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Dignity Across the Lifespan[1]

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the similarities and differences between Juliana Bidadanure's account of justice across age groups (2021) and my own (2020). While we both hold that age-based inequalities are objectionable if they undermine relational equality or cause people's opportunities to dip below a threshold level, we differ when it comes to the specific characterization of a threshold and its basis. Section 1 brings to light three salient differences and argues that in each case, my rendering of sufficiency has decisive advantages. Section 2 takes up the first difference, which concerns the specification of sufficiency as normal opportunities versus central human capabilities. Section 3 explores the second difference, which pertains to justifying sufficiency across the lifespan by appealing to prudence versus dignity. Section 4 considers the third difference, which relates to whether the standard of sufficiency is relative to a particular society or to human capabilities broadly understood. Section 5 responds to two objections. The paper concludes that while Bidadanure's account of age-group justice appropriately targets relational equality and threshold opportunity, the specification of sufficiency falls short. It does not adequately safeguard people's ability to lead nonhumiliating human lives.

Keywords: age-group justice, normal opportunity, sufficientarianism, human capabilities, relational equality, human dignity.

Inequalities between old and young are sometimes justified because they improve people's quality of life over time, from a whole-life or "diachronic" perspective. For example, a policy of prioritizing younger people for lifesaving medical care may be justified on the ground that over time, it increases the chance that people can live a life of normal length (Daniels 1988). Yet, in other instances, in-the-moment or "synchronic" inequalities

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between old and young strike us as ethically objectionable. Juliana Bidadanure (2021) proposes two reasons why this might be the case. First, synchronic inequalities might be objectionable because they undermine equality in relationships between young and old, making it impossible for them to stand together as equals. Second, synchronic inequalities between age groups might be unacceptable because they cause individuals to fall below a sufficiency threshold, which Bidadanure understands as a normal range of opportunities.

At a high level of theorizing, Bidadanure and I agree. Like Bidadanure, I hold that age-based inequalities are objectionable if they undermine relational equality or cause threshold opportunities to dip below a minimum level (Jecker 2020). However, when it comes to the specific characterization of a threshold and its basis, we differ. First, while Bidadanure appeals to “normal opportunity” to set the threshold, I appeal to a list of central human capabilities, which are more expansive than the notion of life plans that reflect the choices of mature, cognitively intact adults. The capability list I propose includes being able to author a narrative or story of one’s life that is still unfolding; being physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy; having bodily integrity; exercising senses, imagination and thought; expressing a range of human emotions; reasoning about plans and goals; affiliating with others; relating to nature and other species; playing and recreating; and regulating the immediate environment. Second, Bidadanure and I differ about the underlying justification for the threshold. While Bidadanure appeals to first-person prudential reasoning to lend support to sufficiency, working in the tradition of Norman Daniels (1988), I appeal to dignity and securing people’s ability to lead nonhumiliating lives, working in the tradition of Martha Nussbaum (2011). A third difference is that Bidadanure characterizes sufficiency as relative to a particular society, while I argue it is constant (though not immutable) and relates to our understanding of common humanity.

This paper explores these differences, elaborating when and why they matter. Section 2 briefly reviews the two accounts, highlighting their similarities and differences and bringing to light the three salient differences. Sections 2, 3, and 4 take up these differences, arguing that in each case, my rendering of sufficiency has decisive advantages. Section 2 takes up the first difference, comparing normal opportunities with capability sufficiency. Section 3 explores the second difference, concerning justifying sufficiency by means of prudence versus dignity. Section 4 considers the third difference, concerning the standard of sufficiency and whether it is relative to a society or to human capabilities. Section 5 responds to objections. The paper concludes that Bidadanure’s rendering

of sufficiency does not adequately safeguard people's ability to lead nonhumiliating lives.

