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Theological Foundations of Human Dignity in Alevism

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Summary

This entry examines the theological foundations of the God–human relationship in Alevism by approaching the concept of human dignity through the perspectives of creation theology and process theology. Although the Alevi tradition does not employ “human dignity” in its contemporary sense as an explicit terminological category, creation narratives and conceptions of the God–human relationship—as well as metaphors and images concerning the human condition found in the traditions of deyiş, nefes, and poetic expression—provide an intellectual ground for theological interpretations of this concept. The entry argues that, within Alevi thought, human dignity can be understood through two theological perspectives that do not exclude one another. From the perspective of creation theology, human dignity is grounded as a heteronomous and objective value bestowed by God, which humans bear unconditionally by virtue of being human. From the perspective of process theology, this heteronomous value acquires an autonomous and subjective dimension insofar as it is recognised and (re)constituted through a dialogical relationship with God, and through moral practice and social relations. In this framework, the entry aims to show that, in Alevi thought, human dignity may be conceptualised not merely as an externally granted value, but as a multilayered theological structure that is grounded in creation and unfolded through process.

Introduction

The concept of dignity has been discussed in Western philosophical literature primarily through the terms *dignitas* (Latin), *dignity* (English), *dignité* (French), and *Würde* (German). However, this is not a debate exclusive to Western philosophy; comparable reflections have a long-standing presence in other cultural traditions as well (Wetz 1998, 14). In Turkish, the term *onur*, which entered the language via the French *honneur*, carries two principal meanings: first, an individual’s self-respect, self-esteem, and sense of dignity; and second, the personal worth, honour, and pride that ground the respect shown to an individual by others.

In modern thought and in the global discourse on human rights, human dignity is generally approached through two fundamental dimensions: absolute value and universality (Rommel and Mooney 2025, 2). First, human dignity is understood as an inalienable value possessed by individuals by virtue of birth; this value is independent of biological, psychological, historical, cultural, or social conditions and is not contingent upon individual competence, achievement, or status (Boehm, cited in Rommel and Mooney 2025, 2). Second, human dignity is regarded as universal: all human beings possess the same value without distinction, and this value can neither be compared nor graded, nor allocated to particular groups.

These two dimensions became especially influential in the formation of a new normative framework in international law after 1945. Following the Second World War, human dignity gained global recognition, was incorporated as a foundational principle into the Charter of the United Nations, and became one of the constitutive concepts of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In this way, human dignity came to be positioned as both the point of departure and the justificatory basis of the international human rights regime. In modern constitutional law, Germany represents one of the most prominent examples of this approach: Article 1 of the German Basic Law defines human dignity as the foundational principle of the constitutional order with the statement, “Human dignity shall be inviolable.”

Despite the high normative status attributed to human dignity at the global level, the gap between its theoretical claims and empirical reality has become increasingly apparent. From this perspective, the conception of human dignity as an absolute and universal value is no longer widely regarded as a sustainable or realistic claim when diverse cultural contexts across the world are taken into account.

Nevertheless, when global forms of exploitation, structural violence, class-based inequalities, discriminatory practices, war crimes, and the ethnic cleansing and genocides that marked the twentieth century are considered, the distance between the normative demand of human dignity and social reality produces a striking contradiction. This tension has led to renewed questioning, in various theoretical and practical contexts, of the modern assumption that human dignity possesses both absolute value and universal validity. In their analysis of critiques directed at human dignity, Rommel and Mooney (2025, 3) emphasise that metaphysical-critical philosophical approaches in particular fundamentally problematise the assumption that the concept rests on a universally valid normative foundation. For this reason, human dignity has increasingly been subjected to critical scrutiny in both philosophical and legal debates, and the question of how its theoretically asserted normative status can be sustained in practice has emerged as a central problem (Bielefeldt 2011, 19).

Within this framework, Franz Josef Wetz draws attention to deep structural inconsistencies that arise in the relationship between human dignity and the practical world, arguing that the concept's normative legitimacy-especially its claim to absoluteness-has been seriously eroded. According to Wetz, despite the global normative prestige attributed to human dignity, the concept often remains, in practice, an "empty conceptual template" (2005, 11) and, in legal documents, little more than a form of "prefatory rhetoric and decorative façade" (2005, 11).

