

IDEALS OF RESPECT: IDENTITY, DIGNITY AND DISABILITY
Adam Cureton

Forthcoming in *Ethics in Practice*, edited by Hugh LaFollette

When we encounter disabled people in our everyday lives—whether as family members, friends, colleagues or briefly encountered strangers—we may find ourselves with certain attitudes towards them on account of their disabilities.¹ We may feel sorry for a blind person, admire a Deaf person, condescend to someone with Down syndrome or become frustrated by a wheelchair user. Our attitudes are not just bare feelings but complex sets of tendencies to feel, think and act in certain ways. They can influence how we act towards disabled people and others in our everyday lives, but we may also decide, for various reasons, to keep some of our attitudes to ourselves. Our attitudes are not always apparent to other people, but some of them may not even be clear to ourselves even though they affect how we feel, think and act in ways that we do not fully understand.

A central feature of the moral life involves reflecting on, assessing, and improving the attitudes we have towards ourselves and others. Racist or sexist people, for example, should not only avoid treating others in discriminatory ways, but they should also dislodge their underlying prejudicial attitudes. Certain forms of forgiveness, humility and love of humanity are arguably ideal attitudes that we should aspire to develop in ourselves even though we may not be strictly required to do so and may never fully achieve them. Carefully surveying and scrutinizing the attitudes we have, evaluating whether they are base or commendable, and cultivating better ones in ourselves are all part of an ongoing project of moral *self*-improvement. This is primarily a first-person task aimed, not so much at blaming, coercing or pressuring other people about their attitudes, but at making ourselves into morally better versions of ourselves.²

My aim in this essay is to partially characterize an ideal kind of respectful attitude that we should aspire to have towards all people and to explain why some of the ways we often regard and treat those with disabilities may be incompatible with realizing this ideal. Developing a respectful attitude of this sort may lead to improvements in how we act towards disabled people and others. Reflecting on its nature and value may also advance our understanding of the parts of morality that go beyond our moral rights and duties and concern the attitudes, character traits and relationships that are significant elements of a moral life.

¹ I am grateful to Thomas E. Hill, John Vorhaus and Hugh LaFollette for helpful discussions about this essay.

² Cultivating ideal moral attitudes in ourselves is one among several tasks we have as moral agents, which also include respecting the rights of others and fulfilling our other duties and obligations. Developing our own moral attitudes beyond what strict duty requires should also not be confused with forms of self-righteousness or moral puritanism because many of the attitudes we ideally should have are directed to other people, although some of them are also appropriately directed to ourselves in the form of, for example, self-respect.

Aims and Methods

My approach to thinking about moral attitudes reflects how I understand the nature, methods and limits of moral philosophy. When we face moral questions in everyday life, we often find ourselves with initial judgments or intuitions about, for example, what we or others should do, what attitudes or character traits are admirable or deplorable and what ideals are worthy of our devotion. Sometimes, however, these initial judgments are based in ignorance, self-serving biases and cultural norms that we accept without much reflection. We may find ourselves conflicted about a moral issue, doubtful about our initial reactions, conflicted within ourselves or otherwise unsure how to proceed. We may also find that our own intuitive judgments are different from those of other people. In moral philosophy, we try to filter and refine this extraordinarily rich and complex set of initial reactions through critical reflection and open dialogue with others. We also attempt to articulate and explain various general principles, values and ideals that stand behind the intuitive judgments that survive critical reflection. The aim of this ongoing process is not just to seek moral guidance but also to develop a deeper understanding of ourselves and of our shared moral beliefs and practices.

Let's begin, then, with an example that involves some common attitudes towards people with disabilities. Many of them may seem innocuous or even commendable while others may seem obviously ignoble, but I want first to describe and illustrate these attitudes before exploring whether they may sometimes be incompatible with an ideal attitude of respect that we should aspire to cultivate and maintain in ourselves.

Example: Kristen's Night Out

Imagine a large party hosted by some students at a house they share near campus. One of them has invited a friend from class named Kristen, who has a kind of cerebral palsy that weakens her muscles and impairs her coordination and speech. The house is fortunately on the first floor so Kristen has no trouble navigating her motorized wheelchair inside. The students that Kristen encounters at the party find themselves with various attitudes towards her because of her disability. They often keep these attitudes to themselves or at least try to conceal them from Kristen, but they also sometimes express them, whether they mean to or not, in how they act towards her.

Perhaps the most common attitude that her fellow partygoers have towards Kristen is that they feel sorry for her because of her disability. They genuinely sympathize with Kristen and lament what they see as her significant misfortune. These attitudes lead some of them to give Kristen concerned looks as she passes and to exchange whispers among one another about how sad her situation is. A few students even find themselves doubting whether they would or could go on in life if they had Kristen's condition, but they are too polite to say so to Kristen herself.