1. TWO ACCOUNTS OF AGE-GROUP JUSTICE

1.1. Normal Opportunity

Bidadanure maintains that what is most ethically troubling about synchronous inequalities "is not that there is a time-slice inequality in distributions as such, but rather that relationships of inequality may pertain at all times" (94). As Bidadanure notes, judgments of synchronic equality or inequality are in a certain sense arbitrary, since whether two individuals are synchronically equal or unequal depends, arbitrarily, on the time segment selected. For example,

> if Bob is worse off than Anna at T2, then he should be assisted. But T2 is itself a collection of smaller segments—say four segments of five years. It seems no less arbitrary to focus on either of those sub-segments than to register the inequality over T2. The simultaneous segments view is thus objectionably incomplete unless it provides some reasons that explain what distinguishes segments that matter from those that do not. (90)

To address the arbitrariness of time segment selection, Bidadanure offers a counterproposal, which centers relationships, pointing out that the arbitrariness of which time segment to select to assess objectionable inequality is a concern that is largely limited to distributive inequalities; it does not raise a significant concern for relational inequalities. This is because relational inequalities tend to be relatively stable from one time slice to the next, baked into social structures and systems, like families, workplaces, and religious institutions, which change slowly. In contrast to resource distribution, which may begin and end abruptly, relationships unfold over time and are more apt to be ongoing from one moment to the next.

Further developing a relational analysis, Bidadanure appeals to relational conceptions of equality developed by philosophers such as Iris Marion Young (2011), Elizabeth Anderson (1999), and Samuel Scheffler (2003; 2015), which seek to balance the field's heavy emphasis on equality of wealth, income, and other material goods with an emphasis on equality in social relationships. Young (2011: 16), for example, calls for displacing "talk of justice that regards persons as primarily possessors and consumers of goods to a wider context that also includes action, decisions about

action, and provision of the means to develop and exercise capacities specifically”. While some distributive theories purport to include relationships already, under headings like “power”, “opportunity”, and “self-respect”, Bidadanure maintains that a distributive approach distorts relationships, seeing them as static things that get distributed, not dynamic social processes. According to Bidadanure, what justice demands is not a particular resource allocation, but instead synchronous relational equality, which consists of the realization of “a community where individuals are able to relate and stand as equals” (96). Synchronous relational equality demands that societies make reasonable efforts to eliminate or reduce inequalities that interfere with equal standing between persons.

The kind of synchronic inequalities that most concern Bidadanure are those that thwart coming together as equals with barriers like domination, marginalization, stigmatization, demonization, and infantilization. For example, both “elderspeak,” a form of baby talk directed to older adults (Caporael 1981), and “ageism,” or disparaging ways of thinking, feeling and acting toward people based on their age (World Health Organization 2021), count as morally problematic on this account, because both stigmatize, marginalize, and infantilize older people. To combat these and other sources of relational inequality, Bidadanure introduces a principle of synchronic relational equality (hereafter “Principle of Relational Equality”):

> *Principle of Relational Equality:* People of different ages must be able to stand before one another as moral equals.

This principle provides “reasons to worry about synchronic relational inequalities independently of whether they correspond to a whole life distribution that is fair and prudent” (85). Even if inequalities even out over time, they still might be morally objectionable if they run afoul of the requirements of relational equality.

In addition to ensuring that people of all ages can relate as equals, Bidadanure wants to ensure that each has threshold opportunities. Bidadanure specifies the threshold by adapting the account of prudence that Daniels (1988) proffers. According to Daniels, *prudence* is a device which, when applied behind a veil of ignorance about a person’s age (“veiled prudence”), protects individuals’ interests throughout their lives. It accomplishes this because deliberators have a stake in protecting their interests at each stage of life, because they are *their* interests. While Daniels applies prudence to the distribution of scarce healthcare resources, Bidadanure applies veiled prudence across multiple domains, including not just healthcare, but also income, education, employment, and politics. Across each domain, Bidadanure argues veiled prudence demands

sufficiency, defined as follows:

> *Principle of Lifespan Sufficiency:* Institutions must ensure that all age groups have enough to enjoy a normal range of opportunities at each and every stage of their lives. (56)

Bidadanure admits that appealing to "normal opportunities" is a delicate matter, and risks building in biases about what opportunities count as "normal" at each stage of a person's life. Nevertheless, Bidadanure thinks that invoking a "normal range of opportunities" carries advantages, and that the risks of introducing bias are manageable. Among the advantages cited are that appeals to normal opportunity support age-related limits under conditions of scarcity. For example, Bidadanure imagines a forced choice scenario where a choice must be made about whether to allocate the limited healthcare resources necessary to restore mobility. In this scenario, considering what mobility is normal for people at each stage of life affords a basis for age-based limits. For example, if it is age-typical for an older person to need mobility assistance but not a younger person, or vice versa, then we can treat people differently while still affording each person a normal range of opportunities relative to their age or life stage. In this example, the appeal to age-related normal opportunity does the work of determining what counts as sufficient opportunities at different ages and stages of life.

