to in an exam, fixing the pillow of a bedridden friend to the angle he always liked, calibrating the exact temperature of a favorite dish of a spouse – love is expressed in that kind of attentiveness, and it forms our sense of individuation. None of these concerns fall within any category of basic rights or the universal categorical imperative; they belong to the realm of care and love. In a world in which all of our basic rights would be meticulously preserved, without that kind of privileged attention we would be diminished as humans. It is not clear that we would survive in any meaningful way and have any sense that we are individuals; it would be a just but a frozen world. This is not an argument against rights; it is a way of pointing to the moral limits of rights as the exclusive conceptual moral frame. Partiality, therefore, means two things: the first, and the more trivial, is prioritizing someone's concerns over the concerns of others. The second meaning resides in realizing a concern as something that calls for a response. Partiality has been an ongoing source of contention for different moral worldviews, and it is indeed difficult to justify partiality as a moral stance within utilitarianism and Kantianism, but from the standpoint of the ethics of vulnerability, partiality is an essential response to the vulnerability of being human.

Our capacities, vulnerable in themselves, cannot flourish without that acute attentive partiality which is bestowed on children at home or in school, the grooming and realizing of the special gifts they have. Needless to say that this meticulous care that is invested through love is far beyond anything resembling basic rights or maximizing utility. Since our sense of being individuals depends on that kind of privileged care and attentiveness, the utilitarian approach that denies partial care, though it is extremely altruistic, seems to have deep dehumanizing effects. (Would a child growing up in a strictly utilitarian household have any sense of himself or herself as a fully individualized person?) In the realm of micro-ethics, the approach that posits the nexus of vulnerability and capacity as what makes us human provides a thicker and more nuanced sense of what the moral response entails, given the complexity and scope of being human.

In shifting to macro-ethics, vulnerability has to generate a different sensibility since within a large-scale realm of public institutions it is difficult to materialize a nuanced and attentive moral response to such vulnerabilities as being superfluous and the need to being privileged. Even more so, since macro-ethics relates to the conduct towards the many, an attentive privileging concern, as such, might undermine the commitment to equality. What is then the moral significance of vulnerability in moving to macro-ethics?

One possible contribution of the focus on vulnerability in macro-ethics is that it directs us to distinguish between the least well to-do and most vulnerable. Members of minorities might be better off but more vulnerable than their environment. Such was the case for example of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th century, the Jews in Central Europe at the beginning of the 20th century and the Chinese in Indonesia the second half of the 20th century. On average, a member of these minorities had a higher income and

standard of living than members of the majority. But their status was utterly fragile (as it devastatingly proved to be). This fragility had its roots in their lack of a genuine powerbase in society, and on the fact that their relative good standing was dependent on the good will and interest of the sovereign, which could be removed from them on a whim. If such groups turn out to be defined as the "enemy from within", their sudden loss of favor exposes them to a fate which is far worse than the least well to-do of the majority. Their past relative success turns into an added reason for the deep resentment expressed towards them in pogroms, mass expulsion or genocide. Achievements and well-being are altogether fragile; they can evaporate in a moment. Fragility is a feature of the general human condition and in the cases of vulnerable minorities there is an added fragility which is caused by being a member of a certain class of people.

But vulnerability is mostly the condition of the least well to-do. Extreme poverty is expressed in the lack of access to most basic goods - from proper nutrition to health, housing and essential education. It is as well marked by utter fragility. In the life of a lower middle class families, for the sake of just keeping their head above water, everything has to be stable. It is enough that an illness occurs in the family or that the primary bread winner is arrested or jailed, for the domino effect to be set in motion that will destroy the relative well-being of such a family. Electricity bills are not paid, cell phones are disconnected, and the family is evicted for not paying rent. Ongoing reliance on borrowing is an ominous sign of a pivot to fragility, and the inability to repay debts has harsh consequences. Children have to help support the family and must leave school; one trouble leads to another. Fragility and resilience might be measured by the breadth of the margins that people have to "afford" tragedies or crisis. The poor have none, which makes them even more exposed to the contingencies of fate or to the harm caused by social institutions. Needless to say that living

by such a hanging thread is emotionally taxing and in and of itself might be self-fulfilling. Immigrants who lack the social network that helps people to overcome day to day obstacles and to confront crisis carry that kind of particular fragility. It is magnified by the fact that a foreigner, not being at home, has not yet acquired the capacity to read social nuances and thus is burdened by the need of an ongoing state of alertness. One possible definition of home is the place where the threshold of alertness is lowered.

I have yet to develop the full distributive and welfare meaning of these thoughts on macro-ethics, but I think that if they have any promise it has to do with the way in which we attend to the turning points that lead to fragility, and try to cement these cracks in ways that ensure that the larger human condition of our vulnerability will not be exacerbated by either class, gender, ethnicity, race and religious membership. A kind of equality of fragility should be attained.