The compassion that many of the students have for Kristen is often accompanied by attitudes of kindness and generosity towards her that aim to ameliorate her hardships and improve her quality of life. Some students keep these

attitudes to themselves; others show that they are ready to help if called upon; while some attempt to assist Kristen directly. Without any prompting from Kristen, for example, a few students let her go ahead of them in the bathroom line; others moved chairs and opened doors for her; and someone began mixing her a drink after she seemed to be struggling with the bottles. Sometimes these generous attitudes were combined with a slight air of superiority and condescension, as when one student resisted the temptation to patronizingly pat Kristen on the head while another asked if she needed help in a slow, high, reassuring tone that he normally reserves for children.

A few of Kristen's closest friends, who were also at the party, care deeply about her and, in particular, hope that her cerebral palsy will one day be cured, which they think would give her a more rewarding and meaningful life than the one she would otherwise have. One of them excitedly mentions to Kristen that new stem cell therapies are showing promise at repairing damaged brain cells and suggests that Kristen look into experimental trials of that kind. When Kristen expresses some reservations about doing so, her friends are confused, incredulous and dismayed at her reluctance to make every effort to cure her condition.

Besides feeling sorry for Kristen and wanting to help her, many of the students are curious about her disability and ways of accommodating it. Many of them pretend not to stare at her unorthodox appearance and involuntary twitching, but they wonder to themselves or one another what her condition is, how she came to have it, how she manages daily tasks, and how fast her wheelchair goes. Some of them pepper Kristen herself with these questions and a few of them mention people they know who also use wheelchairs. Often the students steer their conversations with Kristen back to her disability, as when one person asked how she was able to get around with her wheelchair during her recent study abroad trip.

Some students are somewhat uncomfortable and disconcerted around Kristen because of her disability. They are not sure how to respond to her condition or how they should interact with her. Many of them manage to overcome their discomfort while others are somewhat stilted and standoffish in their interactions with Kristen. Some of them find it easier simply to avoid interacting with her and to mostly ignore her. When Kristen and her friend were chatting, one person even began speaking to Kristen's friend about Kristen's condition rather than addressing Kristen directly. A group of students did not think to invite Kristen to a protest march they were organizing the next day because they assumed that, as a disabled person, the event would be too much trouble for her and that she probably doesn't support their conservative causes anyway.

A few students were somewhat arrogant and patronizing towards Kristen because of her disability. When she joined a lively political discussion, some of the students were impatient with Kristen's slow, quiet and stuttering speech, which led some of them to assume that she is mentally impaired or otherwise lacks the knowledge and abilities to fully participate in their conversation. Most of them did not pay much attention to what she said or take her opinions very seriously, but the more polite ones pretended to understand and think about her ideas while others simply talked over her, finished some of her sentences, or interrupted her.

Many of the students admire Kristen for her courage, resilience and cheerfulness in overcoming her disability. They appreciate Kristen for setting an instructive example for them, inspiring them to adopt a positive outlook, and leading them to rethink their own excuses. Some of them even commented that they were amazed and impressed by the fact that Kristen even came to the party in light of the challenges she faces.

Finally, some students at the party were somewhat insolent and mean-spirited towards Kristen although they usually kept these attitudes hidden from her. They took some joy in making fun of what they saw as her imperfections and deficiencies. Some of them, for example, chuckled to themselves or openly snickered when others mocked Kristen behind her back for her unorthodox appearance, jerky mannerisms, and untidy ways of eating.

Kinds of Respect

Although some of my examples are exaggerated, in my own experience as a visually impaired person, these are some of the main kinds of attitudes that people seem to have towards people with disabilities. It's often difficult to know, of course, what exactly goes on in the minds of other people, although their mannerisms, gestures, tones, facial expressions and actions can sometimes give us clues. We may also be unaware of some of our own attitudes unless we make a concerted effort to scrutinize ourselves as best we can. Now that we have a clearer idea about some of the recognizable ways that people with disabilities seem to be regarded and treated, I next want to consider whether the attitudes that I described towards Kristen are incompatible with an ideal kind of *respect for persons* that we should aspire to cultivate in ourselves?

Respect is a complicated idea, so one way to try to make progress on this question is to step back and think about the idea of respect. When we do so, we find that there are different kinds of respect we can have or fail to have for ourselves or other people. One way to distinguish among different kinds of respect for persons is by considering what answers they give to four questions: First, when we respect someone, what is it about her that grounds our respect? Second, what is it to respect someone; that is, what tendencies of thought, feeling and action make up this attitude of respect? Third, why might people morally deserve or merit our respect? And, fourth, do we have a strict moral duty to respect people or is respecting them a moral ideal we should aspire to?