Yet the risk of introducing age bias must be managed. Bidadanure attempts to do the work of managing age bias in the account of sufficiency by drawing on Daniels' notion of accountability for reasonableness and adapting it to the problem at hand. Bidadanure envisions a procedure involving democratic deliberation, in which representatives from diverse age groups come together to specify a normal opportunity range for each age or stage of life. The procedure affords a "frame for thinking about age-group transfers" and helps identify "rules of thumb, [age] comparative principles, and absolute minimums that can help age groups in a particular society deliberate successfully" (59). For example, employing accountability for reasonableness in this way can correct ageism against young people in the political process by potentially giving younger people a louder voice in political processes where their influence might otherwise be muted due to minimum voting ages; the absence of upper age limits for political offices; and the general tendency of youth to move their place of residence more frequently than people of other ages, rendering them ineligible for certain political opportunities and offices.

1.2. Dignified Lives

At a high level of generality, Bidadanure and I agree. In *Ending Midlife Bias*, I set forth the following two principles emphasizing equality and sufficiency:

> *Principle of Relational Equality:* A just society structures social relations to support equal standing between persons.
>
> *Principle of Dignified Lives:* A just society ensures that individuals have central human capabilities at the threshold level required for leading a nonhumiliating human life. (Jecker 2020: 128, 131)[2]

Taken together, my two principles require societies to make reasonable efforts to ensure both that basic institutions support equal standing between persons, and that they enable individuals to lead dignified lives. The first principle, relational equality, is diachronic, applying across whole lives. This means that disadvantages at one time can potentially be offset by advantages at another. However, the Principle of Dignified Lives is synchronic, applying at each time slice or moment; it therefore imposes a constraint on trading off burdens and benefits across the lifespan by requiring that trade-offs do not cause people to fall below capability sufficiency.

I will not dwell much on the Principle of Relational Equality, because Bidadanure's and my view significantly overlap. Yet it is worth noting briefly how our views of relational equality differ. The key difference lies in how we frame the principle, rather than in the principle itself. While I frame relational equality diachronically, Bidadanure frames it synchronically. Thus my principle permits trading-off advantages and disadvantages, which Bidadanure's principle forbids. However, my principle of relational equality is not sufficient on it its own; I pair it with a Principle of Dignified Lives, framed synchronically. This principle requires equality of threshold capabilities from moment to moment. For this reason, the difference between Bidadanure's view and mine is less stark than it might appear initially. Certainly, not all versions of a capability views are egalitarian, and those that are can be developed in different ways (Arneson 2013). Mine embraces equality of threshold capabilities but countenances inequalities above the threshold.

I turn next to the Principle of Dignified Lives, where there are substantive differences between my account and Bidadanure's, and argue that mine

[2] In *Ending Midlife Bias*, I refer to the "Principle of Dignified Lives" as the "Principle of Capability Sufficiency". These two principles are the same. The shift to "dignified lives" is to accentuate the link between capability sufficiency and being able to lead a nonhumiliating human life. However, I do not mean to suggest that dignity and nonhumiliation are the same, since not all indignities involve humiliation—some occur when a person is drunk, comatose, or intellectually impaired and lacking any awareness that their dignity is being flouted (see Jecker 2020: 160ff.).

carries distinct advantages. To begin with, whereas Bidadanure's Principle of Lifespan Sufficiency emphasizes normal opportunities, my Principle of Dignified Lives emphasizes human dignity. It is necessary to say something by way of clarification about my appeal to "dignity", since the concept is contested. Until recently (Waldron 2012; Rosen 2012; Bieri 2017), many philosophers theorizing about justice have pushed the notion of dignity to the periphery. With few exceptions (Jecker 2020; Waldron 2017; Gordon 2018), dignity has not been included in debates about justice between age groups. Rejected by some as "subjectively squishy" (Pinker 2008), and by others as "useless" (Macklin 2003), dignity's critics dismiss it as an exploited and politicized idea (Cochrane 2009). Yet, even if dignity is sometimes misused, this hardly shows that the concept *itself* is useless. Instead, it underscores that those who rely on it must clarify how they are using the term and what actions it requires.

