Reframing the Concept of Human Dignity

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The concept of *human dignity* is invoked within a number of significant public discourses today, ranging from discourses on human rights to discourses on conflict resolution to discourses on bioethics. Yet little agreement exists regarding the meaning or practical implications of the concept. One of the reasons for this is that the concept of human dignity – like all concepts – takes on different meanings within different interpretive frames. This paper examines three contrasting interpretive frames within which the concept of human dignity can be understood: the *social command* frame, the *social contest* frame, and the *social body* frame. After outlining each of these frames, and exploring what meanings the concept of dignity takes on within each of them, the paper argues that the social body frame offers the most mature and fruitful understanding of the concept. The paper concludes by exploring some of the practical implications of this insight, including the need to reframe significant discourses according to the logic of the social body frame.

Meaning and Discourse

In order to discuss the meaning of a phrase like *human dignity*, it is helpful to consider, at the outset, the concept of *meaning* itself. The field of semiotics studies the relationship between meanings and signifiers. One of the most basic insights of semiotics is that meanings do not reside in words. Rather, words are associated with meanings largely through cultural codes – or socially constructed rules of correspondence between signifiers and meanings. Culturally encoded meanings can be widely shared or widely contested among diverse people, and they can be relatively fixed or relatively fluid across time.

These culturally coded relationships are an essential substrate of social existence. They shape human perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, and they inform social norms, institutions, and practices, in profound ways. Indeed, it can be argued that cultural codes are to social evolution what genetic codes are to biological evolution. In an overarching sense, our cultural codes determine how well adapted we are to changing environments (Karlberg, 2004).

Cultural codes are, in turn, generated, altered, and transmitted largely through *discourse*. Discourses can be conceptualized as the shared ways that people think and talk about a given aspect of reality, which influences their perceptions and social practices in relation to that aspect of reality. Thus we can conceive of discourses on race, on gender, on the environment, or on any other significant aspect of reality. Most efforts to conceptualize discourse rest on the underlying premise that language, and language use, do not merely reflect or represent our social and mental realities, they also play a role in constructing or structuring these realities. This conception of discourse as a structuring agent is now widely accepted across the social sciences and humanities. However, this broad conception of discourse encompasses diverse approaches to inquiry (refer to discussions in McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2001). Among these approaches is *critical discourse analysis*, which is especially relevant to the discussion at hand. Critical discourse analysis examines discourse in its broad social and historical context and is concerned with the ways that power dynamics produce, and are reproduced by, dominant discourses (van Dijk, 2001).

In this regard, critical discourse analysis reminds us that discourses can embody and perpetuate the perspectives, values, and interests of privileged segments of society who, by virtue of their social positions, exert disproportionate influence on the articulation of discourses. Such influence need not be consciously exerted. Rather, people often have an unconscious affinity for

ideas that align with their own interests (Howe, 1978). Therefore, segments of society who have disproportionate access to the means of cultural production tend, to some extent, consciously or unconsciously, to shape dominant discourses according to self-interested ideas and perspectives. Discourses thereby help to construct "a social reality that is taken for granted and that advantages some participants at the expense of others" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 15).

The Role of Interpretive Frames within Discourse

In discourse analysis, discourse is viewed as a phenomenon that has distinct internal properties (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). These properties include systems of categorization, metaphors, narratives, frames, and other interpretive devices that can influence cognition, perception, and action within communities of shared discourse. From among these properties, the discussion at hand is concerned primarily with interpretive frames.

Bateson (1954) is often credited for the initial concept of an interpretive frame. He pointed out that discrete communicative acts are rendered meaningful within larger interpretive frames. For example, an apparently "hostile" communicative act can take on completely different meanings when interpreted through the frame "this is play" or the frame "this is war." Building on these insights, Goffman (1974) conceptualized frames as cognitive schemata or mental frameworks that shape our perceptions, interpretations, and representations of reality; mentally organize our experience; and provide normative guides for our actions.

Following this work by Bateson and Goffman, the concept of *frames* and *framing* has been conceptualized with different nuances across the social and psychological sciences. However, what unifies these conceptions is the understanding that people must rely on acquired structures of interpretation to sift, sort, and make sense out of the otherwise overwhelming universe of information and experience they encounter in their daily lives (Tannen, 1993).