The Historical and Conceptual Evolution of Human Dignity: From Ancient Rome to the Modern Period

Within the Western intellectual tradition, the concept of human dignity has followed a historically and conceptually multilayered trajectory. A semantic examination of the concept shows that the field of meaning associated with "dignity" can be traced back to Ancient Rome; however, it would be misleading to assume a direct continuity from antiquity to the modern period with regard to either its conceptual content or the subjects to whom dignity was attributed. Historical evidence indicates that not all human beings were automatically regarded as "subjects of dignity." The philosophical legitimation of slavery in antiquity, value conceptions grounded in social status, and the exclusion of certain groups from claims to dignity within specific religious and ideological traditions all point to a notion of dignity that was predominantly sovereignty-centred, selective, and hierarchical. Studies that systematically examine this historical trajectory demonstrate how dignity was configured in distinct ways across different periods (for a more detailed discussion, see Wetz 2005).

One of the most illustrative examples of this elitist conception is Cicero's understanding of *dignitas*. Although Cicero introduced the concept into Roman thought, he did not conceive of it as a universal value. Instead, he defined *dignitas* as a status reserved for "excellent individuals" who were capable of mastering their passions and displaying rational and moral virtues. Cicero's assertion that "some are not truly human, but only human in name" makes clear that he did not attribute intrinsic value to human beings by virtue of birth, and it reveals the selective and exclusionary character of the normative conception of humanity in Ancient Rome. Within this framework, *dignitas* is understood not as a value inherent to all human beings, but as an elite status linked to individual virtue and superiority.

In the Middle Ages, conceptions of dignity were articulated within a theological framework that diverged from the status-based and elitist foundations of antiquity. According to the doctrine of *imago Dei*, human beings were considered valuable because they were created in the image of God, and dignity was understood as a

value bestowed by God regardless of an individual’s moral achievements or social position. In this sense, dignity was no longer tied to personal success or status, but oriented toward a claim of universality independent of social hierarchy.

During the Renaissance and the period of Humanism, dignity increasingly ceased to be grounded in theological sources and came to be based instead on human autonomy, rational capacity, and the potential for individual self-perfection. This transformation produced a new anthropological and conceptual foundation that located human value in intrinsic human capacities.

In the modern period, human dignity has been conceptualised as an inalienable and universal status acquired by birth, understood as a natural consequence of possessing reason and free will. In contemporary contexts, the concept has extended beyond an individual attribute to become a foundational principle of human rights regimes, constitutional orders, and universal ethical standards. As such, human dignity has come to function as a constitutive norm endowed with moral and political universality.

This historical-semiotic framework demonstrates that human dignity is a dynamic concept that has been reshaped in different periods through varying normative contents. Within religious traditions, the meanings attributed to human dignity do not constitute a single, homogeneous value; rather, they are articulated through diverse perspectives shaped by the plural and contextual character of belief systems. Indeed, whether human dignity can be said to possess a universal meaning from a theological perspective remains a matter of debate. Religious communities, by virtue of their structural characteristics, tend to be relatively closed and primordial in nature and therefore exhibit a propensity to construct an “other.” Moreover, sacred texts, owing to their dogmatic character and claimed divine origin, are not inherently flexible or open to spontaneous reinterpretation. Human life, by contrast, is a continuously changing process that generates new needs and challenges. This asymmetry complicates theological interpretations of human dignity, since sacred texts do not automatically contain the flexibility required to respond to emerging social, ethical, and moral phenomena.

Throughout history, factors such as violent religious wars, the exclusion and persecution of religious minorities by dominant traditions, exposure to physical violence, exile, and massacres, as well as gender-centred value hierarchies embedded in sacred texts and religious social practices-particularly rigid moral approaches to sexuality, gender definitions, and the social position of women-have further complicated theological engagements with human dignity.

At the same time, theological interpretations have increasingly sought to adopt a

reflexive stance in order to confer universality and normative validity upon claims related to human dignity. In this context, interpretive theological approaches that subject sacred texts to critical hermeneutical engagement, with the aim of responding to human needs, have become especially salient.