By examining these four questions, I hope to characterize an ideal of respect that we should strive to have for all persons and to explain why many people's attitudes towards those with disabilities fail to fully realize this ideal.

Objects of Respect: Dignity, Excellence and Status

Our first question is: When we respect someone, what is it about her that grounds our respect?

Basic Respect

What is often called 'basic respect' is a kind of respect that is directed at persons for having certain commonly shared features that give them a dignity. The idea of dignity, which figures prominently in political constitutions, human rights documents and professional codes of conduct, is thought of as an objective, unconditional worth or status that is infinitely more valuable than the objects of our merely natural desires and preferences. Dignity is also regarded as an incomparable worth in the sense that one person's dignity cannot be sacrificed, weighed or balanced against the dignity of anyone else. And, on this way of thinking, dignity does not come in degrees, which means that anyone who has it possesses the same dignity as anyone else, regardless of their character, achievements, social standing, wealth or any other characteristic they may have.

Philosophers disagree about what features of an individual give her this special moral status. Some of them claim that these shared features are our capacities for rational thought and action³; others argue that simply being human gives us dignity⁴; and it might be that both views are correct, which would imply that many of us have one kind of dignity that comes from being a rational agent and another kind of dignity that comes from being a human being. When we have basic respect for someone, we respect her as someone who possesses the features that give her a dignity.

Basic respect is arguably one of the most important attitudes we should have towards ourselves and others. On reflection, however, we may find that we want to be respected for qualities of ourselves that are more particular and personal rather than just the generic and impersonal characteristics that we share with other individuals. Basic respect for someone is grounded in features that she and most individuals share in common, such as having a rational nature or being human, whereas we may hope that at least some other people also respect us for what makes us different and special.⁵ It may be a relief to hear a thief say 'nothing personal' as he drives away in our car, but we would likely be disappointed to learn that there is 'nothing personal' in the respect that our parents or children have for us. It is thus worth investigating other kinds of respect that are connected with basic respect but grounded in particular qualities of individuals rather than general features they share with most individuals.

Appraisal respect and status respect

A second kind of respect we may have for someone is grounded in what we regard as her admirable achievements, excellent abilities and other fine qualities. Respect of this kind, which is often called 'appraisal respect', comes in degrees depending on how well we think someone conforms to certain standards, such as when we have great appraisal respect for Venus Williams because of her tennis prowess and for Napoleon because of his military genius.⁶

³ See, for example, Hill (2000); Kant (2002); Wood (1999).

⁴ See, for example, Kittay (2017).

⁵ See, for example, Dillon (1992).

⁶ The term 'appraisal respect' comes from Darwall (1977).

And, a third kind of respect we may have for someone is for her place in a social institution or practice, as when we respect someone as a judge, a duke or a professor. Respect of this kind, which we might call 'status respect', does not come in degrees, at least for people who occupy the same position in a practice, although we might have more or less appraisal respect for someone if she performs well or poorly in one of her socially defined roles.

Appraisal respect and status respect are usually directed to persons for having particular features rather than for having generic features that they share with most all individuals. These kinds of respect are often important to us in certain contexts, although we might wonder whether we always have moral reasons to have appraisal respect and status respect towards ourselves or others (we might doubt, for example, that someone who inherited great wealth or who occupies the socially defined position of 'made man' in the mafia morally deserve our respect on the basis of these qualities). In any case, I now want to suggest that there is more about us that we intuitively think makes us worthy of respect than our excellent qualities, our place in various social practices, and our generic features that give us the dignity or dignities that we share with most other people. Exploring this fourth kind of respect will help to illuminate how we should aspire to regard and treat all people, including those with disabilities.

Objects of Respect: Identity

A father who is in denial about his son's homosexuality, who refuses to learn about the music, movies and books that his son finds deeply meaningful, and who openly sneers at his son's recent conversion to veganism seems to lack a kind of respect for his son.⁷ What the son wants from his father is not just basic respect as a human being, appraisal respect for his talents and abilities, and status respect for his place in various social practices; nor does he merely want appreciation of the values he finds in his life or love and concern from his father. The son, we can imagine, also wants his father to respect him *as the particular individual he is*. To understand this kind of respect and to see whether the students at the party denied it to Kristen, we first need to examine what makes someone the particular individual that she is.