One way I have attempted to clarify "dignity" is by anchoring it specifically to human beings and to the central things they can do and be. *Ending Midlife Bias* interprets human dignity by appealing to the following central human capabilities:

Central Human Capabilities

1. *Life narrative:* having an unfinished story of one's life;
2. *Health:* being able to have all or a cluster of the central capabilities at a threshold level
3. *Bodily integrity:* being able to use one's body to realize one's goals;
4. *Senses, imagination, and thought:* being able to imagine, think, and use the senses;
5. *Emotions:* being able to feel and express a range of human emotions;
6. *Practical reason:* being able to reflect on and choose a plan of life;
7. *Affiliation:* being able to live for and in relation to others;
8. *Nature:* being able to live in relation to nature and other species;
9. *Play:* being able to laugh, play, and recreate; and
10. *Environment:* being able to regulate the immediate physical environment. (Jecker 2020; Nussbaum 2011)

A capability-inspired conception of dignity tells us that individuals can lead dignified lives when they possess all or a cluster of central capabilities at a threshold level.

If we take the above capability list to be plausible, we can draw on it to

formulate the normative principle of dignified lives. As a principle of justice, the Principle of Dignified Lives emphasizes what societies minimally must do to ensure people can lead nonhumiliating lives. Thus all people have reason to value the capability to have a life narrative; to be healthy and well-nourished; to have bodily integrity; to affiliate with others; to exercise senses, imagination and thought; to feel and express a range of human emotions; to play and recreate; and to relate to nature and other species. In some instances, this requires resources; for example, health capability requires food security, housing, and access to basic medical and nursing care to support physical and mental health. On other occasions, reasonable efforts involve supporting the opportunity to move freely from place to place (bodily integrity) or to pursue life plans such as participating in the paid labor force (practical reason). Exactly what counts as reasonable efforts is partly a function of an individual's life stage. For example, bodily integrity understood as the ability to move freely from place to place varies across the life course—infants clearly lack the capability, while able-bodied adults clearly have it. There is "no life stage neutral" approach (Jecker 2020: 40-2). Reasonable efforts also depend in part on a society's resources and stage of economic development. Finally, what we understand as a reasonable effort depends crucially on individuals' ability to convert resources into capabilities. For example, people who are blind require more or different resources than people who are sighted in order to be healthy, affiliate with others, regulate the environment, relate to nature, recreate, and carry out a life plan.

1.3. Similarities and differences

While Bidadanure's and my views about equality are roughly similar, three salient differences emerge with regard to our respective accounts of sufficiency. First, although both accounts seek to protect *threshold opportunities*, Bidadanure elucidates the threshold in terms of a normal range of opportunities at each stage of life, while I stress a threshold level of central human capabilities across the lifespan. Second, while Bidadanure *justifies the threshold* by appealing to first-person prudential reasoning, I appeal to dignity and leading nonhumiliating lives. Third, we differ in viewing threshold opportunities as *relative to a society or constant across human beings*. While Bidadanure assesses people's opportunities by comparing them to the normal opportunity range in their society, I compare people's opportunities to central human capabilities, which are constant (though not immutable) across societies. On my account, variations between societies show us how close or far a society is from capability sufficiency. In the next sections (2, 3, and 4), I consider each

difference in turn, identifying reasons for thinking that a preferred account of age-group justice will appeal to threshold capabilities and human dignity, rather than normal opportunities and veiled prudence.

2. NORMAL OPPORTUNITIES VERSUS THRESHOLD CAPABILITIES

As noted, both Bidadanure and I agree that a just society guarantees minimal opportunities at each stage of life. Bidadanure sets the minimum at a normal opportunity range for people in a particular society, while I emphasize ensuring that people can lead nonhumiliating lives, understood in terms of central capabilities to do and be a range of things they have reason to value. In many cases, the differences do not amount to much. For example, in societies where everyone leads a minimally decent life, a "normal opportunity range" will converge with capability minimums. In other instances, the normal range for a particular society might be very low, with many people poorly off. This society's normal range might fall well below capability thresholds, and the two accounts will diverge. To illustrate, consider three scenarios.