Human Dignity in the Context of Classical Monotheistic Approaches

The concept of “human dignity” does not appear as an explicit or terminologically fixed category in the oral and written sources upon which Alevi belief is grounded. Similarly, the canonical revelatory texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam do not contain a systematic or fully articulated conceptualisation of human dignity. Nevertheless, each of these traditions develops narratives, symbols, and theological interpretations concerning the position of the human being within the order of creation and the nature of the God-human relationship, which provide indirect yet powerful interpretive frameworks for understanding human dignity. One of the earliest examples of such theological-anthropological interpretations can be found in Philo of Alexandria (ca. 25 BCE-50 CE), who interpreted Jewish sacred texts through a synthesis with Ancient Greek philosophy. Philo constructs a divinely grounded order and hierarchy of beings and situates the human within this hierarchy as a subject endowed with divine consciousness and responsibility. According to Philo, God created plants with their roots fixed in the ground and their heads turned downward, animals with their heads raised upward, and human beings as creatures whose gaze is directed not toward the earth but toward the heavens. Humans are thus conceived not merely as earthly beings, but as “heavenly beings” (*Himmelsgewächse*) (Philo, cited in Wetz 2019, 41).

This theological-anthropological interpretation grounds human value and privileged status in humanity’s orientation toward the divine and its capacity for a relationship with God, thereby offering a theological mode of reflection on human dignity.

This conception of the human as occupying a privileged position within the order of creation was further developed and sustained in early Christian thought. As Franz Josef Wetz notes, a significant number of early Christian thinkers-both Latin and Greek Church Fathers-explicitly rejected approaches that grounded human dignity in external appearance, social status, or noble lineage. For these thinkers, genuine dignity was neither a title acquired later in life nor an aristocratic privilege transmitted through bloodline. Rather, human dignity was understood as a form of “created nobility” bestowed by God (*geschöpfliche Adelshaftigkeit*) (Wetz 2019, 43). In this way, dignity was detached from social status and linked directly to God. Augustine similarly articulated a hierarchy among created beings: inanimate entities are

subordinate to living beings, plants to animals, animals to rational beings, and among rational beings, immortal entities (angels) are superior to mortal ones (humans). According to Augustine, this hierarchy constitutes the order of nature (Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, cited in Wetz 2019, 53). By systematising the creation doctrine grounded in the Old Testament concept of *imago Dei*, Augustine connected human superiority over other creatures to the possession of a rational and cognitive soul. Through this intellectual and spiritual endowment granted by God, humans are distinguished from creatures of land, sea, and air and occupy a privileged position within the order of creation (Augustine, cited in Wetz 2019, 54):

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis, cited in Wetz 2019, 39).

A comparable scriptural-theoretical prefiguration can be identified within the Islamic conception of the God-human relationship. In the Qur’anic narrative, despite the objections of the angels, the human being is created as God’s *khalīfa* (vicegerent) on earth (Qur’an, al-Baqara 2:30-33). This formulation emphasises that human value is not contingent upon social status, moral virtue, or lineage, but rests directly upon God’s creative and appointing will.

Similar approaches to human value are also evident in Alevism, most notably in the *Buyruk* [1] texts, where the human is described as God’s witness and mirror. Because Alevism does not rest upon a canonised, scripture-centred revelatory tradition, the sources through which sacred meaning is articulated are diverse and formally multilayered-encompassing oral, written, and ritual forms-and at times incorporate theologically divergent pantheistic and panentheistic elements. This plurality complicates any interpretation of human dignity solely within a strictly monotheistic framework. At the same time, it enables Alevism to offer a multifaceted and productive interpretation of human dignity. From within the Alevi belief system, human dignity may therefore be approached on two theological levels: creation theology and process theology.