Philosophers have suggested various approaches to answering the apparently innocuous question 'who am I?', but I want to describe one way of responding, which is by citing the values, commitments, convictions, personal qualities and other features of ourselves that we 'identify' with. When we identify with something, we regard it as significant and important in our lives. We are very reluctant to give it up and we would feel significant shame and regret if we were to sacrifice it. We also regard our identities as having a kind of authority over us that, we think, takes priority over other values, convictions or desires we may have. We regard the things we identify with as provisionally fixed aspects of ourselves. We tend not to question or revise our identities without strong reasons to do so and we usually take our identities for granted when evaluating what else is worth doing or

⁷ This example is adapted from Hill ([This Volume]).

striving for in life. Our identities help to get us up in the morning, keep us going through hardship, and otherwise give a point, purpose and sense of meaning to our lives.⁸

Our identities define one way in which we conceive of ourselves. If we were to suddenly lose our identity, perhaps as a result of a divorce or serious accident, we would likely find ourselves in an 'identity crisis' that would leave us feeling deeply disoriented and dispirited because we would lack the values and loyalties that previously defined our way of life without, at least for a time, any others to replace them with. And if our identities change suddenly and significantly, such as when Saul of Tarsus became Paul the Apostle, we would tend to regard ourselves as, in a practical sense, different people even though, in a metaphysical sense, we may still be the same person.

Many kinds of things can figure in our identities, including our aims, hopes, commitments, projects and goals. We might also identify with a gender, race, ethnicity or culture, with aspects of our physical appearance, parts of our bodies and natural or realized abilities, with affections, loyalties and ties to other people, with our place in various social practices, and with religious or moral convictions that underlie and reinforce other aspects of our identity. We may even identify with things that other people regard as superficial, foolish or even vile.

Other aspects of ourselves are not part of our identity. We may not attach great significance to our physical appearance or taste in wine; we may repudiate our quick temper or predilection for bragging; we may regard our aim to secure a good job as simply a means to raising a family; and we may not care whether or not we are good at video games or part of our neighborhood association.

When we identify with something, in my view, we actively and freely endorse it as part of our conception of ourselves. Sometimes we consciously and explicitly decide to identify with, say, a cause or an aim, but more often we 'find ourselves' identifying with things in the sense that the best explanation for certain of our actions and attitudes over time is that we have, perhaps implicitly, committed ourselves to them in a way that makes them part of who we are. All of us are affected in various ways by our genetics, upbringing, culture, relationships, communities and many other factors, but, on my Kantian way of thinking, we have the freedom to decide for ourselves what commitments, policies and personal 'maxims' to adopt and endorse. Our identities are up to us as something we freely fashion for ourselves from the materials that are available to us.

Our identities are not always clear to us, even after careful reflection; nor are they always fully formed, perfectly coherent and static; and we may not always manage to live up to the identities that we have set for ourselves. We may discover some features of our identities by attempting to explain a series of choices we have made, while other aspects of our identities may remain more or less hidden from us even though our free endorsement of them would become apparent if certain circumstances were to arise. We may never know, for example, whether our

⁸ The literature on 'identities' is vast (e.g. Korsgaard (2009); Velleman (2006); Zagzebski (2010) but this is one conception of a person's identity that, I will try to show, is worthy of respect.

religious convictions are really part of who we are if we never face trying situations that put them to the test. Some aspects of our identities may be vague and inchoate while others may be quite clear and precise. Our identities often have some structure to them, as when we regard certain commitments and convictions as more central to who we are than others, but we may also be unsure how to resolve certain potential conflicts among parts of our identities and so hope that we are never called upon to, for example, choose between love of family and love of country. Our identities can shift and change throughout our lives, which usually happens gradually but can also occur suddenly. And, we may not always have the kinds of will-power, foresight and integrity that we need to conduct ourselves in ways that conform to our conceptions of who we are.

One way of understanding what the son wants from his father and that Kristen wants from her fellow students is that they want to be respected for their identities, as I have described that idea. Respect of this kind, which we might call 'identity respect', is respect for a person as someone who has a particular identity.

Before considering what it means to respect the identity of someone and whether we have moral reasons to do so, let's fill out some features of Kristen's identity so that we can better assess whether the other students at the party fully respected her for who she is.