> *Scenario 1: A society where everyone is very well off:* In this wealthy society, everyone meets (and many exceed) capability minimums. In addition, all people enjoy the normal range of opportunities.

> *Scenario 2: A society where everyone is very poorly off:* In this impoverished society, all people have the normal range of opportunities for the society. Yet many cannot do and be what they have reason to value, such as be healthy, have bodily integrity, deliberate about life plans, or regulate their environment.

> *Scenario 3: A society with a high degree of inequality, resulting in some people being very well off and others very poorly off:* A small percentage of people in this society have ample opportunities throughout life, but the vast majority have meagre chances. Those at the upper echelon can flourish; yet most people lack opportunities to enable them to lead nonhumiliating lives.

These examples serve to illustrate that capabilities and normal opportunity sometimes diverge. To illuminate the difference, it is helpful to distinguish between justice and fairness: two ideas which are frequently used interchangeably, but speak to distinct ethical concerns. Justice indicates giving people their due, showing each person the minimal respect they deserve. Fairness concerns being judged or treated impartially, based on rules or standards applied to everyone, rather than being considered

differently on the basis of morally arbitrary factors. In Scenario 1, justice and fairness converge—the society treats people justly, since everyone has enough, and fairly, since everyone has equal basic chances throughout life. However, in Scenarios 2 and 3 justice and fairness diverge. In Scenario 2, people do not receive the minimal respect they are owed, even though they are treated fairly, while in Scenario 3, some people are treated justly and have decent lives (those at the top rung), while others have less than they should have; no one is treated fairly if the cost of allowing some to flourish is allowing others to fall below the capability thresholds needed to live a dignified life.

Drawing on the distinction between justice and fairness helps bring to light crucial differences between Bidadanure's view and mine. While Bidadanure's Principle of Lifespan Sufficiency ensures fairness, it does not guarantee justice. My Principle of Dignified Lives ensures both; it says essentially that a just society will, at least in a reasonable stepwise way, do what it can to ensure that people can lead dignified lives. People's ability to convert resources into opportunities tends to vary in predictable ways across the lifespan, and at certain life stages, capability shortfalls are more common. The Principle of Dignified Lives ensures that each person at each stage of their life has enough to ensure a capability minimum. To the extent that a society's impoverishment prevents it from making reasonable efforts to ensure dignified lives, it takes steps to realize that goal, moving in a fair and stepwise fashion.

To illustrate how the Principle of Dignified Lives might ensure dignified lives in a society where everyone is very poorly off, consider universal healthcare coverage, defined as "all people receiving quality health services that meet their needs without being exposed to financial hardship in paying for services" (World Health Organization 2014 : x). Even if the society in Scenario 2 cannot afford universal healthcare coverage for its people, it can honor a commitment to justice and fairness as it takes reasonable steps to realize this. For example, the society in Scenario 2 might commit *not* to expand coverage for well-off groups before doing so for worse-off groups (assuming the costs and benefits are not vastly different); it might commit to not expanding coverage for low- or medium-priority services until there is near universal coverage for high-priority services. In both instances, people are shown the minimal respect they are due by minimally protecting their health capabilities.

Does Bidadanure's Principle of Lifespan Sufficiency ensure this? The answer depends on how "normal opportunities" are fleshed out. As mentioned, Bidadanure works in the tradition of Daniels, using the metric of a normal opportunity. According to Daniels' interpretation, normal

functioning across the lifespan converges with capabilities; the difference between them is “more terminological than conceptual or practical” (Daniels 2010: 134). In some instances, Daniels’ assessment is correct; namely, in those societies where the normal range is adequate to guarantee capability minimums (like Scenario 1). In other instances (such as Scenarios 2 and 3), Daniels’ assessment falters, because ensuring a normal opportunity range falls short of ensuring capability thresholds: many people with a normal range of opportunities may be unable to do and be what they have reason to value.