The Monotheistic Foundations of Human Dignity in the Alevi Creation Narrative: Creation Theology

Within the Alevi understanding of creation, human dignity can be examined through written and oral traditions in which it is explicitly traceable, as well as through poetic narratives in which it is expressed indirectly with varying emphases across different

periods. While this understanding broadly rests on a monotheistic or classical theistic conception of God, it also incorporates distinctive and esoteric theological interpretations that at times stretch this framework (see *Küçük Buyruk*, 162-172). In these narratives, God is conceived as one and absolute, endowed with unlimited creative power, creating ex nihilo (*creatio ex nihilo*), and ontologically distinct in essence (*substantia*) from both humanity and nature, thus representing a classically transcendent being (Güzelmansur 2012, 92-93).

In classical monotheistic theology, although God's power is determinative over the entirety of the universe, God remains unaffected by creation and preserves divine immutability. In this framework, God functions as the absolute point of reference that makes existence possible, while the human being is positioned as ontologically dependent upon this absolute power. The relationship between creator and created is thus established on an insurmountable onto-theological ground. Within such a framework, the human experience of God appears not as a rational comprehension but as an existential and unidirectional encounter. As conceptualised by Rudolf Otto, this experience initially manifests as a "feeling of creatureliness" (*das Kreaturgefühl*) (Otto 2014, 8-12), through which humans apprehend their own finitude and their position before God. In this encounter, God is not experienced as an entity fully graspable by reason, but rather as a mystery that evokes awe and dread and transcends the limits of rational understanding (*mysterium tremendum*) (Otto 2014, 14ff.). According to Otto, the third moment of the experience of the sacred-majesty (*majestas* / *das Moment des Übermächtigen*)-expresses an awareness of absolute nothingness arising from confrontation with God's overwhelming transcendent power (Otto 2014, 22-23).

In general terms, Alevi narratives do not posit a complete identification between God and the human being. Although God is conceived as proximate to humanity and engaged in relationship with it, the fundamental distinction between creator and created is preserved. This approach represents one of the plural interpretive horizons within Alevi thought that resists reducing the God-human relationship to a single model. While the classical theistic framework is maintained, the relationship between God and humanity is not understood solely as one of unilateral power, exaltation, and command. Creation is conceived not only as a manifestation of God's absolute will, but also as a relational horizon that opens the God-human relationship to God's desire to be known or to divine solitude, articulated within a dialogical plane of mutual address.

In the *Buyruk* texts, creation begins with God as a hidden treasure and with the desire to be known: "I was a hidden treasure; I wished to be known; I loved myself, I created this people, I disclosed and revealed my hidden treasure" (*Küçük Buyruk*, 163).

This narrative allows creation to be understood not as a unilateral display of divine power, but as an unfolding of divine being grounded in knowledge and love. In this sense, God's "desire to be known" corresponds to a relational conception in which truth becomes possible only through the presence of an addressee. Indeed, Adam's proclamation-"Praise be to the Lord of the worlds"-uttered after being brought to life by God (*Küçük Buyruk*, 172), demonstrates humanity's response to God's desire for recognition. This interpretation softens rigid monotheistic readings that radically isolate God from the world and exclude relationality, instead allowing the God-human relationship to be conceptualised within a theological framework open to reciprocity and communication.

Similarly, another creation narrative in the *Buyruk* directly associates God's motivation for creation with the human being as a means of rendering divine existence visible:

"The will (*meşiyyet*) of the Truth surged forth, and the will of the Truth was directed toward creating a kind of creature that would serve as a witnessing mirror to God's own being. Thus, one hundred and twenty thousand subtle-bodied human forms were created in the likeness of Adam, all of whom existed before the father of humankind, Adam, and before the angels" (*Küçük Buyruk*, 165).

Within this framework, human dignity emerges as a primordial, inalienable, and unconditional value bestowed upon humanity in relation to God's desire to be known and recognised. Human beings do not acquire this value through historical practice or moral self-cultivation; rather, it is granted by God as intrinsic to the very structure of creation. In terms of the creation narrative, its source lies in God alone, and it therefore possesses a heteronomous character.

This heteronomous value, however, is not conceived as a static or otherworldly phenomenon. In Alevi thought, human dignity extends beyond an initial value given at creation and acquires meaning through a process in which it is brought to consciousness within the human moral and existential journey, even through a positive form of estrangement from one's original state. For this reason, a theistic grounding centred on creation inevitably opens space for a process-oriented theological interpretation.