Kristen's cerebral palsy is part of her identity. This may seem surprising, bizarre or preposterous to those who regard cerebral palsy as a physical defect that any reasonable person would want corrected in herself. Underlying this aspect of Kristen's identity is her conviction, which many disabled people share, that her physical impairments are, for the most part, not defects or inherently bad features of her but are instead differences in physical structure akin to differences in race or gender. The disadvantages she suffers as a result of her disability, Kristen firmly believes, are by and large the result of how people with uncommon kinds of bodies like hers are regarded and treated by society through, for example, prejudice, exclusion, lack of accessible facilities and failures to provide reasonable accommodations. Kristen, in other words, identifies with the social model of disability, which emphasizes social factors that disadvantage disabled people; and she rejects the medical model of disability, which regards impairments as inherent defects that more or less explain the disadvantages of being disabled. Far from repudiating her disability, Kristen takes pride in her unusual kind of body and thinks it is beautiful; her work advocating for disabled people gives her a sense of purpose and meaning; and she deeply values the relationships she has formed with other disabled people. Kristen's cerebral palsy has thus come to play a pivotal role in her conception of herself, her way of life and her perspective on the world.⁹

Another aspect of Kristen's identity is that she values a kind of independence and self-reliance. Kristen recognizes that, like all people, she is dependent on others in various ways, but she is the sort of person who prefers not to ask for or receive favors, charity or other kinds of generosity from others. She wants to proceed through life mostly by way of her own efforts, talents, rights and luck rather than

⁹ For discussions of how disability can figure into a person's identity, see Barnes (2016).

rely on or accept various forms of generosity and charity that others are under no obligation to give. This is not to say that Kristen spurns all forms of kindness. Small favors and gifts are often quite welcome to her and she has sometimes chosen to sacrifice some of her independence for the sake of other values. Kristen stands up for her rights, including ones to special assistance and reasonable accommodations, and she recognizes that special relationships may call upon others to help her in various ways. Kristen nonetheless identifies with a decided, but defeasible, preference for diminishing the influence of beneficence from other people in her life.

The most central features of Kristen's identity, however, are her family and close friends, her religious convictions, her love of jazz and her plans to become a human rights lawyer. These and other aspects of her identity combine to make Kristen the particular individual she is.

Respecting the Identity of Persons

Our second question has become: What is it to respect someone as the particular individual she is; that is, what tendencies of thought, feeling and action make up the attitude of respecting someone for her identity?

One natural suggestion is that respecting someone for who she is involves valuing and esteeming her for the particular identity that she affirms. Many of us certainly want *appraisal respect* from others for who we are. We want others to recognize how important our values are, to appreciate our goals and projects, to affirm our deepest convictions and otherwise to prize us for the identities we affirm. When we share common features of our identity with, say, a close friend, we may have appraisal respect for the particular individual he is, but when we regard the identities of other people as pedestrian, unremarkable, base, sleazy or even downright evil, we may not value or esteem their identities.

Kristen's friends, for example, might think that identifying with her cerebral palsy is an irrational adaptation to her limited circumstances. They may think that this aspect of Kristen's identity is based in inadequate information about what her life would be like without cerebral palsy. Kristen's friends may also think that her disability makes her life go worse for her, all things considered. They may even think that her disability is simply bad in itself.

Or, the students who try to help Kristen may think that her preference to avoid generosity and charity from others is a morally suspect aspect of her identity because it tends to undercut morally important values of care, trust and mutually-dependent relationships of love and concern. They may also think that Kristen has this preference because she has internalized oppressive norms of self-reliance and independence that diminish the social standing of disabled people and, perhaps especially, disabled women.

It nonetheless seems that we should aspire to respect someone for who she is despite having little or no appraisal respect for the particular identity that she affirms.

A second suggestion, then, is that respecting someone for who she is at least involves understanding her identity, whether or not we endorse it. Our

commonsense idea of respect for persons seems to involve tendencies to notice, pay attention to and understand the identities of others, as when we show respect to a foreign-exchange student by learning about his culture, show respect to a friend by reading the books that she most enjoys and show respect to a family member by getting to know his spouse.

One complication with this second suggestion, however, is that nosy neighbors, busybodies, prying strangers and others who infringe on our privacy seem to be paradigmatic examples of *disrespectful* rather than respectful people. Our ordinary idea of respect for persons seems to include tendencies to recognize and conform to limits on how much we notice, learn about and concern ourselves with the inner lives and personal information of others. We sometimes express these boundaries of respect metaphorically, with phrases such as: 'give me some space', 'that's none of your business' and 'good fences make good neighbors'. Many of us would feel disrespected if, for example, a barista we do not know asked about our political or religious views, if the person next to us on an airplane spent most of the flight trying to figure out our sexual orientation, or if our spouse read our personal emails without permission. Even if these methods are sincerely used to learn about and understand our identities, they nonetheless seem disrespectful. This suggests that respecting someone's identity also involves tendencies not to pay attention to, concern ourselves with, or learn too much about the identities of others.

Taking these suggestions and complications into account, I now want to describe three paradigmatic features of respect for the identities of persons and consider some of their implications for how the students regarded and treated Kristen.