Frames are, in effect, a form of "conceptual scaffolding" that we rely on to construct our understanding of the world (Snow & Benford 1988, p. 213). As Ryan and Gamson explain,

> Like a picture frame, an issue frame marks off some part of the world. Like a building frame, it holds things together. It provides coherence to an array of symbols, images, and arguments, linking them through an underlying organizing idea that suggests what is essential – what consequences and values are at stake. We do not see the frame directly, but infer its presence by its characteristic expressions and language. Each frame gives the advantage to certain ways of talking and thinking, while it places others "out of the picture." (2006, p.14)

Such frames are often acquired unconsciously. They influence not only how we interpret specific phenomena but also which phenomena we notice. They are composed of tacit explanations and expectations regarding "what exists, what happens, and what matters" (Gitlin, 1980, p.6). In this regard, a given "fact" will become more or less salient, or take on different meanings, within different frames (Ryan & Gamson, 2006). Indeed, the same words even take on different meanings within different interpretive frames (Lakoff, 2006a).

Finally, interpretative frames can be conceptualized in terms of *surface frames* and *deep frames*. For the discussion at hand, deep frames are particularly relevant because they shape, among other things, our deepest assumptions about human nature and the social order. Or, as Lakoff explains,

> Deep frames structure your moral system or your worldview. Surface frames have a much smaller scope… Deep frames are where the action is… they characterize moral and political principles that are so deep they are part of your very identity. Deep framing is the conceptual infrastructure of the mind: the foundations, walls, and beams of that

edifice. Without the deep frames, there is nothing for the surface message frames to hang on. (2006a, p.12)

Deep Frames

With these insights in mind, we can examine three deep frames that bear directly on the concept of *human dignity* because they embody foundational assumptions regarding human nature and social reality and, in the process, they lend structure to different moral worldviews. These frames, which have been elaborated in more detail elsewhere (Karlberg, 2012), are the *social command frame*, the *social contest frame*, and the *social body frame*.

The Social Command Frame

The social command frame is a legacy of patriarchal and authoritarian modes of thought. Within the social command frame, human nature tends to be conceived in terms strength and weakness, and the social order tends to be conceived in terms of dominance and submission. Society is thus understood in strongly hierarchical terms and power is conceived in terms of control and coercion.

In order to function, the frame suggests, society and all of the social institutions within it need to be governed by powerful individuals who have the strength to impose order and discipline. According to this logic, most segments of the population are naturally inclined toward ignorance, moral weakness, or other forms of dependency, and are thus incapable of governing themselves effectively. Governance and leadership should therefore be the prerogative of exceptional individuals or groups that are in some way superior to others.

One of the metaphors that is invoked to support this frame is the metaphor of the "alpha male" who dominates and leads the pack. Another metaphor that is invoked toward similar ends

is the military metaphor of a General in relation to his (rarely her) troops. Within the social command frame, these and similar metaphors suggest the normalcy and efficacy of a strongly hierarchical and authoritarian social order.

In general, democratic societies have rejected the social command frame as an oppressive construct invoked by self-interested elites seeking to buttress their power and privilege in society. Yet the frame is still widely invoked in authoritarian societies, even as it continues to echo in regressive democratic discourses, strongly hierarchical organizations, and patriarchal families.

The Social Contest Frame

The social contest frame became a widely influential interpretive frame with the ascendancy of Western-liberal thought where it emerged, in part, in response to the acute injustice and oppression associated with the social command frame. Within the social contest frame, human nature is conceived primarily in terms of egoistic, self-interested, and competitive instincts. Society is thus understood as a competitive arena in which self-maximizing individuals or groups pursue divergent interests in a world characterized by scarce resources and opportunities.

One widely invoked metaphor that encapsulates this frame is the metaphor of biological evolution, as interpreted through the lens of social Darwinism. Even though evolutionary biologists are increasingly recognizing the fundamental role that mutualism and symbiosis play as an evolutionary dynamic, a competitive understanding of evolution has dominated public consciousness since social Darwinism was consolidated as one of the ideological underpinnings of laissez-faire capitalism. According to this metaphor, society is just another arena of

evolutionary competition in which only the strongest will survive, and thereby society as a whole will be strengthened. In addition to this social Darwinist metaphor, the social contest frame is also characterized by war metaphors, sports metaphors, fight metaphors, and market metaphors – all of which are widely invoked today to make sense out of virtually every aspect of social reality.