Accordingly, in Alevi thought, human dignity can be understood on two levels. The first is a primordial or objective dignity, grounded directly in God, which humans possess unconditionally by virtue of being human. The second is a secondary or subjective dignity, through which individuals come to realise and actualise this value within processes of social and moral maturation. While primordial dignity arises from humanity's selection by God as a meaningful interlocutor, secondary dignity takes

shape through conscious life practice oriented toward the telos of *insân-ı kâmil* and through the dialectical relationship established with God.

The moral and pedagogical framework of this process is articulated in Alevi teaching through core principles such as the Four Gates and Forty Stations, *ikrar* (commitment), *rızalık* (consent), and tolerance. In this way, human dignity assumes a dual-layered structure: it is both an intrinsic value bestowed by God and a processual value realised through human moral and existential effort.

The Process-Theological Context of Human Dignity in Alevi Theology

Although Alevi teaching encompasses diverse theological interpretations of the God-human relationship-ranging from classical monotheistic narratives to pantheistic and panentheistic tendencies-these approaches converge on a shared premise: the relationship between God and the human being is not conceived as unidirectional, static, or closed, but rather as grounded in reciprocal orientation and interaction within human moral, spiritual (*irfanî*), and lived practice. In this respect, Alevi theology articulates an understanding that emphasizes the structural, existential, and dialectical character of the relationship between *Hak* and the human being, rather than isolating God from the world within an absolute transcendence typical of classical, scripture-centered models.

Within this framework, the human being apprehends God’s existence while simultaneously coming to apprehend the self, thereby positioning oneself as a subject addressed by the divine. This encounter encourages an understanding of the God-human relationship not as a static and pre-defined relation founded on a strict creator-creature dichotomy, but as a process that unfolds within human consciousness and deepens through lived practice-one that derives its meaning predominantly from human experience. This relational and processual conception of the God-human relationship observable in Alevi belief exhibits notable parallels with modern theological approaches collectively referred to as process theology.

Process theology emerged in the twentieth century within philosophical-theological debates with the aim of rethinking the God-world relationship beyond the transcendent God of classical theism. Its philosophical foundation lies in Alfred North Whitehead’s process metaphysics, developed in *Process and Reality*. According to Whitehead, reality is not a closed system composed of immutable substances; rather, it is a continuous process constituted by relations, events, and reciprocal interactions. Being, therefore, is understood not as a fixed essence but as an ongoing becoming within relationality. In this context, Whitehead subjects the classical monotheistic conception of God to a radical critique at both historical and metaphysical levels,

problematizing the notion of God as an unaffected absolute isolated from the world. Whitehead argues that, despite historical variations, classical theistic thought has fundamentally conceptualized God through three models: a sovereign ruler in the politico-theological sphere; a commanding lawgiver in the moral-theological sphere-particularly evident in the Hebrew prophetic tradition and the rise of Islam; and, in the metaphysical sphere, the Aristotelian model of an unmoved mover or first cause, isolated from relation (Whitehead 2021, 612). Although these models arise in different contexts, they share a common tendency: God is articulated either in terms of power, moral command, or abstract metaphysical principle. As a result, this conceptual figure detaches God from the processes of the world, its relational texture, and its creative plurality.

By contrast, Whitehead's conception of God is intrinsically bipolar, consisting of a primordial (or initial) nature (*uranfängliche Natur*) and a consequent (or secondary) nature (*Folgenatur*). The primordial nature comprises a conceptual description of all attributes ascribed to God, independent of time and space. While this dimension is immutable and stable, it does not depict God as external to or disengaged from the world. Rather, the primordial nature provides the metaphysical and conceptual ground necessary for creative processes in the world; it functions as the precondition of creative action (Whitehead 2021, 616-617).

Whereas the primordial nature is conceptual and unchanging, the consequent nature is shaped through the interaction between the conceptual foundations of God's primordial nature and the concrete processes of the world, thereby representing God's conscious dimension (Whitehead 2021, 616). In this sense, God does not directly transform the world or govern it through coercive sovereignty; instead, God guides it. As Whitehead famously puts it: "God does not create the world, he saves it; God is the poet of the world, guiding it with tender patience by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness" (Whitehead 2021, 618). Thus, the God-world relationship is conceived as a relational reality that integrates world processes through transformations of consciousness in the consequent nature, rather than through coercive domination.