First, respecting someone for who she is involves regarding her identity as *worthy of our understanding* because it is her identity, even if we vehemently disagree with it. What this attitude requires will vary in different circumstances, but we can draw out a few of its implications by considering how the students at the party regarded and treated Kristen.

When we regard someone's identity as worth understanding, we recognize that she has an identity that has deep significance to her and that defines her point of view on the world. Some of the students who ignored or avoided Kristen, as well as the student who spoke to Kristen's friend about Kristen's condition rather than addressing Kristen herself, may have not fully recognized or attended to the fact that Kristen has an identity of her own.

Recognizing that someone has an identity involves, more specifically, recognizing certain general features of identities. One feature of an identity, I have suggested, is that it is freely chosen or endorsed by the person who has it. The students who were organizing the protest march, for example, may have mistakenly thought that Kristen's political views were determined or caused by her experiences as a disabled person rather than aspects of her identity that are up to her. Identities can also be multi-faceted and structured. Some of the students who were curious about or otherwise preoccupied with Kristen's disability may have mistakenly assumed that Kristen's disability is the main or most significant aspect of who she is

whereas Kristen's disability is only part, and not the most significant part, of her conception of herself.

Regarding someone's identity as worth understanding also involves standing ready to learn about it in ways that are consistent with the person's privacy and with other requirements of respect. More specifically, when we respect someone's identity, we tend to show our willingness to get to know them, provide opportunities for interactions, listen to or otherwise communicate with them, and take their ideas seriously. Some of the students may not have been willing to learn about Kristen's identity because of the discomfort, awkwardness or impatience they felt around her on account of her disability. If they regarded her identity as worth understanding then they may have made more of an effort to interact with her and to patiently listen to her rather than cutting her off or finishing her sentences.

Standing ready to understand someone's identity is compatible with recognizing and conforming to respectful limits on how much we concern ourselves with or learn about their identities. By staring at Kristen, wondering about her condition and peppering her with questions, the students may be overstepping respectful limits of privacy. A more respectful approach would involve a willingness to get to know Kristen combined with a presumptive policy of not trying to learn about aspects of her identity in ways that would infringe on her privacy.

And, when we regard someone's identity as worth our understanding, we tend not to make unwarranted assumptions about it. There are usually significant limits to how well we can get to know someone. A person's identity is up to them and we can never really understand what choices others make in their own minds; identities often change and shift; there are often complex relationships among the various parts of a person's identity; and the person herself may not be fully aware of her own identity.

The students who feel sorry for Kristen, for example, may have incorrectly assumed that, from her point of view, her life is going poorly for her as a result of her disability. They may have made these assumptions on the basis of unreliable evidence, such as stereotypes, folk wisdom or their own guesses about how they would respond to a significant disability, whereas Kristen's life may be going quite well for her according to the aims, projects, values and other aspects of her point of view and conception of herself.

Kristen's friends may also incorrectly assume that her cerebral palsy is not a feature of her identity and so assume that, because of the hardships it brings, Kristen would prefer to be rid of her disability if a cure were to become available. Even the students who find Kristen inspirational may be making assumptions about her identity, such as that she identifies as courageous and resilient, whereas Kristen may not identify with or even possess these traits.

A second paradigmatic feature of respecting someone for who she is involves respecting her as the author of her own identity, whether or not we agree with the identity she affirms. We not only value her right to form a conception of herself within certain limits and value her freedom to do so, but we also value the special relation that holds between her and what she identifies with, namely the relation of her identifying with those things. By analogy, when we insist that our parents respect our decision to drop out of college, we are not necessarily demanding that

they change their minds about how foolish or ridiculous they may think our decision is; we are instead demanding, in part, that they at least value that we have chosen to do so.

Respecting someone's identity in this way does not require us to value the things that she identifies with, but it does require us to value that she identifies with those things. Kristen's friends and some of the students at the party may not like aspects of Kristen's identity; they may regard them as foolish or imprudent; they may think that some of them are immoral or inherently bad; and they may think that Kristen has endorsed some of them through faulty patterns of deliberation and reasoning. Having these attitudes, however, is compatible with valuing the special relation that holds between Kristen and the goals, commitments and preferences that they nonetheless disagree with.

We fail to value the special relation between a person and her identity by arrogantly regarding the connection between ourselves and our own identities as more valuable or important than that same relation between another person and her identity. The students, for example, who regarded or treated Kristen as a child and who did not listen or pay attention to her contributions to the group discussion may have thought that her identifying with things deserves less consideration because of her disability or because of mental impairments that they incorrectly assumed she has. Denigrating, deriding, mocking or denying this relation are also ways of failing to value the special relation between a person and her conception of herself, as perhaps occurred when some of the students mocked Kristen for aspects of herself that she identifies with. Attempting to change someone's identity may sometimes be compatible with valuing the relation that holds between them and the identity they now affirm, but only if we proceed with reason and argument rather than manipulation and deception. There is often a danger, however, that criticizing someone's identity will shade into mocking or ridiculing the fact that she identifies with something.

