Donna Hicks, a psychologist and veteran conflict-mediator affiliated with the Weatherhead Centre for International Affairs at Harvard University, has been involved in the practice and theory of conflict-resolution almost two decades, and *Dignity* is inspired firstly from her experience in that field. The book tackles the role of emotions in conflict by looking at the way in which dignity violations prevent conflicting parties from coming to an agreement.

Hicks defines dignity as the birthright of all human beings, entitling them to "inherent value and worth [that] need to be honoured no matter what they do" (p. 5) This is not the same as respect, which is a quality of actions that needs to be earned. She further argues that dignity is as much a part of a human as an arm or leg and will be defended with just as much vigour, for the same reasons: evolution has caused humans to enjoy the presence of dignity and to feel pain at its loss.

Basing herself on evolutionary psychology, neuroscience, and cognition, Hicks depicts the average human being as woefully unprepared for the travails of modern life, such as feeling rejected or subjecting oneself to the whim of others. These and other indignities illicit the same responses that physical threats did in previous eras of human history: fight or flight. This reaction often "puts dignity ahead of survival"(p. 4), and severely complicates human relations by predisposing already vulnerable people to answer to dignity violations in kind.

To help us better adapt to the challenges of our time Hicks offers her dignity model, outlining ten essential elements of dignity and ten temptations to violate dignity. This model, she claims, has two key benefits: firstly, it empowers those who use it, by giving them the vocabulary and the concepts necessary to describe a common, but often ignored, problem. Secondly, the model sensitizes users to the "different ways people experience a psychological acknowledgement of their dignity"(p. 29-30), and to the true nature of their own instinctual temptations to violate dignity.

Hicks devotes a chapter to each essential element of, and each temptation to violate dignity, fleshing them out with numerous anecdotes from her experience as a conflict mediator. To demonstrate the lack of the essential element of acknowledgement, Hicks describes a dialogue between the representative of two Israeli and Palestinian communities in which one of the Palestinians, after having his concerns repeatedly brushed aside with no explanation, leaves the room in distress. His words are worth repeating: “My people are treated as if we are invisible...This lack of respect for who we are and what we have been through is making me sick” (p. 61) Clearly, the lack of acknowledgement can accumulate, and lead to a visceral reaction, cutting dialogue short.

In contrast, in her chapter on the element of independence (chapter 9), Hicks states that as opposed to dominating, “using power to empower others...is a step forward in our primal longing to be connected with others” (p. 88) This tactic creates healthy relationships, and avoids the poison of resentment, which is a result of dignity violations. The latter violations only “set the stage for the transformation of the other into an enemy.” (p. 88), and thus for conflict.

Whereas the book's exposition on the essential elements of dignity introduces new concepts, Hicks' discussion of the temptations to violate dignity attempts to sensitize us to our instinctual responses to such violations. For example, “reacting to save face can get us into more trouble than it
saves us from” (p 95) The Catholic Church's paedophilia scandals, Tiger Woods' extramarital affairs, and the US government's glacial pace in addressing the prisoner abuse at the Abu Gharib prison in Iraq are examples of both individuals' and institutions' ultimately self-defeating efforts to look good in the eyes of others.

The last part of the book presents an application of the dignity model to the issue of reconciliation. Drawing on her work on a BBC television show bringing together victims and perpetrators of the conflict in Northern Ireland, Hicks argues that “The forgiveness approach and the dignity approach [to reconciliation] are very different” (p. 191) Specifically, engaging the dignity of conflicting parties is a more mutual and empathizing approach to reconciliation than forgiveness, which can be one-sided and condescending, granting moral superiority to one party and perpetuating us-them dichotomies.

Throughout the book, the causal mechanism underlying the emotional dynamics of dignity is two-fold: first "our human evolutionary legacy” is mined for explanations of phenomena as diverse as gossiping and seeking reconciliation. Second, Hicks invokes developmental psychology and neuroscience to explain, for example, why people seek security in harmful relationships (their own dignity was badly damaged in childhood) and how humans empathize with each other (mirror neurons).

As a method for approaching thorny and often painful emotional conflict, the dignity model, with its emphasis on communication, openness, and empathy, seems to be helpful for facilitators trying to engage conflicting parties, which may be caught up in an affective storm and unable to efficiently discuss other issues. Moreover, Hicks perceptively remarks that violations to a person's (or a peoples') dignity can be the trigger that leads from tension to open conflict, and can keep the wounds of conflict open for a long time.

Still, the dignity model fails to convince on several counts. First, social factors are given short shrift: some cultures encourage killing to save face while others do not, and though Hicks mentions the case of Japan, she fails to follow up on it. Second, the reader is given the impression that interactions between groups are analogous to those between individuals. This may hold true in cases such as negotiations between states, which are necessarily carried out through human representatives. However, conceiving of a nation as an entity that can be emotionally hurt not only grants a collectivity human cognitive qualities, but also treats this collectivity as little more than the sum of its (emotionally feeling) parts.

In fact, at all levels of analysis, the dynamics of dignity seem to be essentially dyadic. The conflict between the dignity violator and the victim of a dignity violation takes the same form regardless of its substantive content. In the Catholic Church paedophilia scandals, one can interpret various combinations of interaction between perpetrators and victims (Church-victim group, Church-individual, priest-group, etc) through the same lens. Such generality can quickly degenerate into analytic vagueness.

Despite these shortcomings, the dignity model's possible applications are myriad, since it assumes that dignity is a species-wide phenomenon in humans. In fact, the first application that came to my mind was handling family politics during tense holiday dinners While this book is useful for managing relations of all kinds, it is likely to be especially helpful in fields with relatively little exposure to the emotional dimension of conflict, such as international conflict mediation and civilian-military relations.

In conclusion, the book provides a model for explaining and harnessing dignity, and the method it proposes for approaching the emotional dimension of conflict resolution is worthy of praise and
emulation. However, the trickier conceptual and causal problems linked with dignity – what it is precisely or where it comes from – remain something of a mystery.

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