Whitehead's process philosophy was adopted and systematized at the theological level by Charles Hartshorne within the framework of neoclassical theism. As Faber notes, Hartshorne's work can be read as a theological interpretation of Whitehead's cosmology (Faber 2003, 29). For Hartshorne, God is no longer an absolutely transcendent being detached from the world; rather, God is the principle of the world's existence, its soul, while the world constitutes God's corporeal body (Faber 2003, 31). In this framework, the God-world relationship is understood not as a one-sided scheme of creation that positions God as distant from and opposed to the world, but as a

relational structure operating through immanence.

At precisely this point, process theology rejects the classical theistic approach that situates God outside of process. Consequently, the God-world relationship is no longer conceived as a unilateral model of causality or sovereignty, but as a reciprocal, dialectical, and interactive relation. Within this relationship, both God and the world undergo transformation by becoming estranged from their primordial natures and acquiring new experiences; reality becomes manifest precisely within this encounter and process of transformation.

In Alevi teaching, God’s self-disclosure in creation is approached through mystical, gnostic, and Neoplatonic multi-layered interpretations of the God-world relationship. It is precisely here that a clear intersection emerges between Alevi theological thought and modern process theology: in both approaches, God is understood not as a static and immutable essence, but as a relational reality unfolding within process.

While this line of thought shares certain points of contact with the metaphysics of *wahdat al-wujūd* systematized by Ibn ʿArabī (1165-1240) within Islamic mysticism, it cannot be situated on an identical conceptual ground with Alevi interpretation. For Ibn ʿArabī, although God is conceived as the ultimate source of being, God ultimately preserves absolute transcendence as a truth that is eternally unknowable and unattainable in its entirety (Schimmel 2002, 79). In Alevi thought, by contrast, God is understood as manifesting within all created beings without establishing a substantial identity with them; yet God is also not withdrawn into an entirely inaccessible sphere of transcendence. For this reason, although Alevi theology is at times associated with pantheism, what is at stake here is not the identity of God and the world, but a processual and relational ontological conception in which God becomes visible within creation. Within this framework, *insân-ı kâmil* corresponds to the process of unification with God, a notion frequently expressed in Alevi discourse through the phrase “the human is in *Hak*, and *Hak* is in the human.”

This approach provides a flexible conceptual ground-also formative for Alevi cosmogony-through an emanationist ontology in which being flows from a divine source and manifests within multiplicity. Without excluding a monotheistic understanding of creation, this ground opens a broad theological-hermeneutic horizon receptive to pantheistic and panentheistic interpretations. In this context, the doctrine of emanation emerges as a key element that structurally loosens the monotheistic interpretation of *creatio ex nihilo*, thereby opening pathways toward pantheistic and panentheistic conceptions of being.

Etymologically derived from the Latin *emanatio*, the concept of emanation has been

employed especially within gnostic traditions as a key model for explaining the manifestation of divine reality in multiplicity. The doctrine of emanation grounds the relationship between unity and multiplicity through the concept of the “One.” In Neoplatonic thought, the One is conceived as the ultimate source of all that exists and as the divine principle. According to Plotinus’s ontological schema (Tornau 2001, 13), the One occupies the highest position within the hierarchy and simultaneously constitutes the principle of the Good. From the One emanates intellect (*nous/intellectus*), and from intellect emerges soul (*psyche*). Together, these three principles or hypostases constitute primary reality. Beneath them lies the sensually experienced material world, while at the lowest level stands formless matter, associated with deficiency and evil.