And, a third paradigmatic feature of respecting someone for who she is paradigmatically involves tendencies not to be judgmental about her identity, within certain limits, and to make an effort to be unbiased and impartial in our assessments of it. When there is reasonable doubt about whether someone's identity is unworthy or immoral, respecting them for who they are may involve withholding judgment about its value as well as humility about our own abilities to make such assessments. And, it seems that respecting someone for who she is involves not ridiculing or mocking their identities even if we vehemently disagree with them.

Kristen's friends, for example, were especially critical of Kristen's choice to identify as a disabled person without, perhaps, attempting to identify and overcome prejudices that may be influencing these judgments. They were also quite sure that Kristen should want to cure her cerebral palsy and judged Kristen harshly for not recognizing this fact, whereas a more respectful attitude towards her would involve tempering or withdrawing these judgments about an aspect of Kristen's identity that, it seems, reasonable people can disagree about.

These tendencies, however, may be less pronounced or entirely absent in other kinds of cases in which aspects of someone's identity are more clearly immoral. Some of the students may think that Kristen's preference to avoid charity

and assistance from others is an immoral and dangerous aspect of her identity because it involves internalizing sexist and ableist norms and because it contributes to further oppression of women and of disabled people. These students may respect Kristen for who she is in the other ways I mentioned, such as by not making assumptions about her identity and valuing her as the author of identity, but it may also be appropriate for them to judge that this aspect of Kristen's identity is morally misguided.

Some of the students who mocked Kristen for some of the signs and symptoms of her disability may have done so in part because they knew that she identifies as disabled and they wanted to make fun of this fact. A more respectful attitude towards her would involve not only refusing to openly laugh at Kristen for aspects of herself that she identifies with, but also not deriding, scorning or making light of it in their own minds. We can disagree with the values of other people and regard them as unworthy or even immoral without also regarding them as ridiculous or laughable.

These three paradigmatic features of respecting someone as the particular person she is can also guide how we regard and treat people who identify, for example, with their race, ethnicity, gender, culture, sexual orientation or social class. Once we recognize the importance of someone's identity to her and the wide variety of things that she can identify with, we can work to cultivate respectful dispositions of thought, feeling and action towards her for the identity that she affirms. We may not share her deepest values and commitments, but we can show her respect of this kind by, for example, not assuming that we know her sexual orientation, not mocking her race or ethnicity, learning about her gender identity, and attempting to overcome our own prejudices in assessing aspects of her culture.

Identity respect as a moral ideal

The remaining two questions are whether people morally deserve or merit respect for who they are and, if they do, whether having this kind of respect is a moral duty or an ideal that we should aspire to. When people talk or think about wanting to be respected for the particular individual that they are, part of what they may mean is that they want appraisal respect or appreciation for who they are, but many of us do not in fact have identities that make us morally worthy of such respect. I want to end by sketching one approach to explaining the morality of identity respect in a way that does not require us to value the identities that others affirm. Other moral frameworks might explain the morality of identity respect in different ways, and one need not endorse the theory I briefly describe in order to appreciate the moral value of identity respect, but I think that a broadly Kantian moral framework can deepen our moral understanding of this kind of respect and inspire us to cultivate it in our own lives.

The starting point of this broadly Kantian moral theory is the set of capacities for rational thought, choice and action that virtually all human beings share. These "higher" capacities are quite extensive and substantive. They include not just our abilities to engage in moral reflection or to think and act consistently; they also

include our abilities to form, revise, pursue and govern ourselves by values, goals, commitments and identities as well as to imagine, reflect, deliberate and make free choices, to do math and science, to think for ourselves and to appreciate art and music.

These various rational capacities give rise to fundamental rational interests in people who possess them. One of our rational interests is in regarding ourselves, and being regarded by others, as having an objective, unconditional and incomparable worth that is grounded in our rational nature. We also have basic rational interests in developing, protecting and exercising each of our rational capacities. And, we have a fundamental rational interest in fulfilling the personal ends, goals, values and commitments that we set for ourselves.

A rational person is someone who has a complete set of capacities that involve the use of reason along with this corresponding set of rational interests. Infants, young children and those with severe disabilities, as well as people who are asleep or in comas, are rational persons in this sense as long as they have the relevant capacities and interests. Their rational capacities may be offline for a time, underdeveloped, unrealized or even entirely dormant; they may not be fully aware of their rational interests or able to state them; but virtually all human beings nonetheless count as rational persons because they have a rational nature.