Moreover, this same interpretive frame has become embedded in a wide range of institutional structures today, from competitive models of democratic governance, to advocacy-based models of justice, to grade-based models of education. What all of these institutional constructs share in common are underlying normative assumptions that the best way to organize society is to harness everyone's self-interested and competitive energy and attempt to channel it toward the maximum social benefit (Karlberg, 2004). This is accomplished by organizing social relations and institutions as contests that allegedly reward truth, excellence, innovation, efficiency, and productivity. Such contests inevitably produce winners and losers but, in the long run, (surviving) populations are allegedly better off.

The Social Body Frame

Though the social body frame has deep roots in diverse cultures, it has been reemerging in a modern form over the past century, in response to the ever-increasing social and ecological interdependence humanity is now experiencing on a global scale. At the core of this frame is an understanding of society as an integrated organic body. No other metaphor captures the logic of interdependence more effectively than this social body metaphor.[1]

In an interdependent social body, the well-being of every individual or group depends upon the well-being of the entire body. This collective well-being cannot be achieved through

oppressive power hierarchies, as suggested by the social command frame. Nor can it be achieved by structuring virtually every social institution as a contest of power, as suggested by the social contest frame. Rather, collective well-being can only be achieved by maximizing the possibilities for every individual to realize their latent potential to contribute to the common good, within empowering social relationships and institutional structures that foster and canalize human capacities in this way.

The social body frame requires a sober re-examination of prevailing assumptions about human nature. In this regard, the human sciences are now demonstrating that human beings are wired for both competition and cooperation, egoism and altruism, and which of these potentials is more fully realized depends in large part on our cultural environment, our education and training, our opportunities for moral development, and the institutional structures we act within (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Henrich, Heine & Norenzayan, 2010; de Waal, 2009; Keltner, 2009; Tomasello, 2008; Henrich & Henrich, 2007; Scott & Seglow, 2007; Margulis, 1998; Sober & Wilson, 1998; Fellman, 1998; Monroe, 1996; Lunati, 1992; Lewontin, 1991; Kohn, 1990; Rose, Lewontin & Kamin 1987; Seville, 1986; Axelrod, 1984; Margolis, 1982; Leaky & Lewin, 1977; Becker, 1976).

In light of this emerging understanding of human nature and human potential, the social body frame brings into focus one of the most urgent challenges facing humanity today: At a time when over seven billion people must learn how to live together on an increasingly crowded planet, it is imperative that we learn how to cultivate – widely, systematically, and effectively – every individual's latent capacity for cooperation and altruism. The success of such efforts will depend, at least in part, on fostering the individual's consciousness of the oneness of humanity (Karlberg, 2008, 2004; Monroe, 1996; Kohn, 1990). Such a consciousness entails a radical

reconception of the relationship between the individual and society, the implications of which are conveyed in a compelling manner by the social body metaphor.

Reframing Human Dignity

The three frames outlined above are ideal-types (Weber, 1904). In other words, they are analytical constructs which, like all analytical constructs, never correspond perfectly with some presumably objective reality. Care must be taken, therefore, not to reify these frames or over-extend the metaphors that inform them.[2] These frames can, however, serve as useful heuristic devices for organizing certain forms of inquiry and guiding certain forms of practice – such as inquiry into the meaning of *human dignity* and the application of this concept in fields such as human rights and conflict resolution.

Before proceeding in this direction, it should also be noted that the frames outlined above sometimes co-exist in contradictory or fragmented ways. As Lakoff explains, people employ interpretive frames in unconscious ways that are not always consistent or coherent, and that can change over time (2006b). In this regard, some people may employ the social contest frame in specific domains (such as governance, law, and the economy) while they employ the social body frame in other domains (such as family life or social affiliations). In addition, some people may unconsciously shift between these frames even when thinking about the same social domain. Interpretive frames can therefore be understood as patterned but shifting and sometimes fragmented interpretive tendencies that can nonetheless exert powerful influences on the ways people think, speak, and act in relation to various aspects of reality. With these insights in mind, we can examine the way each of the three deep frames outlined above encodes the concept of human dignity with different meanings.

Human Dignity within the Social Command Frame

Within the social command frame, the concept of dignity takes on its simplest, original meaning, as a signifier of status or rank. Dignity, as Rosen explains, "originated as a concept that denoted high social status and the honors and respectful treatment that are due to someone who occupied that position" (2012, p.11). This strongly hierarchical conception of dignity has, in turn, been adapted in various ways. Beyond signifying people of high rank, the term has also been used to signify an elevated or refined manner or bearing, as well as elevated or weighty discourse.