The three examples show that capability sufficiency affords a more stable metric than normal opportunity. It does not hinge upon contingent facts about a society’s level of wealth and resources at a particular time but is instead tethered to human capabilities as such.

Bidadanure might respond to these points by arguing that prudent deliberation builds in limits on what counts as an acceptable normal opportunity range for a society. For example, prudent deliberators would not accept a normal range set low when feasible improvements were achievable. In response, the worry remains that feasible improvements might *not* be achievable when a society is very poorly off. In such cases, the Principle of Dignified Lives spots a problem where the Principle of Lifespan Sufficiency does not. The Principle of Dignified Lives allows us to say that people have not received the minimal respect they deserve, even though they are treated fairly.

To summarize, the approach to age-group justice that Bidadanure offers is meant to apply to societies that contain socioeconomic inequalities of various kinds, with deliberators aiming for sufficiency relative to normal opportunity. However, the commitment of prudent deliberation does not guarantee dignified lives. Even if deliberators ensure fairness in allocating available resources, they do not ensure justice by committing to reasonable efforts to guarantee that people have enough. Bidadanure tells us that normality has *comparative* value and can tell us whether a given arrangement is better or worse (58). Yet the crucial question for justice is not this one. Instead, it is whether normality reaches *sufficiency*—whether people have *enough* to make a dignified human life possible.

3. PRUDENCE VERSUS DIGNITY

An even more significant difference between Bidadanure’s account and mine concerns the justifications we give for the principles of lifespan sufficiency and dignified lives. Bidadanure justifies the Principle of

Lifespan Sufficiency by appealing to veiled prudence. As noted in section 2, Bidadanure reasons that veiled prudence protects individuals' interests throughout their lives, because deliberators have a stake in protecting their interests at each stage of life, since they are *their* interests.

Elsewhere, I have argued that veiled prudence does not fully shield us against ourselves. One concern is that "prudent deliberators who internalize social bias against older people will fail to appreciate their [own] equal value across the lifespan, giving more weight to younger stages of their lives than later ones" (Jecker 2020: 144). This worry is supported by empirical evidence. For example, Banaji and Greenwald report that 80% of all Americans have a stronger "young = good" association than "old = good" association, and this discrepancy is just as strong for elderly as for young respondents (Banji and Greenwald 2013). The implications for prudential reasoning are worrying, casting doubt on whether we can trust ourselves to protect ourselves across the lifespan. More precisely stated, a prudent deliberator who is middle-aged at time t_1 may discriminate against both another person, p_2, who is old at time t_2, and against their own future self, p_1, who becomes old at t_2. The fact that p1 at t_1 is the same person as p1 at t2 does not suffice to protect p1 at t_2 against being the victim of their own bias (Jecker 2020: 144).

A related worry is that the first-person advantage that Bidadanure relies on by appealing to prudence may not yield *any* special advantage. There is no reason to think that p1 at t_2 is less likely to be discriminated against by her former self (p_1 at t_1) than by another person (p_2). In short, those who harbor bias against the old may readily become their own victims, loathing the qualities in themselves that they reject (Jecker 2020: 145).

A still further worry is that prudent planners must be able to deliberate without knowing their age, which implies that they can imagine the possibility that they could be any age. However, how could they *not* know certain facts about their age? For example, they would obviously know they are not infants or small children since they are functioning as fully informed rational deliberators. Knowing this, would they shortchange early life? While old age does not inevitably yield mental decline, it sharply increases the risk of disease and disability. Would this knowledge coupled with ableist and/or ageist bias taint prudential reasoning, prompting deliberators to devalue their own later life? The broader concern these points raise is what I call "midlife bias", the tendency to center midlife and make outliers of other life stages (Jecker 2020). A capability view avoids midlife bias. It holds that people's ability to function in a plurality of ways across the lifespan has dignity and merits respect.

Bidadanure might respond to this concern by setting up the conditions

for deliberating differently. For example, prudent deliberators might use equity weights that offset the tendency toward ableist and ageist bias, thereby treating people with respect at all ages and stages. However, this approach could quickly become cumbrous and fall short of its goal, weighting ages and stages too much or too little. It is not easy to rectify the problem of ableist bias in prudent deliberation, which is why I have chosen a different path.