This conceptual structure becomes particularly visible within Alevi tradition, especially in Bektashi-Alevi poetry and literature. Here, God is conceived, on the one hand, as the first being or primordial substance within the unity of existence, and on the other hand, as a process that completes itself through cyclical movement. This cycle is described through the arc of descent (*kavs-i nüzûl*), moving from the divine essence toward creation, and the arc of ascent (*kavs-i urûc*), moving from creation back toward unity with God. In this way, different modes of divine existence are expressed within a systematic totality (see Noyan Dedebaba 2001, 123f). Anton Josef Dierl systematizes this emanation process in a similar three-stage structure. In the first stage, God exists as a primordial deity (*Ur-Gott*) not yet conscious of itself. In the second stage, through processes of alienation in a Hegelian sense, God acquires identity and is designated as *Hak*. In the third stage, *Hak* produces the first intellect or logos. This primordial logos is understood both as the constitutive principle of the world and as divine light; since the human body is conceived as a microcosm, this primordial logos is identified with the human being’s own originary logos (Dierl 1985, 65-67; Gürtaş 2006, 208).

Within the Alevi-Bektashi tradition, the doctrine of emanation is expressed not through abstract metaphysical propositions but through poetic language and liturgical discourse, employing concrete imagery. The verses cited below render visible the relationship between *Hak* and the human being as a processual and reciprocal field of cognition. In this process, the human attains consciousness by apprehending *Hak*, while *Hak* is known and becomes manifest through the human. Emanation is thus conceived not merely as the outflow of being from God, but as a relational form in which consciousness, identity, and qualities are mutually disclosed, transformed, and ultimately united in the One. In this sense, the human being transcends the status of a merely created entity and is elevated to the position of a subject endowed with divine qualities.

Cihân var olmadan ketm-i ademde

Hak ile birlikte yekdâş idim ben

Yarattı bu mülkü çünkü o demde

Yaptım tasvirini nakkâş idim ben

Anâsırdan bir libâsa büründüm

Nâr u bâd ü âb ü hâktan göründüm

Hayrü’l-beşer ile dünyaya geldim

Âdem ile bir yaş idim ben

Bektaş Çelebi (Alias Şiri, 18. Jh.)

* * *

Daha Allah ile cihân yok iken

Biz ani var edip ilân eyledik

Hak’ka hiçbir lâyık mekân yok iken

Hanemize aldık mihmân eyledik

Kendisinin henüz ismi yok idi

İsmi söyle dursun cismi yok idi

Hiçbir kıyafeti resmi yok idi

Şekil verip tıpkı insan eyledik

Edip Harabi (1900)

* * *

Kâinatın aynasıyım

Madem ki ben bir insanım

Hakkın varlık deryasıyım

Madem ki ben bir insanım

İnsan hakta hak insanda

Arıyorsan bak insanda

Hiç eksiklik yok insanda

Madem ki ben bir insanım

Aşık İsmail Daimi (1932-1983)

* * *

Hem batiniyim hem zahiriyim

Hem evvelim hem ahiriyim

Hem ben oyum hem o benim

Hem O kerim-i han benim.

Yunus Emre (1273-1321)

In this context, the doctrine of the Four Gates and Forty Stations (Dört Kapı Kırk Makâm) provides a central framework that systematically structures the moral and theological orientation the human being follows within the process of emanation. In accordance with the logic of emanation, moral development unfolds as a gradual and directional process. The telos of this process is the human being's becoming *insân-ı kâmil*, that is, attaining annihilation in *Hak* (*fanā' fi'l-Hak*) and reaching a state of unity in which the distinction between the human and *Hak* is dissolved.

The Gate of Sharia situates the human being within a heteronomous framework of law, norms, and sanctions. At this stage, the individual does not yet grasp value through an internalized moral consciousness, but rather through external rules and mechanisms of reward and punishment. Although primordial dignity is already present, it has not yet assumed the form of an internalized ethical disposition; instead, it is recognized primarily through compliance with prescribed norms, and moral perspective has not fully risen to the level of reflective consciousness.

The Gate of Tariqa represents the stage at which the human being no longer remains content with this heteronomous order and begins to assume responsibility. *Ikrar* (the vow or pledge) marks a decisive threshold here: the individual declares responsibility

not only toward God but also toward the community. With the principle of *rızalık* (mutual consent), morality transcends a purely individual orientation and acquires a social dimension. Within social relations founded on reciprocity and recognition, the human being learns to become the agent of their own actions.