What all of these meanings share in common is the signification of relative worth or value. Dignity thus denotes the relative worth or value of people, or of their bearing and manner, or of their thoughts and speech. All of these meanings thus denote social hierarchy in one form or another. In practice, such hierarchy has often been ascribed according to distinctions based on class, race, creed, genealogy, and other socio-economic categories.

Human Dignity within the Social Contest Frame

Within the social contest frame, the concept of dignity takes on a more egalitarian meaning, often denoting a universal right to self-determination and autonomy. Thus we are told that dignity "means no more than respect for persons or their autonomy" (Macklin, 2003, p. 1419). This usage reflects, in large part, the political philosophies that emerged in the European enlightenment, with their emphasis on liberty and equality. In also reflects the emergence of dignity as a legal concept in human rights discourse.

For instance, the second World War and the holocaust were widely (and rightly) interpreted as profound violations of human dignity. The Universal Declaration of human rights,

written in the immediate aftermath of those experiences, thus asserts, in the first sentence of

Article 1, that "All people are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Likewise, Article 1 of

the post-war German constitution states that "Human dignity is inviolable. To respect it and

protect it is the duty of all state power." Many other modern human rights documents echo this

general usage.

In this context, one might ask what forms of dignity can be legally respected and

protected by a state? In the context of Western-liberal political philosophy, the primary answer

becomes the right to self-determination, autonomy, and agency – which is how human dignity is

now frequently understood (Rosen, 2012). This focus on dignity-as-autonomy is consistent with

the social contest frame. When human nature is conceived largely in terms of self-interested

motives playing out within competitive social arenas, then the autonomy of individuals and

groups to pursue their own interests, within a set of rules that apply equally to all, takes on

paramount importance.

Human Dignity within the Social Body Frame

Within the social body frame, the concept of dignity assumes a more organic meaning. In

this context, dignity can be understood in terms of the intrinsic value or worth of every human

being as a member of an interdependent community – or social body.[3] Moreover, the social

body frame suggests that this intrinsic value is realized as individuals develop those latent

capacities upon which the well-being of the entire body depends. These capacities include, for

instance, the capacity for honesty and trustworthiness, for cooperation and reciprocity, for

empathy and compassion, for fairness and justice, for altruism and selflessness, for discipline and

moderation, for learning and the investigation of reality, for creativity and productivity. It is

through the development of such capacities that an individual's latent potential is fully realized, and it is through the realization of this latent potential that the individual contributes to the well-being of the entire social body.

In this regard, the social body frame suggests a two-fold purpose that gives meaning to human existence. Our purpose is to develop our latent potential in order to contribute to the development and progress of society. Furthermore, the social body frame reminds us that this purpose can only be realized within a social environment that fosters and protects these twin developmental processes. In this context, the responsibility of all social institutions – families, schools, media, corporations, the state – include fostering and protecting the development of human potential and channeling it toward the common good.

The social body frame thereby entails respect for individual agency and autonomy (within the bounds of moderation). This is because the development of an individual's latent potential, and the direction of that potential toward the common good, cannot be imposed on an individual against their will. Rather, it can only emerge as an expression of a will that is informed by a consciousness of the essential unity and interdependence of humanity. Therein lies the key to human dignity within the social body frame: it is achieved through the voluntary subordination of self-centered instincts and appetites to the well-being of the entire social body.

A primary responsibility of the state, and all other social institutions, is to nurture and protect such processes. But this implies more than merely guaranteeing individual liberty. It implies fostering the consciousness of the oneness of humanity and providing a framework for acting upon this consciousness in our private and public lives.

Such a social order, it should also be noted, would not be without hierarchy. Yet hierarchy, like dignity, takes on a new meaning within the social body frame. Hierarchy within

an organic body is not a structure of dominance or an outcome of power-seeking behavior. Rather, organic bodies are characterized by internal hierarchies that empower rather than oppress the diverse members of the body. Differentiation of roles and functions is a natural expression of organic interdependence. Organic hierarchy provides the organization, coordination, and efficiency by which the diverse potentialities of autonomous individuals can be realized and their energies can be applied in productive ways that promote the common good. Within such empowering hierarchies, human dignity can flourish.