Bidadanure appears at times to be cognizant of this concern, referring to the importance of preventing "the phenomenon of diachronic clustering of disadvantage" (222). Attempting to address it, Bidadanure invokes Daniels' notion of accountability for reasonableness. Accountability for reasonableness calls for democratic deliberation involving representatives from diverse age groups coming together: "all age groups must work hard to establish what counts as a 'reasonable' set of opportunities for young and old to have access to" (223). Yet the appeal inevitably centers rational deliberation and cannot directly safeguard the stakes of people who are young or cognitively impaired. Thus the problem recurs. Avoiding it requires centering a wider range of capabilities central to being human, including affiliating, expressing emotions, playing, exercising senses and imagination, and relating to animals and nature. Human beings with these capabilities possess a dignity that merits respect, irrespective of whether they can also exercise thought and practical reason.

The analysis brings to light a crucial difference (perhaps *the* crucial difference) between Bidadanure's view and my own. While Bidadanure works within a Kantian tradition, which identifies rationality as the feature that gives human beings superlative moral worth, my capability account takes this view to task. It relies more on an Aristotelian construal of dignity, which is not built around higher-order powers of reasonableness and rationality but on the central things that human beings can do and be (Richardson 2006). The capability approach regards human beings who lack the rationality requisite for intellectual deliberation as having a dignity and worth that "shines like a jewel" (to use Kant's turn of phrase). Kittay puts the point this way: the condition of a self-governing adult—the liberal Kantian model—ought not serve as the "normal" condition of persons. Instead, "the full range of human functioning is the 'normal' condition" (Kittay 2020: 101).

To summarize, by foregrounding a range of things that people can do and be across the lifespan, the capability view as I am developing it invites thinking about human dignity more expansively. Rather than focusing narrowly on individuals as rationally deliberating, self-responsible, and self-governing, the capability view accepts that across the lifespan, people

function in a wide array of ways. While a focus on actively deliberating agents is part of this conception, it is not the whole. Applying a capability lens opens up a larger evaluative space when assessing sufficiency than prudence does.

4. RELATIVE VERSUS CONSTANT THRESHOLDS

A final difference between our accounts is that a capability view steers clear of formulating sufficiency in relative terms, viewing it as a mostly stable threshold. Admittedly, human capabilities could conceivably shift if human beings or their environment were dramatically altered. However, this would require large-scale changes that fundamentally alter what human beings can do and be, like major modifications to the human genome passed down from generation to generation, or climatic changes that reach a level where they make much of the planet unhealthy or uninhabitable.

By contrast, Bidadanure elaborates the normal opportunity range as relative to each particular society, comparing an individual's opportunities to what is considered a normal range for people in their society and setting that as a "reasonable threshold". Elaborating the notion of a "reasonable threshold", Bidadanure tells us that it includes two components—both an "absolute standard" that ensures people are free from deprivation and a "procedural standard" that is "trickier" and hinges on accountability for reasonableness (58). Bidadanure might say that the absolute standard already covers everyone's basic needs. However, in a footnote, Bidadanure acknowledges that "this is only true of relatively rich countries. In poorer countries, the actual normal opportunity range may be lower than the basic needs threshold" (60, note 18). This footnoted qualification underscores why accountability for reasonableness cannot give an account of justice or human dignity. It relies on something outside the account to do that heavy lifting—an account of basic human needs. Other than appealing to human needs, Bidadanure says very little about the absolute threshold. However, she hints at it, suggesting in one place that "it resembles what Axel Gosseries refers to as the requirement of 'continuous sufficiency,' which is grounded on the view that a life well lived necessitates a continuous lifetime access to resources necessary to live a life in dignity" (59-60). What is needed at this juncture is what Bidadanure does not deliver: a full list of the basic human needs that must be met in order to lead a fully dignified human life. Otherwise, the appeal to dignity is little more than a vague, slippery appeal. It is not enough to say that basic needs are obvious—food, clothing, and shelter. Such a minimalist view defines

human *survival,* not *dignity.*

Granted, it is open to Bidadanure to argue that providing an account of basic needs is an independent consideration: while important, it is not essential to justice across the lifespan. That would help explain why Bidadanure relegates it to a footnote. Yet, in reply, on my account, dignity is fundamental to justice across the lifespan. For me, giving an adequate account of age-group justice demands setting forth an account of respect for human dignity at each age and stage of life.