The Gate of Marifet signifies the level at which this assumed responsibility deepens at the level of consciousness. At this stage, the individual recognizes not only the self but also the other as a moral subject. The principle of “controlling one’s hand, loins, and tongue” (*eline, beline, diline sahip olmak*) marks the transition between individual morality and social ethics. The teaching of “regarding the seventy-two nations with the same gaze” enables human dignity to be conceived as a universal value, not confined to a single identity, belief, or affiliation. At this level, the human being claims dignity not only for the self but also for others; thus, human dignity becomes a dialogical and constitutive principle within social relations.

At the Gate of Hakikat, processual tensions come to an end. At this stage, dialectical oppositions are no longer operative. The human being reaches the highest level of their own process of becoming. The distinction between the human and God loses its significance, and the human attains unity with *Hak* in the form of *unio mystica*. Here, the telos of *insân-ı kâmil* corresponds not only to moral perfection but also to an ontological transformation.

Within this framework, Alevi teaching conceptualizes human dignity as an ethical structure that is realized and continually reproduced within social relations. The principles of tolerance, *rızalık*, and reciprocity constitute not only the foundation of moral maturation but also the basis of an ethics of peace, an awareness of gender equality, and a sense of responsibility in the relationship between humans and nature. In this way, Alevi moral thought transcends the narrow confines of a purely moral-theological system and opens onto a broad normative horizon that is receptive to feminist theology, pluralistic (peace) ethics, and ecological responsibility (environmental ethics).

Conclusion

This study has examined the concept of human dignity from an Alevi perspective by addressing it on two theological levels: creation theology and process theology. The analysis has made it possible to conceptualize human dignity in two dimensions. The first is primordial, God-given dignity-God-originated, heteronomous, or objective-bestowed upon the human being by God. The second is secondary, subjective dignity, which is shaped through moral practices and social relations. This dual structure provides a decisive framework for situating Alevi anthropology in a position that

exhibits both continuity with classical theistic conceptions of the human being and a distinctive theological distance from them.

In the first stage, drawing on Alevi creation narratives, the human being is shown to have been created as God’s witness and mirror, and thus to possess primordial dignity. This dignity is defined as a value granted by God to the human being solely by virtue of being human; it is not constructed through social processes. In this sense, divinely originated dignity may be characterized as absolute and primary dignity.

In the second stage, within a process-theological perspective, human dignity is approached as a becoming, that is, as a process. The striving toward *insân-ı kâmil* is examined within the framework of the doctrine of emanation, which is implicitly observable in creation narratives and explicitly articulated in Alevi poetry. In this process, both God and the human being are positioned within a dialectical structure in which they participate in the unfolding of truth. Accordingly, neither can the human being, as a created entity, fully constitute truth, nor can God, conceived as the “hidden treasure,” disclose all dimensions of truth in isolation. In this way, the human being’s primary dignity is revealed as a secondary, subjective value that must be shaped and realized within an ongoing process.

Although not examined directly in this study, human dignity also constitutes another important dimension that must be addressed in relation to the historical injustices experienced by Alevis. What is at issue here is not a new type of dignity, but rather a distinct, victim-centered mode of relating to human dignity. The historical violence suffered by Alevis on the basis of their identity has enabled a reinterpretation of dignity in a modern context and has created the conditions for contemporary perspectives-such as feminist theology, ecological responsibility, and peace ethics-to be considered within a theological framework.

Endnotes

[1] Whether Buyruk texts and other written Alevi sources can be regarded as foundational sources of Alevism is addressed with differing approaches in the existing scholarship. In this study, the Buyruk texts examined have not been subjected to a comprehensive and critical analysis within the context of these debates. Nevertheless, it can be argued that, if not in their entirety, certain sections of the Buyruk texts contain elements that overlap at the level of content with Alevi narratives. In this respect, it is possible to speak of a limited and conditional correspondence between Buyruk texts and oral Alevi narratives. In the study, the relationship between God and human is discussed through a selected Buyruk example. Critical readings of the

Buyruk texts and intertextual comparisons are beyond the scope of this study.

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