Finally, the social body frame also implies that justice must be the ruling principle of social organization. In its absence, the unity and hierarchy discussed above become oppressive and rob individuals of their dignity. And, again, justice takes on a specific meaning within the social body frame. At its most basic level, justice can be understood as a latent capacity of discernment entailing fair-mindedness along with a recognition that the development and well-being of the individual are organically linked to the development and well-being of the community. This is a capacity that can be fostered and developed within every individual as they become conscious of the organic oneness of humanity. Similarly, at the collective level, justice can be understood as a capacity that is latent in all collective endeavors, entailing the conscious application of the principle of justice – understood in the organic sense alluded to above – as a guide to collective decision making and collective action. Only in such a context can human dignity be protected and promoted.

Practical Implications

The preceding analysis suggests a number of practical implications. First, it suggests that human dignity cannot be achieved merely through legal enforcements – as important as those are. Ultimately, respect for human dignity, in its most mature form, arises from an emergent

consciousness of the oneness of humanity. And the emergence of this consciousness depends on education in the broadest sense of the word – the ways we are nurtured, socialized, encouraged, trained and empowered, within our families, our schools, our media environment, and the many other social institutions we participate in.

Consider, for instance, the problem of dignity violations. Such violations can be understood as a root cause of human suffering and conflict (Hicks, 2011). Moreover, such violations have a deep psychological component. Dignity, in this sense, can be understood not merely as a legal right, but also as an inner state of consciousness that, when violated, triggers powerful emotional responses. As Hicks explains, "our desire for dignity runs deep"; it is among "the most powerful forces motivating our behavior" and "in some cases… our desire for dignity is even stronger than our desire for survival" (2011, p.14). Human dignity is thus not merely a philosophical abstraction or a legal construct. It is a phenomenological reality that has its basis in human consciousness.

Seeking to protect individuals and groups from gross violations of their dignity, through the construction of human rights frameworks and enforcement mechanisms, is clearly a laudable endeavor. But such efforts will always be limited in their scope and effect because the external regulation of human behavior is rarely effective unless it is reinforced by internal motivations and self-regulation. Hence enforcement efforts need to be coupled with the educational processes alluded to above. These educational processes, moreover, are not simply about reducing tendencies to violate the dignity of others. People also need to learn how to encounter indignities with dignity – or to preserve their inner state of dignity in the face of ostensible violations. In other words, education is not merely about learning to respect the dignity of others. It is also

about learning how to preserve one's own dignity by responding to apparent dignity violations in thoughtful and mature ways that do not result in escalating cycles of indignity and conflict.

This is no easy thing. On a psychological level, people are often inclined to respond to received dignity violations with retaliatory dignity violations, which can set in motion a vicious cycle (Hicks, 2011). This all-to-familiar dynamic plays out within homes, on the playground, in the workplace, in communities, and even in the theater of international relations. Breaking these cycles requires a remarkable degree of maturity. Among other things, it requires the capacity to recognize the nature of these vicious cycles, to subordinate emotional responses to a higher cause, to forgive the past, and to foster conditions in which all parties can move forward constructively. Such capacities are, in turn, fostered by a consciousness of the oneness of humanity, which brings into focus our underlying interdependence and the need to strive for more cooperative and reciprocal modes of interaction that promote the well-being of the entire social body.

The well-known example of Nelson Mandela is instructive in this regard. After growing up amidst the racial indignities of the apartheid regime in South Africa, and after suffering twenty-seven years of incarceration for his efforts to end the apartheid system, he successfully negotiated an end to the regime, became president of a new South Africa, oversaw the drafting of its new constitution, and initiated a truth and reconciliation commission to help heal the nation and enable it to move forward constructively. In the process, he came to symbolize the maturity alluded to above, along with the capacities associated with it. Indeed, Mandela became a symbol of human dignity in the twentieth century. And not surprisingly, his underlying worldview was framed by a clear and conscious recognition of the oneness of humanity (Mandela, 2010, 2012).