5. REPLIES TO OBJECTIONS

I turn finally to considering and replying to two objections. The first asserts that Bidadanure's approach fares better than my capability view because it is more complete, while the second asserts that it fares better because it is less biased.

5.1. Incomplete

Critics might charge that the capability view presented here is incomplete, because it offers only a minimalist conception of justice, designated by capability thresholds. By contrast, Bidadanure provides a more complete view, encompassing support for a reasonable array of life plans. Miller expresses the concern that capability views in general must

> be supplemented if only to tell us what to do with the surplus (assuming there is one) once everyone has sufficient resources, but also to guide us in situations where there are too few resources to bring everyone up to the sufficiency threshold. Should we, for example, maximise the number of people who achieve sufficiency, or minimise the aggregate shortfall suffered by those in the relevant group? Unless we are prepared to say that these are not matters of justice, a theory of justice that contains only the sufficiency principle and nothing else looks incomplete. (Miller 2021)

In reply, this paper's argument does not aim to show that the capability view is a complete or fully developed theory of justice. There are many questions it leaves unanswered. Even if capabilities were fleshed out further, there is more to social justice than reaching capability thresholds (Robeyns and Byskov 2021). Nonetheless, the capability view presented here fills important gaps in age-group justice, affording a conception of human dignity that other conceptions of age-group justice omit.

5.2. Ableist

A second objection that critics might raise is that a capability approach is implicitly biased, since it singles out people with lesser capabilities and makes efforts to raise capabilities to a threshold that is considered minimum. According to Pogge, “capability theorists postulate a natural hierarchy in order to claim greater resources for the worse endowed …. While this concern for the naturally disfavored is noble, it is destructive of any social conception of human natural diversity as horizontal” (Pogge 2010: 46). By contrast, a prudential approach, like Bidadanure’s, is fairer to people with disabilities, because prudent planners expect and can take into account the fact that as they age and the risk of disease and disability increases, people might be unable to work, and might need help with activities of daily living.

The reply to this objection is twofold. First, the concerns about prudence raised previously (in section 3) apply here, casting doubt on whether prudent deliberators can be fair to people at all ages and stages of life. For example, if ageism or ableism infects their thinking, they may give more weight to their midlife selves.

A second reply is that a capability approach distinguishes capabilities from functioning. While it makes reasonable efforts to ensure that people have threshold capabilities, it allows people free reign to function diversely. In this sense, the account assumes that there is something good about having a choice, a real opportunity to function, even if an individual renounces the choice rather than exercising it. Nussbaum explains it thus: “if we place the accent firmly on capability, rather than on functioning”, it is not implausible to say that dignified lives include a set of human capabilities together with a plurality of functioning (Nussbaum 2006: 184).

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Bidadanure’s position on justice across the lifespan pinpoints two salient ethical concerns: relational equality and lifespan sufficiency. While we agree that these are key components of age-group justice, we part company when it comes to specifying sufficiency. This paper has argued that Bidadanure’s rendering of sufficiency falls short in three respects. First, guaranteeing a normal range of opportunities ensures fairness, not justice. In poorer societies, people with a normal range of opportunities still cannot do and be what they have reason to value. Second, appealing to veiled prudence and democratic deliberation by diverse age groups is fraught. Neither the very young nor many of the very

old can join in, leading to “midlife bias”. Third, Bidadanure makes only a vague appeal to “dignity” as “meeting basic needs”, leaving unspecified what exactly this entails.

The Principle of Dignified Lives avoids these pitfalls, offering a robust notion of dignity that is fleshed out in terms of capability sufficiency. The Principle of Dignified Lives applies at each time slice or moment—to infants as well as to older adults with intellectual impairment. It pairs well with a whole-life or diachronic Principle of Relational Equality. Guaranteeing justice for all ages requires abiding by principles of relational equality and dignified lives. A just society makes reasonable efforts both to ensure that young and old can stand before one another as equals, and to protect people’s ability at all ages to lead nonhumiliating lives.

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