Assuming that this conception of a rational person is correct, the next step is to consider the nature and content of morality. Moral principles, on this view, are those that all rational persons would agree to from an ideally moral point of view in which they are fully rational and moved to secure the rational interests of all persons.

Many questions remain about how to specify a moral standpoint of this sort, but if we imagine fully rational versions of ourselves who attempt to reach agreement on moral principles based on our concern for the rational interests of everyone, we can begin to see why we would likely settle on an ideal of respect for the identities of persons.

We might first consider what principles must be strictly followed in order for all of us to secure our various rational interests to a minimum degree. We would likely settle on moral duties, for example, not to kill or significantly injure others in ways that damage those capacities, to respect their rights to form and pursue values, goals and commitments, to avoid manipulating or deceiving them in ways that undermine the use of their realized rational abilities, and to respect their privacy so that we do not impose non-rational forms of pressure on them.

Once we have settled on principles that are necessary for all of us to minimally secure our rational interests and we have reconciled these principles with one another into a coherent system of moral duties, we would next consider some substantive ideals in which the rational interests that we all share are fully realized. One ideal, for example, would be all rational agents thinking for themselves rather than letting others do our thinking for us; another ideal would be all of us achieving maximal happiness. We would recognize, of course, that some of these ideals may be incompatible with one another while others may be impossible in certain circumstances.

We all share a basic rational interest in exercising our rational capacities, so one of the ideals we might agree to is everyone using our realized capacities of reasoned thought, deliberation and action as best we can. We live in a world of other people, however, in which thinking, deliberating and acting rationally often depends on engaging, listening to and learning from others. Our decisions and actions are often interconnected with those of other people. And understanding and accurately applying the various standards of rationality depends, in many cases, on reflection and consensus among many people. Assuming there are significant social aspects to reasoned thought, deliberation and action in human beings, the ideal of everyone exercising our rational capacities well, once interpreted and applied to human beings in the natural world, arguably involves regarding, treating and otherwise relating to one another as rational persons of that kind.

Assuming we have already settled on moral principles that are necessary for us to satisfy our rational interests, however, we lack sufficient grounds to impose strict requirements on how people are to act with regard to this ideal beyond simply affirming it in their lives. We can nonetheless reflect more on the nature of the ideal and on the kinds of reasons that it gives us, which may include not only bringing the ideal about, but also trying to live out the ideal ourselves.

The ideal of relating to one another as rational agents gives us reasons to respect the identities of other people in the ways I have suggested. Forming a conception of oneself, defining one's own point of view on what is worthwhile in life and otherwise fashioning an identity for oneself necessarily involve significant and often sustained and intricate use of our rational capacities as we, for example, imagine different plans of life, communicate with others, deliberate about our options, and ultimately exercise our freedom to make ourselves into a particular kind of person. Reasoned discussion and deliberation with others often begins from each person's point of view. And we are often subject to biases, prejudices, ignorance, inattention and other factors that affect how well we rationally judge our own identities and those of others. These and other considerations suggest that the ideal of relating with others as rational agents gives us reasons to recognize when others have identities that they freely affirm, to stand ready to learn about their identities while respecting their privacy, not to make unwarranted assumptions about their identities, to appreciate the value *to others* of their having an identity and having the particular identity they have, and to avoid being biased and judgmental in assessing their identities within certain limits.

If ideally rational versions of ourselves would affirm these reasons from an impartial moral point of view as ways of properly responding to one or more ideals that they all affirm then we, here and now, should strive to cultivate an ideal attitude of respect for the identities of others, including those with disabilities.

Works cited

- Barnes, Elizabeth (2016), *The Minority Body: A Theory of Disability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Darwall, Stephen (1977), 'Two Kinds of Respect', *Ethics*, 88 (1), 36-49.

- Dillon, Robin (1992), 'Respect and Care: Toward Moral Integration', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 22, 105-32.
- Hill, Thomas E. (2000), *Respect, Pluralism, and Justice: Kantian Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Hill, Thomas E. ([This Volume]), 'Ideals of Appreciation and Expressions of Respect', in David Wasserman and Adam Cureton (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Disability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), [Pages].
- Kant, Immanuel (2002), *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Arnulf Zweig (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Kittay, Eva Feder (2017), 'The Moral Significance of Being Human', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 91, 22-42.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. (2009), *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Velleman, J. David (2006), 'Self to Self', *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 170-202.
- Wood, Allen W. (1999), *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Zagzebski, Linda (2010), 'Exemplarist Virtue Theory', *Metaphilosophy*, 41 (1 - 2), 41-57.