Similar insights regarding the internal locus of human dignity, and its underlying source, can be gained from the case of the Bahá'ís in Iran. The Bahá'í community was founded upon an explicit commitment to the promotion of the oneness of humanity, which is understood by Bahá'ís as the imperative next step in humanity's collective social and spiritual evolution, without which humanity cannot adapt to conditions of ever-increasing global interdependence. As a result of this commitment the Bahá'í community in Iran has, since its birth 160 years ago, been subject to recurrent waves of violent persecution that have claimed the lives of roughly 20,000 adherents in the most brutal and inhumane ways (Martin, 1984; Moomen, 1981). In the most recent wave of persecution, unleashed after the Iranian Revolution in1979, over two hundred Iranian Bahá'ís have been executed solely for their beliefs; thousands have been imprisoned and tortured in an effort to get them to recant their faith; tens of thousands have lost their homes, their property, their savings, their pensions, and their jobs; the entire community of several hundred thousand has been subjected to systematic vilification from the media and the pulpit; Bahá'í children and youth are systematically harassed at school and denied access to universities; Bahá'í gravesites are regularly desecrated; Bahá'í marriages are declared immoral; the activities of Bahá'í are widely monitored; and crimes are committed against Bahá'ís with legal impunity because the current Iranian constitution denies the Bahá'ís basic human and civil rights (Brookshaw & Fazel, 2007; IHRDC, 2006; Kazemzadeh, 2000).

Against this backdrop of ostensible dignity violations, the Bahá'í community has refused to relinquish its own dignity. It has remained a law-abiding community and refrained from any form of sectarian opposition or conflict. It has, instead, adopted a strategy of constructive resilience that has preserved its integrity and ensured its continued advancement (Karlberg, 2010). By these means, the Bahá'ís of Iran have never let their oppressors establish the terms of

the encounter. They have refused to play the role of victim; refused to be dehumanized; refused to forfeit their sense of agency; refused to compromise their principles and commitments.

The resolve of the Bahá'í community, in this regard, has been motivated and sustained by an abiding consciousness of the oneness of humanity, which they are working to embody and promote. They see, in the actions of their oppressors, the machinations of immature and self-interested leaders who are desperately clinging to a corrupt and anachronistic social order that cannot be sustained indefinitely. Bahá'ís thus find a higher meaning and purpose in their own suffering and sacrifice, as they labor side by side with all likeminded people who are working to construct a more just social order, founded on the consciousness of oneness which, they are confident, will ultimately prevail. In this consciousness they have achieved a remarkable degree of psychological resilience (Davoudi, 2003; Ghadirian, 1998, 1994). They have also achieved a remarkable degree of efficacy. Indeed, though the Bahá'í movement began as an obscure movement with a handful of adherents in a remote region of nineteenth-century Iran, its adherents now come from every country on earth; number in the millions; are drawn from every ethnicity, class, and creed; and constitute the most diverse, widely distributed, democratically organized community on the planet (Weinberg, 2007; Hatcher & Martin, 1998; Smith, 1987). They are engaged, moreover, in collaborative efforts with growing numbers of like-minded people from all continents who are working to bring about a more just social order in which the dignity of all people is respected and promoted.

Conclusion

As the examples above illustrate, the maturation of human dignity lies, ultimately, in the reframing of human consciousness. And as the preceding analysis explains, the work of reframing will have to occur, in part, at the level of discourse, because discourse is a primary

medium through which the codes of human culture and consciousness evolve. Moreover, at this critical juncture in history, this reframing has become an evolutionary imperative. Our reproductive and technological success as a species has transformed the conditions of our own existence. Over seven billion people now live on this planet and our technologies have amplified our impact a thousand-fold. Inherited codes of culture and consciousness are proving maladaptive under these conditions.

In this context, reframing significant discourses according to the logic of organic interdependence is a vital adaptive strategy. Skeptics may, of course, dismiss this view as naïve and unrealistic. But is it realistic to assume that the prevailing culture of contest can be sustained indefinitely on a planet with over seven billion people wielding increasingly powerful and destructive technologies? Is it realistic to assume that narrowly self-interested motives can continue to drive human behavior in this context? Is it realistic to assume that the struggle for power and domination can continue to define our social existence indefinitely under such conditions? What is needed, in this regard, is a new realism – a new interpretive frame. The logic of the social body frame offers this. And, in the process, it provides a genuine foundation for human dignity.

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Endnotes

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[1]   It is important to note that the social body metaphor has occasionally been invoked in the

past, in cynical and oppressive ways, within the logic of the social command frame. For a full

discussion of this theme refer to Karlberg (2012).

[2]   For an insightful discussion regarding the problems of reifying or over-extending the social

body metaphor, refer to Levine (1995) or Elwick (2003).

[3]   The conception of human dignity in terms of intrinsic value or worth has been articulated by

a range of philosophers over the centuries, from Aquinas (in McInerny, 1998) to Kant (1785)

to Kateb (2011). However, none of these philosophers have explicitly situated this intrinsic

conception of human dignity within the logic of the social body frame, where it takes on a

more organic, rather than atomistic, meaning.